

Communications

Emotional Intelligence & Work Place Effectiveness

Kavita Singh

The Power of Emotional Intelligence

James Dozier discovered the power of emotional intelligence (EI) in 1981, which resulted in saving his life. Dozier was a U.S. Army brigadier general who was kidnapped by the Red Brigades, an Italian terrorist group. During the initial days his captures were euphoric with excitement, agitated and irrational at times. He felt that his life was in danger. To save himself, he remembered something he had learned about emotion in an executive development program at the Centre for Creative Leadership in Greensboro, North Carolina.

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Emotions are contagious and a single person can influence the emotional tone of a group by modelling. He first thought of getting his own emotions under control, quite a difficult task to achieve.

Kavita Singh is Reader (OB & OD), Faculty of Management Studies, University of Delhi, 110007. E – Mail: kavitas22@gmail.com

He tried to calm himself and conveyed his calmness to his captives through his actions. He then realized that his captors also caught his calmness and became more rational. In retrospect when Dozier looked back on this episode, he was convinced that his ability to manage his own emotional reactions and those of his captors literally saved his life (Campbell 1990).

The term emotional intelligence (EI) had not been coined in 1981, but James Dozier actually experienced it live and gave us an initial framework to identify what it is: “The ability to perceive and express emotion, assimilate emotion in thought, understand and reason with emotion, and regulate emotion in the self and others” (Mayer et. al. 2000). Dozier could perceive accurately the emotional reactions of his captors, and he also diagnosed the danger that those reactions posed for him. By regulating his emotions and then expressing them effectively, he was able to manage the emotions of his captors. This experience illustrates EI in action.

Since then the concept of EI has become so popular in the management literature that it has become imperative

to understand and be aware of the research and theory on which it is based. It is also useful to consider how EI is important for effective performance at work place. As the pace of change is increasing and world of work is making ever greater demands on a person's cognitive, emotional and physical resources, this particular set of abilities is becoming increasingly important.

Traditional measures of intelligence, although providing some degree of predictive validity, have not been able to account for a large portion of the variance in work performance and career success. As Goleman (1998) states, "When IQ test scores are correlated with how well people perform in their careers the highest estimate of how much difference IQ accounts for is about 25 percent (Hunter & Hunter 1984, Schmidt & Hunter 1981). A careful analysis, though, suggests that a more accurate figure may be no higher than 10 percent and perhaps as low as 4 percent" (Sternberg 1997).

However, the issue of separating abilities related to cognitive intelligence from abilities, traits, and competencies related to EI remains a complex one; all its definitions represent a combination of cognitive and emotional abilities (Cherniss 2001). This reflects the growing understanding in neuroscience that cognition and emotions are interwoven in mental life (through thick connections between the emotional centers and the neocortex) rather than discretely independent, especially in complex decision-making, self-

awareness, affective self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and interpersonal functioning (Davidson 2001).

Defining Emotional Intelligence

Salovey and Mayer (1990) coined the term EI in 1990, while being aware of the previous work on non-cognitive aspects of intelligence. They described emotional intelligence as "a form of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them, and to use this information to guide one's thinking and action". In the early 1990's Daniel Goleman became aware of Salovey and Mayer's work, and this eventually led to his book, *Emotional Intelligence*.

John Mayer (1990), a University of New Hampshire psychologist, defines the term more narrowly than Goleman (1995). For Mayer, emotional intelligence is the ability to understand how others' emotions work and to control one's own emotions. By comparison, Goleman defines EI more broadly, also including such competencies as optimism, conscientiousness, motivation, empathy and social competence. According to Mayer, these broader traits that Goleman relates to EI are considered personality traits by other theorists. For example, psychologist Gordon et. al. (1994) say that emotional

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intelligence deals largely with personality and mood, aspects of the individual that cannot be changed. Gordon, president of a Chicago-based employee-training company, claims that improving employees' literacy and analytical skills, not their emotional skills, is the best way to boost job performance. 'Work success is mostly cognitively driven,' says Gordon. 'Emotion by itself won't get you very far.'

Responding to such charges, Goleman proposes that cognitive skill 'can help you get a job' in a company, but emotional skill helps you 'grow in the job' once you're hired. To illustrate Goleman's point, psychologist Stein and Book (2006), marketers of tests that assess employees' EI quotient (EQ), cites the example of a Harvard business graduate who received numerous job offers from companies clamoring to hire her. However, due to a lack of EI, the

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woman continually sparred with her employers and could not keep any of the jobs. Studies of close to 500 organizations worldwide, reviewed by Goleman in his book, indicate that people who score highest on EQ measures rise to the top of corporations. 'Star' employees possess more interpersonal skills and confidence, for

example, than 'regular' employees who receive less glowing performance reviews. Goleman (1998) concludes that 'Emotional intelligence matters twice as much as technical and analytic skill combined for star performances. And the higher people move up in the company, the more crucial emotional intelligence becomes.'

Companies can test and teach EI and many employers are already beginning to do so.

To rise higher in ones professional competence at the workplace, it is not just essential that individuals are good in their jobs. They are required to be more positive, approachable, warm, empathetic and optimistic. A number of studies in the area suggest that it takes more than traditional cognitive intelligence to be successful at work. The EI of the person which includes his ability to restrain the negative feelings and focus on positive feelings plays an important role in determining his success. The idea got further boost with the release of Daniel Goleman (1995), 'Emotional Intelligence: Why it Can Matter More than IQ'. In another book, 'Working with Emotional Intelligence', Goleman (1998) focused on the need for EI at work, an area often considered more head than heart. The notion does not remain limited to the managers and leaders of the organizations but any job that requires dealing with people would need the input of emotional intelligence. Also, whereas IQ is relatively fixed, EI can be built and learned. Companies can

test and teach EI and many employers are already beginning to do so. However, while some psychologists view Goleman's proposition as an encouraging prescription for building career skills, others say its validity is as yet unproven. Some of the theory's critics question the way EI is defined and claim it cannot be taught. Others maintain that cognitive and technical skills ultimately qualify people for the best jobs and help them excel at those jobs.

Bosses and leaders need high EQ because they represent the organization to the public, they interact with the highest number of people within and outside the organization and they set the tone for employee morale (Goleman 1998). Leaders with empathy are able to understand their employees' needs and provide them with constructive feedback. Different jobs also call for different types of EI (Goleman 1998). For example, success in sales requires the empathic ability to gauge a customer's mood and the interpersonal skill to decide when to speak about a product and when to keep quiet. By comparison, success in painting or professional tennis requires a more individual form of self-discipline and motivation. There are gender differences in EI as well, Stein (2006). After administering EQ assessments to 4,500 men and 3,200 women, his organization found that women score higher than men on measures of empathy and social responsibility, but men outperform women on stress tolerance and self-confidence measures. In other words,

women and men are equally as intelligent emotionally, but they're strong in different areas.

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Impact on Workplace Effectiveness

Look deeply at almost any factor that influences work place effectiveness, and you will find that EI plays a role. Any growing and prosperous organization needs to retain good employees, particularly those with the skills that are important in the high-tech economy. What is it that can make an employee stay with an organization for a longer duration? A Gallup Organization study of two million employees at seven hundred companies found that duration of stay of an employee in a company and his productivity would be determined by his relationship with his immediate supervisor (Zipkin 2000). In another study by Spherion, a staffing and consulting firm in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, and Lou Harris Associates, it was found that only 11 percent of the employees who ranked their bosses as excellent were likely to look for another job. However, 40 percent of those who ranked their bosses as poor wanted to leave. In other words, people who have good relation with boss are four times less likely to leave than are those who have poor relationship (Zipkin 2000).

Bosses who are able to make their employees stay for a longer duration are those with high emotional intelligence.

A few skills and characteristics in the bosses become determining factors for the satisfaction of employees in any organization. If a boss can sense the feelings of his employees at the workplace regarding the work and can intervene at the appropriate time when these employees begin to lose faith in the system and become disenchanted, he possibly would be able to handle them in a better way. In the process they are also able to manage their own emotions, thereby inducing a feeling of trust and attachment among the employees. In essence, bosses who are able to make their employees stay for a longer duration are those with high emotional intelligence.

The greatest challenges that the organizations face today include (Cherniss 2001):

- Coping with massive, rapid change.
- Employees need to be more creative in order to drive innovation.
- Managing huge amounts of information.
- Enhancing customer loyalty.
- Employees need to be more motivated and committed.
- Need for collaborative effort.

- The organization needs to make better use of the special talents available in a diverse workforce.
- The organization needs to identify potential leaders in its ranks and prepare them to move up.
- The organization needs to identify and recruit top talent.
- The organization needs to make good decisions about new markets, products, and strategic alliances.
- The organization needs to prepare employees for overseas assignments.

These and many more concerns today confront work organizations, both public and private. Since majority of these concerns involve people in different roles, EI must become a determining factor for their effective management. And in virtually every case, EI must play an important role in handling the concern. For instance, while dealing with the process of change in an organization a lot of emotions are generated which may range from very positive to very negative (Singh 2005). This requires ability on the part of both the employer and the employees to perceive and understand the emotional impact of change on self and others. To be effective in helping their organizations manage change, leaders should be aware of and manage feelings of anxiety and uncertainty of their employees (Bunker 1997). They also should be able to appreciate the emotional reactions of other employees and help them to cope up with change.

Besides the leader, the other members of the organization should be also able to monitor and manage their own emotional reaction as well as of their colleagues.

Emotional Intelligence at Work

The influence of EI begins with the retention and recruitment of talent. The extent to which candidates' EI is considered in making top executive hiring decisions has a significant impact on the ultimate success or failure of those executives. The EI of the persons doing the hiring is also crucial for good hiring decisions. EI also affects the development of talent. However, not all relationships are equally effective in doing so. The EI of the mentor, boss, or peer will influence the potential of a relationship with that person for helping organizational members develop and use the talent that is crucial for organizational effectiveness. Martin Seligman (1991) has developed a construct that he calls "learned optimism". It refers to the causal attributions people make when confronted with failure or setbacks. Optimists tend to make specific, temporary, external causal attributions while pessimists make global, permanent, internal attributions. In research at Met Life, Seligman and his colleagues found that new salesmen who were optimists sold 37 percent more insurance in their first two years than did pessimists. In another study Seligman (1991) tested 500 members of the freshman class at the University of Pennsylvania. Their scores on optimism predicted their

actual grades better than their SAT scores.

EI has as much to do with knowing when and how to express emotion as it does with controlling it. In an experiment at Yale University by Sigal Barsade (1998) a group of volunteers played the role of managers who came together in a group to allocate bonuses to their subordinates. An actor was planted among them who was always the first one to speak. He would show different reactions in different groups ranging from cheerful enthusiasm, relaxed warmth, to depressed sluggishness and hostile irritability. It was found that the emotions of the actor had an infectious impact on the group. The positive feelings led to improved cooperation and better group performance. These groups were better able to allocate their resources resulting in a feeling of satisfaction and in the other groups the results were just the opposite.

People who were best at identifying others' emotions were more successful in their work as well as in their social lives.

Empathy is a particularly important aspect of EI, and researchers have known for years that it contributes to occupational success. Rosenthal and his colleagues (1977) at Harvard discovered over three decades ago that people who were best at identifying others' emotions were more successful in their work as well as in their social lives.

The above findings suggest that EI is important for success in work and in life. However, this notion actually is somewhat simplistic and misleading. Both Goleman (1998) and Mayer et. al. (2000) have argued that by itself EI probably is not a strong predictor of job performance. Rather, it provides the bedrock for competencies that are. Goleman has tried to represent this idea by making a distinction between EI and emotional competence (EC), which refers to the personal and social skills that lead to superior performance in the world of work. "The emotional competencies are linked to and based on emotional intelligence. A certain level of emotional intelligence is necessary to learn the emotional competencies" Goleman (1998). For instance, the ability to recognize accurately what another person is feeling enables one to develop a specific competency such as influence. Similarly, people who are better able to regulate their emotions will find it easier to develop a competency such as initiative or achievement drive. Ultimately it is these social and EC that we need to identify and measure if we want to be able to predict performance at workplace resulting in its effectiveness.

Unresolved Issues & Dilemmas

Although psychologists have been studying aspects of emotional intelligence in organizations for decades (without using that term), the concept, as it is now understood, is relatively new. There still is much that is unclear about the nature of emotional intelligence, the

way in which it should be measured, and its impact on individual performance and workplace effectiveness. In some cases this lack of clarity has led to conflict and controversy among researchers and practitioners. One of the most basic controversies involves the definition of the concept itself.

The term emotional quotient (EQ) was first coined by Bar-On (1988) as a counterpart to intelligence quotient (IQ), i.e. cognitive ability. Bar-On thought of EQ as representing a set of social and emotional abilities that help individuals cope with the demands of daily life. Salovey and Mayer (1990) had something different and more restricted in mind when they introduced the term EI several years later. For them, EI concerned the way in which an individual processes information about emotion and emotional responses. Goleman (1995) initially saw EI as an idea or theme that emerged from a large set of research findings on the role of the emotions in human life. These findings pointed to different ways in which competencies such as empathy, learned optimism, and self-control contributed to important outcomes in the family, workplace, and other life arenas. Fortunately, there seems to be some progress in clarifying the concept of EI. Goleman has recently made a distinction between EI and EC, as mentioned above. For instance, managers who possess a high level of what Salovey and Mayer (1990) think of as EI will not necessarily be more effective than other managers in dealing with conflict among their employees. However, they will be able

to learn use conflict management skills more readily than individuals who bring less EI to the job. This recent formulation helps clarify the relationship between the definitions of EI that are used most frequently in the field. Nevertheless, it probably will be sometime before there is real clarity and consensus concerning the nature of emotional intelligence.

EI is really a combination of cognitive and emotional abilities.

A related area of controversy is the measurement of EI. Several different instruments are now available that claim to measure EI. All are of recent vintage except for Bar-On's EQ-i, which was developed in the mid-eighties. Gowing (2001) clarifies how the different instruments overlap and how they diverge in what they measure. Although much progress has been made and all the current measures show promise, there still is much work to be done in clarifying and refining measurement methodology. Another unresolved issue concerns the relative predictive power of EI and IQ. Although Goleman (1998) has argued that EI accounts for more of the variance in individual and group performance than purely cognitive ability does, part of the problem is that these abilities are not mutually exclusive. EI by any definition is really a combination of cognitive and emotional abilities. As Goleman has suggested, the essence of EI is the integration of the emotional centres of

the brain (the limbic system) and the cognitive centres (prefrontal cortex). Similarly, Mayer et. al. (2000) conceive EI as a set of skills that involve processing information about emotion. Empirical research leaves little doubt that: (1) IQ and other measures of cognitive ability are limited in their power to predict who will succeed and (2) measures of EI are strongly correlated with performance in certain situations. However, there has been little good research that compares the predictive power of IQ and EI.

EI is composed of varied competencies and it still is unclear exactly how they are related.

An often overlooked fact is that EI is composed of varied competencies and it still is unclear exactly how they are related. Both Mayer et al. (2000) and Goleman (1998) have developed models suggesting how different competencies may be related. Goleman proposes that Self-Awareness is the foundation for two other EI abilities: Self-Control and Social Awareness. Self-Control and Social Awareness, in turn, are the foundation for Social Skills.

The relationship between individual and group EI presents us with yet another unresolved issue. Group EI is not simply the sum total of the individual EI of group members. Having a few people with high individual EI is not enough to generate the conditions

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necessary for teamwork and group effectiveness. Groups also need norms and enduring processes that support awareness and regulation of emotion within the group. What we need is a study that measures both individual EI and group EI and then examines whether adding group EI increases our ability to predict group effectiveness. Before we can conduct such a study, we need good measures of both groups EI and individual EI. The major dilemma that confronts business organization is that the same conditions that make emotional intelligence so vital for organizational effectiveness also make EI difficult to nurture in organizations. This dilemma results from the current climate in contemporary organizations. The highly turbulent, dynamic, and competitive environment that has come to characterize the developing economic system at the dawn of the new millennium makes EI more vital than ever before. Rapid technological change, an increasingly diverse workforce, and global markets also contribute to a growing need for EI. Yet these factors are also creating a climate in which it is increasingly difficult for people to develop and use EI that is so necessary for organizational effectiveness. Even senior executives find it difficult to focus on anything other than short-term results. Yet the development of EI requires sustained reflection and learning.

Can EI be Developed?

An assumption that EI of the person can be developed, unlike cognitive intelligence, has led to the popularity of this concept. Studies have proved that while genes have a strong influence on our cognitive abilities (Riemann et. al. 1997) they also express themselves in the social and emotional competencies of individuals (Meany 2001). Bar-On (2000) has found that older cohorts tend to score higher on his scale of EI, suggesting that, to some extent, EI may be learned through life experience.

The same conditions that make emotional intelligence so vital for organizational effectiveness also make EI difficult to nurture in organizations.

It has been held for long time that development of social and emotional competencies takes commitment and sustained effort (Cherniss & Adler 2000, Cherniss & Goleman 2001). However, the most persuasive that people can improve on EI competencies comes from longitudinal studies conducted at the Weatherhead School of Management at Case Western Reserve University (Boyatzis et. al 1995). The students in this study took part in a course on competence building which included both emotional competencies and the cognitive ones. The assessment of students at the beginning of the program, upon graduation and again years later on-the-job showed that EI competencies can be significantly

EI competencies can be significantly improved and are sustainable over a long period of time.

improved and are sustainable over a long period of time. Recent research on “mindfulness” training - an emotional self-regulation strategy - has shown that training can actually change the brain centres that regulate negative and positive emotions. This training helps people focus on present and keep worries at a distance and also to maintain calm before acting on emotional impulse (Davidson et al. 2003). These results serve to support the notion that EI competencies can be developed.

People must step back from the day-to-day focus on getting more done and instead concentrate on personal development. Carving out time each week for such activity seems to many an unaffordable luxury. Only the most emotionally intelligent have the insight and determination to do so, though it is still not clear how those who lack this level of EI can be helped to change their priorities in ways that enable them to develop it.

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