

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE IN LEADERSHIP

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Abstract: *When you try to describe a "perfect leader", what comes into mind? We could imagine someone that never loses its control regardless of the problem faced, or we could imagine someone who has complete confidence in his team, a team that listens, someone with whom it is easy to communicate and which always takes thoughtful decisions. These are the qualities of a person with a high level of emotional intelligence.*

This paper is the result of my research in the field, in particular on the connection between emotional intelligence and leadership development. I present some of the most widely recognized and prevalent methods to improve emotional intelligence.

Keywords: *emotional intelligence, leadership, leader*

1. INTRODUCTION

How can we explain the fact that sometimes persons with a high level of IQ (cognitive intelligence) of over 140 works for persons with an IQ lower than 100?

Emotional Intelligence (EI) is the ability to understand and control our own emotions and those around us. Persons with a high level of EQ have a better understanding of their emotions and how are affecting the people around them. For a leader this aspect is essential in order to have success in his endeavours. According to Daniel Goleman, an American psychologist who helped very much to promote EQ, there are five main elements of Emotional Intelligence:

1. Self-awareness.
2. Self-regulation.
3. Motivation.
4. Empathy.
5. Social skills.

Developing these five elements for a leader is a key to have a better understanding of his team. The first step for a leader in understanding his team should start with understanding himself, knowing which are his strengths, weaknesses and work on those weaknesses.

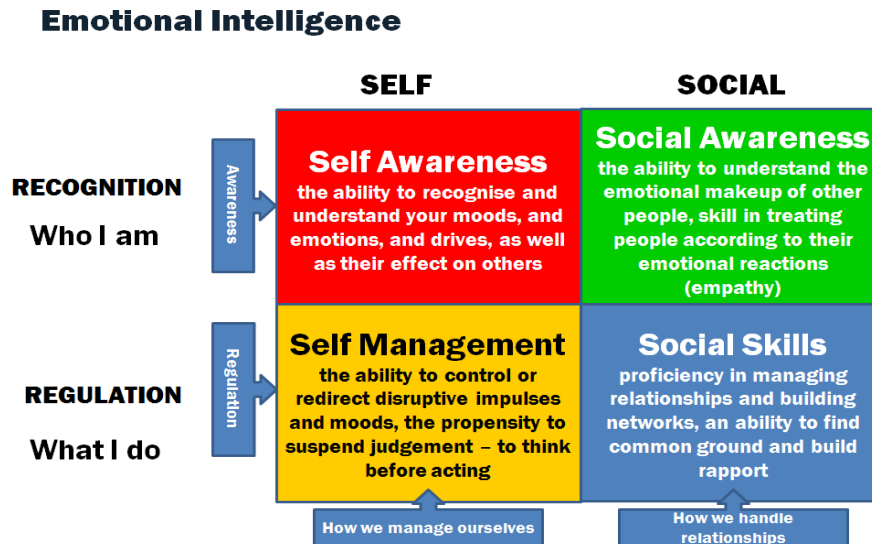


FIG. 1. Daniel Goleman Emotional Intelligence model

This paper focus on the ways we can improve the five main elements of Emotional Intelligence I mentioned above.

2. ELEMENTS OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

2.1. Self awareness

Self awareness represents the ability to discern, recognizes own emotions, attitudes, reactions by awareness (internal verbalisation process). By self awareness is performed the direct jump from the biological man to the person who consciously realise his own uniqueness, personality, intuitively and reflectively validated.

Being aware of itself, a leader may better determine to what extent his emotions and its actions affect the people around him. The leader will also have a clearer and more complete picture of his strengths, weaknesses, desires and motivations, personal beliefs and perceptions that can be used in the leadership process.

Many times during different psychological tests I've seen people having trouble naming at least three of their strengths and weaknesses, unfortunately that can be considered a lack of self awareness and introspection. Introspection is a capacity that a future leader needs to develop, even though the principle "know yourself" is centuries old I've noticed that many people don't know exactly what are the steps for an introspection. We understand biases, the halo-effect power, to a certain degree, we apply critical thinking on our decision process as military. But we can't gain self awareness by reading books, knowing psychology without understanding what really drives us, how other people experience us, understanding our past and current self. We see the world, from our experiences we shape it, the question is how does the world shape us?

So what can we do to improve our self awareness? First, I think we should know how to name our emotions when we have an introspection, we can start with the question "How do I feel?" but if the answer is "I feel good/bad" we just reached the surface of our emotions.

Psychologists Joseph Luft and Harrington Ingham have created in 1955 a technique for people to better understand themselves and others which can serve as a heuristic exercise.

The technique is called “The Johari window”[1] and it consists in a list of adjectives that the subjects need to choose in order to describe themselves and others, after the adjectives are chosen they are inserted in a grid made out of four quadrants that represent the aspects that we know about ourself and what is other people’s perception of us. I will not go further in the description of this exercise, but I will mention the adjectives from the test to have a better understanding of what “I feel good/bad” can be on a deeper introspection.

Table 1. The Johari window adjectives

Able	Clever	Friendly	Introverted	Observant	Religious	Silly
Accepting	Complex	Giving	Kind	Organized	Responsive	Spontaneous
Adaptable	Confident	Happy	Knowledgeable	Patient	Searching	Sympathetic
Bold	Dependable	Helpful	Logical	Powerful	Self-assertive	Tense
Brave	Dignified	Idealistic	Loving	Proud	Self-conscious	Trustworthy
Calm	Empathetic	Independent	Mature	Quiet	Sensible	Warm
Caring	Energetic	Ingenious	Modest	Reflective	Sentimental	Wise
Cheerful	Extroverted	Intelligent	Nervous	Relaxed	Shy	Witty

Developing self-awareness is not something we can do over night, it requires a lot of effort, practice, attention to one’s personality, behaviour and connections to external factors, forces. In this endeavour there are many books and researches that can help this development, but nothing can help if no practical effort is made.

Every development program should start with a deep understanding of the past and current self. In the past years one of the most successful theories about how to obtain a deeper identity understanding is through narrative identity which “postulates that individuals form an identity by integrating their life experiences into an internalized, evolving story of the self that provides the individual with a sense of unity and purpose in life”[1]

Looking at the experiences that had the biggest impact in shaping us, the people and events, asking ourselves, which experience gave us strongest passion for leading and identifying those experiences can bring answers for setting goals and future paths.

Having a mindful habit on a daily basis that can focus attention on self is another step. That habit can be keeping a journal, meditate, running, or any other activity that invites to reflection and focuses attention to what really matters and is important to us.

Seeking a strong feedback is another important step we need to take in order to better understand ourselves and also identify the effect we have on people around us. Receiving honest feedback sometimes put us in a defensive position and we need to understand why “receiving feedback sits at the junction of two conflicting human desires. We do want to learn and grow. And we also want to be accepted just as we are right now.”[1]

Becoming self-aware takes time, might take years of reflection, introspection, and difficult conversations. As we follow these kind of practices I mentioned above, we will become more comfortable even being vulnerable, transparent, at the end this will transform us in a more authentic leader.

2.2. Self-regulation

Effective Leaders rarely become verbally aggressive towards anyone, making decisions in a hurry based on the moment impulse, labels and form prejudices towards others or compromise their own values. Self-control can be improved though by practicing self discipline.

- Knowledge of one's own values and principles. A leader will need to know when he will not be able making any compromise, which is one of the most important of its values as its form own code of ethics that can be reported at the time that they are faced with an ethical dilemma and has made a decision.

- Taking responsibility. If you tend to blame someone else when something does not work as it should, assuming the consequences of recognition of some mistakes in front of those involved will lead to an increase in self-esteem.

- Keeping calm. In tense situations, the impulse to react to the situation may lead to mistakes. Induce a state of calm, in which the reactions are rationalised, the decision process can be drastically improved.

2.3. Motivation.

Self-motivated leaders work consistently toward their goals, and they have extremely high standards for the quality of their work.

How can you improve your motivation?

- Re-examine why you're doing your job – It's easy to forget what you really love about your career. So, take some time to remember why you wanted this job. If you're unhappy in your role and you're struggling to remember why you wanted it, try the Five Whys technique to find the root of the problem. Starting at the root often helps you look at your situation in a new way. And make sure that your goal statements are fresh and energizing.

- Know where you stand – Determine how motivated you are to lead.

- Be hopeful and find something good – Motivated leaders are usually optimistic, no matter what problems they face. Adopting this mindset might take practice, but it's well worth the effort. Every time you face a challenge, or even a failure, try to find at least one good thing about the situation. It might be something small, like a new contract, or something with long-term effects, like an important lesson learned. But there's almost always something positive, if you look for it.

The first step in building motivation is to identify what demotivates us and then face the problem straight forward. Now here, we're looking at demotivation on two levels. On one level, we have to look at the fundamental motivation to lead, at a second level, we have to look at the day-to-day irritations that frustrate us and distract from doing a good job. Some of the benefits of leadership are obvious, but what if we find that something is holding us back? What if we find that, deep down, we're not sure that we want to lead a team?

One can challenge himself to set aside for a few minutes to note down the things that steal his motivation, whether these are things that undermine the motivation to lead or are general irritants that are undermining the self-motivation. Making a list with the demotivations may help find the solutions when we identify the cause, a cause which can be circumstantial or habitual. If one demotivation is a recurring habit, we have to acknowledge it as a serious handicap, which may undermine all the good work we want to accomplish. That is when we need to make a concerted effort to bring motivation and passion to the activity. One of the key figures in the development of the theory of motivation was Frederick Herzberg, who closely studied the sources of employee motivation in the 1950s and 1960s. What he discovered was that the things that demotivate people are different from the things that motivate them. Herzberg's "Hygiene Factors"[2] (the things that made people unhappy and demotivated) were obstructive company policy, unhelpful administration, intrusive supervision, bad working relationships, poor conditions, uncompetitive salaries, low status and job insecurity. Just as these things demotivated the people Herzberg studied, they may also be the things that demotivates us in our military environment.

Establishing a clear motive for the actions we undertake is one of the best ways to create motivation. Once we have figured out that the effort we make fulfils a need we have, the effort will automatically become much more worthwhile.

At one level, the very basic level, we make an effort at our job because it gives us the money and helps us fulfil some material needs. At another level, we make an effort because we feel that by performing well, we are helping our team achieve a better goal and this makes us feel good about ourselves.

2.4. Empathy

For leaders, having empathy is critical to managing a successful team or organization. Leaders with empathy have the ability to put themselves in someone else's situation. They help develop the people on their team, challenge others who are acting unfairly, give constructive feedback, and listen to those who need it.

A leader should earn the respect and loyalty of his team, then show them he cares by being empathic.

How can we improve empathy?

- Putting ourselves in someone else's position – It's easy to support our own point of view, but taking the time to look at situations from other people's perspectives is also important and not that easy to perform at all times.

- Paying attention to body language – Perhaps when we listen to someone, we cross our arms, move our feet back and forth. This body language tells others how we really feel about a situation, and the message we're giving isn't always positive. Learning to read body language can be a real asset in a leadership role, because the leader will be better able to determine how someone truly feels. This gives him the opportunity to respond appropriately.

- Respond to the feelings – We sometimes are put in the situation to ask our team members to perform certain task that although they agree, we can hear the disappointment in their voice. By addressing their feelings, telling them we appreciate their work can improve their performance.

2.5. Social skills

Leaders who do well in the social skills element of emotional intelligence are great communicators and they set an example with their own behaviour.. They're just as open to hearing bad news as good news, and they're expert at getting their team to support them and be excited about a new mission. Leaders with good social skills are also good at managing change and resolving conflicts diplomatically. They're rarely satisfied with leaving things as they are, they don't sit back and make everyone else do the work, they get involved and lead other from the first line, setting standards and being in control.

Developing social skills require:

- Learning conflict resolution – Leaders must know how to resolve conflicts between their team members. Learning conflict resolution skills are vital if we want to succeed.

- Improving communication skills – How well do you communicate? Asking for feedback from our team or superiors also combined with a constant effort to improve our knowledge about how to control our emotions (delivering a briefing for example) or improve our knowledge about a certain operation can have direct benefits upon our communication skills. First step as usual is identifying where can we improve and what stops us to reach the desired level of skill.

- Learning how to acknowledge and show others merit – A leader can inspire the loyalty of his team, simply by giving praise when it's earned. Learning how to praise others is a skill that is not easy to develop as it requires a very good understanding of someone's personality and character in order to have authenticity.

CONCLUSIONS

Emotional intelligence is the ability to recognize emotions, understand what they're telling us, and realize how our emotions affect people around us. It also involves the perception of others: when we understand how they feel, this allows us to manage relationships more effectively.

To be effective, leaders must have a solid understanding of how their emotions and actions affect the people around them. The better a leader relates to and works with others, the more successful he or she will be. Taking the time to work on self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills areas will help us excel.

One of the reasons people with high emotional intelligence are usually successful is because they're the ones that others want on their team. They make others feel good, they go through life much more easily than people who are easily angered or upset.

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