

InFo
Vol. 8, Nos. 1 & 2
2005
pp. 5 - 14

FEATURE

Emotional Intelligence in the Workplace

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Abstract – *Emotional intelligence is a concept which originated relatively recently, and which has held the focus of the research community up until today. Most useful in the workplace environment, EQ can explain why some leaders prosper and others do not. EQ can be developed, and this study links it to character, as well as success. Individuals with high EQ do not necessarily function as a group with high EQ without practice. Men and women appear to have equal amounts of EQ, and older individuals learn it better than younger ones, though the peak appears to be in the 40s. The most recent trend is toward seminars aimed at developing EQ in the workplace. Guidelines for best practices in conceiving such a seminar are included.*

What is that concept that embraces theories from numerous domains of knowledge such as psychology, communication, physiology, organizational management, which has captured interest among both lay people and professionals? What term has been a focus of debate in recent years, but when utilized appropriately seem to transform a workplace? What distinguishes star performers from mediocre or low performers at work? What enables one to be more effective in one's personal life and work? The answer to all these questions is *emotional intelligence*.

Emotional Intelligence, more commonly called EI or EQ (as used in this paper), is a relatively new model based on behavioral psychology, popularized in 1995 with Daniel Goleman's book called *Emotional Intelligence: Why It can Matter More than IQ*. In his book Goleman argues that (IQ), the traditional measure of intelligence is too narrow. Capturing public interest and stirring controversy at professional levels, Goleman presented his claim that people with emotional skill excel in life, perhaps more than people with a high IQ.

Three years later, in 1998, Goleman published another book, *Working with Emotional Intelligence*, in which he points out the need for EQ especially in the workplace. The success of Goleman's books has resulted in a surge of academic

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research as well as the commercialization of EQ in recent years. Debates among professionals and lay people about EQ have produced both positive and negative impressions about the concept. This presentation attempts to highlight the value of EQ in the workplace, drawing on supportive research-based data, and points out the draw-backs of over-doing the emphasis on EQ.

At the onset I would like to suggest that a fine connection exists between EQ and character. My own intensive study of the concept of EQ, participation in the 5th Annual Emotional Intelligence Conference in Holland in June 2005, and a personal conviction derived from the study of the Bible and experience, have impressed me about this strong relationship between EQ and character. Though a Christian perspective of character means far more than what EQ explanations provide, it makes sense for us to accept most of the theories and practices related to this concept. Let me point out an area that I would tread with caution, however. The literature on brain research, which is part of the theoretical underpinnings of EQ, seems to be based on evolution. While this does not make brain research unsuitable for Christians to study, Christian educators must use discretion in interpreting EQ in ways consistent with Biblical truths.

Definitions

The concept of EQ has been formed developmentally in the recent past. In the academic realm, three main models of EQ exist: ability based, competency based, and the social or non-cognitive based. John Mayer, a University of New Hampshire psychologist, was one of the first to coin the term during his study on intelligence. In 1990, he and Peter Salovey (from Yale) used the ability model to define EQ in the traditional sense as “an ability to recognize emotions and their relationships and the ability to reason and solve problems on their basis” (as cited in Brown, 2005, p. 1).

Then came Goleman’s competency-based model which considers the personal and social capabilities of people. Based on Gardner’s theory of multiple intelligences as presented in the book *Frames of Mind* (1983), Goleman drew a model highlighting the two social intelligences of *intrapersonal* and *interpersonal* intelligences. He defined EQ as, “the capacity for recognizing our own feelings and those of others, for motivating ourselves, and for managing emotions well in ourselves and in our relationships” (1998, p. 375). Originally, he identified five domains of emotional intelligence and twenty-five emotional competencies. Later these were streamlined to four domains and eighteen competencies (Goleman, Boyatzsis, & McKee, 2002, p. 39). These are listed in Table 1.

According to Goleman (1998), emotional *intelligence* determines the capacity for learning the practical skills that are based on the domains, while emotional *competence* determines how much of that capacity has been put into

workplace capabilities (pp. 28-29). Research studies have quantified the characteristics of EQ which were earlier “void of such measurement and definition” (p. 1). Earlier, called “soft skills,” these competencies are found in high performers in the workplace.

Explaining the nature of these competencies, Goleman (1998) says that they are 1) independent—each makes a unique contribution to job performance, 2) interdependent—each draws to some extent on certain others, 3) hierarchical—they build on each other, 4) necessary, but not sufficient—having EQ does not guarantee display of the competencies, and 5) generic—the list is applicable to all jobs, though different jobs make differing competency demands (p. 30).

Table 1
The Emotional Competence Framework

Personal Competence – Managing Ourselves	Social Competence – Managing Relationships
<p>Self Awareness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emotional self-awareness • Accurate self-assessment • Self-confidence <p>Self-Management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emotional self-control • Transparency • Adaptability • Achievement • Initiative • Optimism 	<p>Social Awareness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Empathy • Organizational awareness • Service <p>Relationship Management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inspirational leadership • Developing others • Change catalyst • Conflict management • Teamwork and collaboration

Note: Adapted from Goleman, D. (1998). *Working with emotional intelligence*. New York: Bantam Books, pp. 32-34.

The third and the broadest concept of EQ comes from BarOn, who takes a non-cognitive approach to EQ. For him, EQ is “an array of non-cognitive abilities, competencies and skills that influence the ability to succeed in coping with environmental demands” (as cited in Brown, 2005, p.1).

The above discussions of EQ are among the most widely accepted ones, but one should not be surprised if a search of the literature will bring more viewpoints on the issue. According to Orme and BarOn (2002, p. 23), the interest in the subject is indicated by the almost 500% increase in the number of publications and in the sheer number of scientific publications alone, of which 3,500 were published between 1970 to the end of the 1990s. The past decade, since the publishing of Goleman’s books, has seen the greatest interest in the

concept. One growing theme, related to EQ, is improving key emotional competencies in order to help people and organizations become more effective and successful.

Rationale for EQ

This revolutionary value of EQ comes partly from the new perspective on emotions. This scientific view, according to Freedman (2005) is that emotions are “understandable, measurable, and practical” (p.1). Supporting this view, Caruso and Salovey (as cited in Hughes, Patterson & Terrell, 2005) say that “emotional skills can also be measured in an objective way through the use of ability, performance, or knowledge tests. Such tests would ask a series of questions like these: What is the cause of sadness? What is an effective strategy for calming an angry customer?” (p. 12)

A research study conducted in 2003 by Damasio (as cited in Hughes, Patterson, & Terrell, 2005) has found that human beings need to process emotional information before making any cognitive decisions and that EQ is that factor which weaves “together thought and feeling into the marvelously rich fabric of human experience” (p. 14). In the same line, Freedman (2005) compares thinking and feeling to two notes of the same chord. He says, “Emotions are part of intelligence—part of cognition. Both are biological processes and inseparable from our physical selves” (p. 1). Emotions influence every aspect of our lives. They help us survive and are the basis for relationships. As Freedman further points out, “To be intelligent with our emotions, we must recognize and attend to them respectfully and intentionally” (2005, p. 1).

The good news, as Goleman (1998) expresses, is that “emotional competencies can be cultivated with the right practice” (p. 284). Since patterns of EQ are not fixed, people can improve their overall EQ by improving areas where they lack skills. This aspect of EQ is unlike IQ, which is considered relatively stable throughout life.

Character and EQ

Another important and interesting aspect of EQ is its association with character. Though not all proponents of EQ agree, there are those who suggest a clear connection between character and EQ. Goleman (1998), for example, equated EQ with character when he said:

There is an old-fashioned word for the body of skills that emotional intelligence represents: *character*... The bedrock of character is self-discipline; the virtuous life, as philosophers since Aristotle have observed, is based on self-control. A related keystone of character is

being able to motivate and guide oneself, whether in doing homework, finishing a job, or getting up in the morning. (p. 285)

In the above context, Goleman refers to self-control as a critical component of character or EQ. I would like to suggest that all good human relation skills are essential components of character. One may find ample opportunities to develop these skills, whether at home or in the workplace. Most often, an observer uses the relationship skills of another individual as the benchmark for evaluating that person's character. Of course, moral character goes beyond such observable traits, but people often "judge the book based on its cover," as the saying goes.

Leadership and EQ

The most effective leaders, as Cherniss and Goleman (2001) describe, are "those who have the ability to sense how their employees feel about their work situation and to intervene effectively when those employees begin to feel discouraged or dissatisfied" (p. 4). They are "also able to manage their own emotions, with the result that employees trust them and feel good about working with them" (p. 4). Thus, bosses and administrators whom employees enjoy working with are those who manage with EQ.

Leaders and administrators, in particular, need high EQ (Goleman, 1998). One reason is that they represent the group or the organization to the public and interact with the most number of people inside and outside the group or organization. "The artful leader is attuned to the subtle undercurrents of emotion that pervade a group. . ." (p. 220), and is "the key *source* of the organization's emotional tone" (p. 220). Leaders with empathy understand their employees' needs and provide them with constructive feedback. Besides this, extremely successful leaders give off a high level of positive energy to the group. This emotional charisma has much to do with being an emotional *sender* rather than a *receiver*.

Literature is replete with studies on leadership and EQ. Being sincere about their emotions sets apart the charismatic leaders from manipulative ones (Goleman, 1998, p. 222). One study conducted in Canada by Stone, Parker, and Wood (2005) identified similar emotional components that distinguished school administrators as superior or below average in leadership abilities.

A research study conducted by Leslie (2000) shows that key leadership capabilities and perspectives are related to EQ, and that the absence of EQ was related to career derailment. In their recent concept of leadership, known as "primal leadership," Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee (2002) point out that "the emotional task of the leader is primal—that is first—in two senses—It is both original and the most important art of leadership" (p. 4). According to them, the

leader has much power to sway the emotions of everyone. Positive use of emotions results in resonance while negative drive causes dissonance.

Primal leadership can be developed by working on the social competence domain of EQ. This domain involves empathic listening and resonating to others' thinking to develop one's thought and actions. This enables a leader to provide both a "unified and individual sense of direction for his or her group" (as cited in Wilson, 2005, p. 1). This theory suggests that advanced listening techniques are essential skills for effective leadership. Practical steps for training in this area are also explained by Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee (2002).

Workplace and EQ

Emotional intelligence plays an important role in the workplace. Research studies during the past 25 years about factors that contribute to success in workplace have resulted in identifying factors that are related to workplace intelligence. These studies used quantified data on performance from myriad organizations and industries and have contributed to the knowledge base in EQ (Lynn, 2002). Emotions contain vital information that help us "to be better at what we do" (Wolfe & Caruso, 2004, p. 3). Analyses of studies of about 500 organizations worldwide, reviewed by Goleman (1998) "point to the paramount place of emotional intelligence in excellence on the job—in virtually any job" (p. 6). He points out that those with the highest EQ measure rise to the top in the organizations and become leaders. Another important finding from these studies is about star employees. Star employees possess more EQ than other employees. Interestingly, EQ mattered twice as much as technical and analytic skill for them (p. 378).

Different jobs call for different types of EQ. For example, success in sales requires the empathic ability to identify the mood of the customer and the interpersonal skill to decide when to pitch 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. Thus EQ affects just about everything you do at work. "Even when you work in a solitary setting, how well you work has a lot to do with how well you discipline and motivate yourself" (Goleman, as cited in Murray, 1998, p. 3).

Studies of gender differences in acquiring EQ have found interesting results. Goleman (1998) says that "men and women seem equally able to increase their emotional intelligence" (p. 285). In a study by Stein (as cited in Murray, 1998), 4,500 men and 3,200 women were assessed for their EQ. He found that women scored higher than men on empathy and social responsibility while men outdid women on stress tolerance and self-confidence. He concluded that women and men are equally intelligent emotionally, but they are strong in different areas.

Another consideration in EQ acquisition has been age. Studies show that, “maturity remains an advantage; it may be slightly harder to ‘teach young dogs new tricks,’” says Goleman (1998, p. 285). In their study comparing several hundred adults and adolescents, Mayer and Salovey (as cited in Goleman, 1998), found that EQ increases with age with a peak occurring in the forties.

EQ in the workplace can mean many things. For example, Cherniss (2005) refers to a school set-up as an example. Here, the students’ workplace intelligence is one of the considerations. Teaching EQ-related skills to students will improve their quality of life both at present and in the future. On the other hand, schools are also workplaces for teachers. Success in teaching students depends “on the skill and sensitivity of the teacher who delivers it in the classroom, and supports it and reinforces it” (p. 2). However, these skills have much to do with the EQ of the teachers which, in turn, is influenced by the climate of the school, which is influenced by the EQ of the principal. Similar levels of interaction relating to EQ can be identified in other organizations as well.

Promoting EQ in the Workplace

A starting point in improving EQ is the recognition of its importance (Hughes, Patterson, & Terrell, 2005, p. 1). Research supports the idea that adding EQ to an organization begins with the leader (Cherniss, 2005, p. 2). The process involves a self-assessment of one’s strengths and weaknesses in various aspects of EQ. Training or coaching helps strengthen the EQ of that person. The next step is to work on the group’s EQ. Among the various groups of the organization, the very top would be the starting point. Since a group with individuals with high EQ may not necessarily function as an emotionally intelligent group, learning to work together is important. The third step is to train the front line—the individuals in the organization—for example, the teachers in a school.

According to Cherniss (2005), an emotionally intelligent workplace differs from a not-so-emotionally-intelligent organization. The common traits typically identified are commitment, trust, and emotional atmosphere. Commitment is when employees do “extra tasks that are not part of their job description just because it’s important to them that the organization functions” (p. 3). Trust is seen when at all levels people feel that if someone makes a mistake, it was an honest mistake, rather than an act of self-interest. Emotional atmosphere is evidenced where positive emotion permeates the place instead of hurt feelings, depression, lethargy, and lack of energy.

A more elaborate model for training in EQ is suggested by Goleman, Cherniss, Cowan, Emmerling, and Adler (2005, pp. 1-4). They have identified four phases in promoting EQ in the workplace, based on an exhaustive review of

the research literature. These four phases include 22 guidelines for practice as shown in Table 2.

Trainers and coaches in the field of human resources have developed programs that educate people on the relevance of EQ in the workplace, assess their strengths and weaknesses and provide support for enhancing their EQ. Studies on effectiveness of EQ training and coaching provide insights for future directions in this area.

Table 2
Guidelines for Best Practice

Preparing

- Assess the organization's needs
- Assess the individual
- Deliver assessments with care
- Maximize learner choice
- Encourage people to participate
- Link learning goals to personal values
- Adjust expectations
- Gauge readiness

Training

- Foster a positive relationship between the trainers and learners
- Make change self-directed
- Set clear goals
- Break goals into manageable steps
- Provide opportunities to practice
- Give performance feedback
- Rely on experiential methods
- Build in support
- Use models
- Enhance insight
- Prevent relapse

Encouraging Transfer and Maintenance

- Encourage use of skills on the job
- Develop an organizational culture that supports learning

Evaluating Change

- Evaluate
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Note: Adapted from Goleman, D., Cherniss, C., Cowan, K., Emmerling, R., & Adler, M. (2005). *Guidelines for practice*. Retrieved October 20, 2005 from <http://www.eiconsortium.org/research/guidelines.htm>

Summary and Conclusion

Since the publication of Goleman's book on *emotional intelligence* in 1995, a great deal of interest in the concept has been generated. The initial explanations of EQ were often vague and literature lacked valid and reliable instruments for the models that were proposed. But recently EQ, as an emerging science, has contributed much to a better understanding of human intelligence focusing on emotional competencies. While these concepts are helpful for understanding ourselves as private individuals, it is in the area of leadership and workplace skills that EQ makes its greatest contribution.

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