Review

Presence and potential of emotional intelligence (EI) in organizational settings

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Accepted 7 December, 2011

The paper investigates the presence of a sense of emotional intelligence (EI) in human beings and the potential it can offer in organizational settings. The results are based upon a critical review of the available literature. The study indicates the presence of a sense of EI in human beings. It reveals a positive role of EI in our professional lives. It shows that employees’ EI contributes positively to enhance their job performance while they are working on assignments individually, jointly in teams and/or in leadership roles.

Key words: Emotional intelligence (EI), self development, human potential, organizational settings.

INTRODUCTION

Usually, people like to think of themselves as rational beings while satisfying their motives in an intelligent way. To a certain extent, that is true but humans are also emotional beings. Most of the affairs of everyday life are colored with feelings, moods and emotions like joy, sorrow, love, happiness and sadness (Morgan et al., 1988). Everything we do has both a cognitive and an affective component (Norman, 2004). Feelings and emotions provide us with insight and energy and are involved in nearly every decision we make (Brotherson, 2009). In reality, emotions are the glue that connects people to each other (Segal et al., 2010). Emotions are the foundation of our ability to understand us and relate to others. Therefore, emotional intelligence (EI) is an inherent skill that human beings possessed since creation. In order to survive, he needed to assess potentially dangerous situations quickly and accurately by analyzing humans’ and animals’ nonverbal behaviors (Levinson, 2003). We can convey messages to animals and children through emotions only. Communication through emotions is evident even at birth because the infant’s face and voice convey information about physical and emotional health (Locke, 1995). Children weep or become happy based upon the emotions rather than words people say to them. If we love/care they are happy and cool, if we show annoyance/aggression they start weeping or even crying.

According to Boyatzis (2009), EI competencies predict effectiveness in professional, managerial and leadership roles. Consequently, competencies like EI, conflict management, teamwork, interpersonal sensitivity and negotiation skills are considered much more crucial than academic competence, technical expertise and professional education (Singh, 2010). Naqvi et al. (2011) reported that the factor of compatible personality takes precedence over qualification and experience fulfilling the job specification of that position. This paper aims to present an understanding of the concept of EI, acknowledge the presence of EI and to explore the potential it offers in the domains of our organizational and work lives.

Emotions

Emotions are psychological and physiological episodes experienced toward an object, person or event that...
create a state of readiness (McShane and Glinow, 2005). Research shows that emotions, as much as or more than mind, contain one's history – every chapter and verse of every experience, deep understanding and relationship in one's life (Cooper, 1997). This makes sense and ensures that we have particularly clear memories of what makes us happy, excited and threatened (Goleman, 1995). Emotions are different from moods in that emotions are brief events or episodes directed toward someone or something and are felt both psychologically and physiologically, while moods are less intentional states that are not directed toward anything particular (McShane and Glinow, 2005). Indeed the helplessness experienced at the hands of emotions and moods is due, in part, to the fact that feelings occur after the fact. What is felt is the outcome of changes that have already begun, and continue to unfold. Assessing emotions and moods gives one back a measure of control and provides information about what is going on in the body and brain (Sizer, 2006). A variety of emotions are experienced in work, as well as routine settings. However, scholars have clustered all emotions into six primary categories; namely, anger, fear, joy, love, sadness and surprise (McShane and Glinow, 2005).

Understanding emotional intelligence (EI)

The concept of EI has its roots in psychology but now it has become an important construct to be studied in social psychology, education, human resources, psychiatry and many more (Mayer, 2006). People may take the term EI as oxymoron because intelligence implies rational thinking which is devoid of emotions (Caruso et al., 2001). However, the concept of EI conveys a quite different meaning. In understanding the relation between cognition and emotion, the distinct contribution of EI is to see thought and emotion adaptively, intelligently and as intertwined. The concept of EI proposes that intelligence may understand emotion and that emotion may facilitate intelligence (Mayer and Ciarrochi, 2006).

Intelligence may understand emotions of others through their emotional expressions because there is a subjective element to emotions. What is felt and displayed is a feature of emotion; it is what people show (Fineman, 2003). People identify emotions in others from many sources such as voice, tone, context, verbal language and nonverbal body language especially facial expressions.

On the other hand, emotions may facilitate intelligence. In a state of negative affection – feeling anxious or endangered – brain confers us the ability to concentrate upon a topic in a detailed fashion, without distraction, and then to go deeper and deeper into the topic until some solution is reached. Under such conditions, affective system prepares us for action and makes us alert to focus the problem at hand (Norman, 2004). In the same vein, Tiedens and Linton (2001) found that emotions such as happiness, anger and disgust encourage more heuristic processing, such as relying on the expertise of a source of communication when evaluating arguments, while emotions like sadness and fear promote more careful, systematic styles of thinking. Liberman (2006) reported that anger could block mediators’ ability to get resolve the conflict and that it is the mediator’s job to detect level of aggression among the parties and assist them by validating their anger and helping them to set it aside so that they can move ahead. Ngah et al. (2009) revealed a negative association of regulation of emotion with job performance and job satisfaction which indicated that when people experience negative affective states, they become unhappy and thus unable to produce better performance. On the other hand, in a state of positive affection, brain processor is broadened, the muscles relax and brain attends to the opportunities offered by the positive affection. This implies that, we are far less focused, and are highly receptive to interruptions and any novel idea. Hence, positive affection stimulates curiosity, engages creativity and makes the brain into an effective learning organism (Norman, 2004).

Thus, when people are aware of and in control of their emotions, they can think clearly, manage stress, communicate well with others; and display trust, empathy and confidence. When people lose control of emotions they will spin into confusion, isolation and doubt (Segal et al., 2010). Therefore, people need to acknowledge emotions but not let them rule the conduct. If emotions take control of the intellect - which allows for choices to be made to achieve desired goals – then intellect will take a back seat. Instead, intellect should have a final say and control the emotions to take decisions (Liberman, 2006).

Acknowledging the presence of emotional intelligence (EI)

To communicate with babies speakers produce utterances filled with vocal and facial affect. Babies are well equipped to read the alterations of voice and face, mouth and eye movements which directly express the message we want them to absorb. Children learn to express their needs through emotions first then through words. Infants pass on positive/negative signals by displaying proper emotions to tell his/her internal state at birth (Locke, 1995).

In second week, a baby may smile sleepily after a feeding and at the age of 2 months babies smile more at visual stimuli such as faces they know (Papalia et al., 2004). Sometimes, crying is the most powerful and the only way, infants can communicate their needs (Papalia et al., 2004). Infants at the age of 3 to 6 months learn to read emotions of others and express it through observation and imitation. They need parents to be responsive and attentive to them which teaches them that
their emotions affect the world around them (Brotherson, 2009).

Comparatively, at some later age, children learn to communicate verbally and non-verbally. So, at the age of 9 months children learn to point an object, usually they make a noise to show that they wanted it. In the age of 9 to 12 months, children learn some conventional social gestures like waving bye-bye and nodding head for yes (Papalia et al., 2004). At the age of 12 to 18 months, children begin to use single words, primarily nouns to express whole phrases or requests. And at the age of 18 to 24 months, children start to utter simple sentences (Passer and Smith, 2004). This asserts that, to communicate with the external world, nature prepares us to make use of our emotions/EI first then words or language. In collectivist cultures like Pakistan, children try to get their parents' commitment for gift, the moment their parents are happy on their children's academic achievement. At workplace, employees check the mood/emotions of the boss before going to request for any favor. This implies that humans possess a sense of EI from day one of their lives but they do not know this.

Potential of emotional intelligence (EI) in organizational settings

EI is an individual's ability to cope effectively with environmental demands and pressures, therefore research reveals a positive correlation between EI and life success (Singh, 2010). The essence of the job of a manager is to make decisions and solve problems faced by the respective organization. Research reveals that practical application of EI skills and behaviors can improve not only the outcome of a decision but also the processes associated with decision making (Hess and Bacigalupo, 2011). The subcomponents of EI - self awareness and self regulation - positively affect the problem solving behavior of employees (Rahim and Minors, 2003). Additionally, managers with high EI may better and more carefully handle the inherent work-family conflicts than those with low EI (Carmeli, 2003). Emotionally intelligent people are able to recognize others' feelings, so by allowing their expressions such people can perform well in negotiation as well (Loannidou and Konstantikaki, 2008).

At workplace, EI of employees affects behavior and attitude they exhibit within organizations. A number of research studies prove a positive relationship of EI with job satisfaction of employees in different work environments (Ngah et al., 2009; Sy et al., 2006). A longitudinal study also reveals a positive association of EI with employee job satisfaction (Jordan and Troth, 2011). Moreover, job satisfaction of employees can be predicted on the basis of their score on EI (Ghoniem et al., 2011). In the same vein, research indicates that emotionally intelligent managers tend to develop high commitment towards their careers and high affective commitment for their organizations (Carmeli, 2003). Research reveals a significant positive relationship of employees' EI with their organizational commitment (Rangriz and Mehrabi, 2010). On the other hand, EI is negatively related with employees' withdrawal intentions from the organization (Carmeli, 2003). Furthermore, a longitudinal study shows a negative correlation of EI with employee turnover intentions working in a large health service company (Jordan and Troth, 2011). Research reveals a significant negative relationship between EI and perceived stress in the workplace. So, the employees reporting a high score on EI perceive a lower level of occupational stress, thus suffer less from negative health consequences (Oginska-Bulik, 2005).

Being capable of participating effectively in a team environment is an important consideration for success in work life. A study (Sue-Chan and Latham, 2004) indicates a high positive correlation of managers' EI and their team playing behavior. EI of team leader relates positively with trust within a team context and hence commitment within the team (Schlechter and Strauss, 2008). A research study shows a significant positive correlation between average EI of teams and their goal focus (Jordan et al., 2002). Rapisarda's (2002) study reveals that EI competencies are positively correlated with team cohesiveness. Koman and Wolff (2008) revealed that, a team leader’ EI affects team level emotional competence and team performance through the development emotionally competent group norms. Additionally, high EI teams operated at high levels of performance (Jordan et al., 2002). Managerial EI can predict team satisfaction with a reasonable degree of accuracy (Langhorn, 2004).

EI of employees also affect customer service. The dimensions of EI - self awareness and empathy - had a significant positive effect on employees' concern for quality (Rahim and Minors, 2003). An experimental study (Kernbach and Schutte, 2005) reveals that higher EI of service providers leads to greater customer satisfaction. In the context of teams, managerial EI may only predict customer satisfaction to a very moderate degree of accuracy (Langhorn, 2004).

Finally, EI potentially contributes to the job performance of employees. Rangriz and Mehrabi (2010) proved a significant positive relationship between EI and employee performance. Chaudhry and Usman (2011) reveal that, 40% of the variation in employee performance measured in terms of organizational citizenship behavior can be accounted for by their scores on EI. Nel and De Villiers (2004) revealed that 29% of the variance in overall job performance in a call centre can be explained by the variance in EI of call centre agents. A study shows that appraisal and expression of emotions are moderately highly correlated with job performance (Ngah et al., 2009). Furthermore, an experimental study reveals that employee productivity is significantly high in terms of pre
and post training sessions held to improve employees’ EI (Hosseinein et al., 2008).

The extant literature shows that EI relates positively with employee behavior, attitude, team play, customer satisfaction and job performance. Hence it is asserted that, in their work lives employees’ EI confers in them traits, attitudes and behaviors that lead them to be high performers.

**Emotional intelligence (EI) for organizations**

Leaders in organizations are interested in knowing the factors that improve employees’ EI (Andries, 2009). Singh (2010) argues that organizations can enhance the EI of executives by improving their competencies – people success, system success and self success. Therefore, organizations may arrange effective training programs focused on behavioral skills to improve EI and leadership styles of their managers, thereby enhancing the performance, wellbeing and quality of organizational life (Grant, 2007). The human resource (HR) managers may use skill based EI test (EQ-i) as a functional tool in the assessment and development of individuals who are in executive roles or about to take executive positions (Stein et al., 2009). Here managers should not only consider the cost of providing appropriate training to improve these skills but also to address the cost to the organization if such action was not taken. Thus a win-win scenario is achieved for both the individual employee and the organization and the slogans like “We are a caring and sensitive organization” becomes more than just words (Chrusciel, 2006). Certainly, this will increase the human capital of the organization.

Jonker (2009) views that managers may use EI as a tool to augment their decisions for selection, recruitment, training and development of employees from entry level to senior executive positions. To increase employee and organizational performance, managers must start administering EI test to select the right person for the right job (Kulkarni et al., 2009). According to Rahim and Malik (2010), EI should be included in employee training programs to help employees to be motivated and develop a cooperative behavior. Ramesar et al. (2009) argue that organizations should strive to develop EI of managers as a skill to cope with stress. Anand and Suriyan (2010) report a significant relationship of EI with the leadership practices of executives. The researchers suggest HR managers to think over various training methods to enhance managers’ EI as an instrument to increase their leadership qualities. Schlechter and Strauss (2008) confirmed a positive relationship between transformational leadership and leader’s EI. Coetzee and Schaap (2005) also found the similar results.

Still EI is important in other avenues within organizations. Nwokah and Ahiauzu (2009) found a significant positive association of EI and marketing effectiveness of corporate organizations, because emotions play a very important role in product design – appearance, effectiveness and pleasure of the use of the product; and self-image, personal satisfaction and memories it conveys (Norman, 2004). Apart from this, customers are very fond of the brands with which they have unique emotional experiences. Therefore, like the functionality of a product/service, emotions influence the decision making processes of customer purchase decisions (Consoli, 2010). Hence, it is important for the organizations to understand the buying motivations of customers to achieve organizational success.

**Emotional intelligence (EI) can be learned**

The preceding discussion highlights the potential of EI for human beings and organizations. This can only be realized if EI can be learned/developed. It still remains debatable whether EI can be learned/changed or is innate to human beings. Boyatzis and Saatcioglu (2008) screened results of 17 cross sectional and longitudinal studies and concluded that MBA students can develop their emotional competencies. Boyatzis (2008) argues that EI competencies can show improvement of about 10% that may last for 3 to 18 months after training. By following the behavioral approach to EI, we enter into a domain of human talent that can be developed in adulthood as well (Boyatzis, 2009). In a study conducted with employees, treatment group was exposed to an extensive 11 week EI training program, while the control group was not instructed any material related to EI. The pre-/post-course mean differences for the treatment group demonstrate a significant improvement in overall EI score and all four dimensions while the control group show no significant improvement for EI. A development program of EI targeted at accountants reports a significant difference for total EI score based upon the pre test and post test scores of the experimental and control groups (Jonker, 2009). Grant (2007) proves that EI can be changed through long training programs by focusing on specific behaviors related to EI such as coaching skills. The study reveals that 13 week training program significantly enhanced participants’ EI while 2 day training program was not effective in significantly increasing EI. Similar results were found by Moriarty and Buckley (2003) with respect to EI of teams. This proves that it is possible to enhance EI of individuals and teams through deliberate long term training which may last for months.

**CONCLUSION**

Human beings primarily express their needs and feelings through emotions then through language hence possess a sense of EI since birth. Review of literature reveals that
EI plays a significant role in achieving success in our work lives. Moreover, EI of the employees of an organization is vital for the achievement of objectives. Therefore, to be successful, organizations should select, train, develop and retain employees who are highly emotionally intelligent. The potential benefits of emotionally intelligent employees can be realized as EI can be developed by imparting long term training.

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