Emotional Intelligence: A Necessity to Leaders' Effectiveness

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Abstract

Emotional intelligence is a key ingredient to a leader's productivity and job satisfaction. In a practical sense, emotional intelligence is a leader's skills for: (1) identifying, controlling, and expressing one's emotions and (2) understanding, interpreting, and responding to the emotions of others; with both of these skill sets taking place in the context of a situation that achieves the desired results. A leader's self-awareness—knowing one's emotions and their impact on self and others—is crucial to effectively applying emotional intelligence. Leaders must resist negative thoughts which generate emotions that are non-productive, or even counterproductive, to maximizing the potential of effectively utilizing emotional intelligence. Optimism and happiness, mindfulness, meditation, and mindset are skill areas that aid leaders in developing and sustaining emotional intelligence.

Key words: leaders, emotional intelligence, self-awareness

Introduction

"Effective leaders don't buy into or try to suppress their inner experiences. Instead they approach them in a mindful, value-driven, and productive way—developing what we call *emotional agility*" (David & Congleton, 2018, p. 122).

Leaders mastering emotional intelligence can: (1) read and regulate their own emotions, (2) intuitively grasp how others feel, and (3) gauge the emotional climate of the work setting (Goleman, 2018a). Emotional agility—an outcome of effective application of emotional intelligence—can help leaders alleviate stress, reduce errors, become more innovative, and improve job performance (David & Congleton, 2018, p. 123). Holistically, emotional intelligence is singularly the best predictor of a leader's workplace performance and strongest driver of his/her excellence (TalentSmart, 2018; Bradberry, 2014).

Effective application of emotional intelligence requires self-awareness on the part of leaders concerning how they can regulate their behaviors through self-reflection and allowing themselves to demonstrate empathy toward others. As Goleman (2013) notes:

> To speak from the heart, to the heart, a leader must first know her values. That takes self-awareness. Inspiring leadership demands attuning both an inter-emotional reality and to that of those we seek to inspire. These are elements of emotional intelligence. Awareness of ourself and of others, in its application in managing our inter-world and our relationships, is the essence of emotional intelligence. (pp. 225-226)

Leaders can make effective use of emotional intelligence, even if they are predisposed to feeling uncomfortable about using some of the skills related to it. Human resource professionals often have emotional intelligence training and development incorporated into their services for organizational personnel (Bharwaney, Bar-on, & MacKinley, 2011).

The Specifics of Emotional Intelligence

The two basic conceptual models of emotional intelligence are: (1) *ability* model and (2) *trait* model (Lievens & Chan, 2010, pp. 5-6). A third model, *mixed*, has aspects of both the ability and the trait models and is discussed. Each model is presented with accompanying specific criteria that leaders can use to enhance their emotional intelligence skills. There is considerable overlap of criteria for the three models. It is noted that classification of emotional intelligence models, and specific programs flowing from them, may not always be aligned as presented here. Emotional intelligence is still a developing discipline. Leaders should review all of the aspects of each model and its accompanying criteria to generate self-reflections and identify ways for improving their use of emotional intelligence and reinforcing its positive effects.

Ability Model

The *ability model* is also called the emotional, cognitive ability or information processing model. It is defined as "the ability to monitor one's own and others' emotions to discriminate among them and to use the information to guide one's thinking and actions" (Salovey & Mayer, 1990, p. 189). The ability model of Salovey and Mayer (1990) is broken down into four branches with specific criteria presented for each branch:

1. **Emotional identification, perception, and expression**—This represents the leader's ability to: (a) identify the emotions that others feel verbally and non-verbally, (b)

       detect the authenticity of others' emotional expressions, (c) appraise one's own emotions, and (d) express one's own emotions clearly to others.

2. **Emotional facilitation of thought**—This references the leader's ability to: (a) use emotions to assist her/his thinking and problem solving, (b) know the systematic effects of emotions on cognitive processes, (c) harness emotions to guide cognitive activities and solve problems, and (d) understand conceptual overlap between the use of this branch with the other emotional branches.

3. **Emotional understanding**—This represents the leader's ability to: (a) discriminate amongst the usage of emotions in the proper context, (b) comprehend emotional language, (c) analyze the cause and effect relationships between events and emotions, and (d) understand how basic emotions combine to form complex emotions.

4. **Emotional management**—This pertains to a leader's skills related to: (a) changing emotions based on the situation, (b) setting emotion regulation goals, (c) selecting emotion regulation strategies, and (d) implementing emotion regulation strategies. (Lievens & Chan, 2010, p. 5; Cote, 2014, pp. 6-10)

Trait Model

The *trait model* of emotional intelligence is defined as "an array of non-cognitive capabilities, competencies, and skills that influences one's ability to succeed in coping with environmental demands and pressures (Bar-on, 1997, p. 16).This is a broad definition of emotional intelligence that combines emotional perceptions with non-cognitive competency skills and personality traits. Emotional intelligence competencies are defined as "an ability to recognize, understand, and use emotional information about one's self or others that leads to or causes effective superior performance" (Boyatzis & Sala, 2004, p. 149). The two approaches to the trait model presented are: (1) Bar-on and (2) Bradberry and Greaves.

      Bar-on. According to Bar-on, the trait model is represented by five factors:

1. **Intrapersonal** (self-regard, emotional self-awareness, assertiveness, independence, and self-actualization)
2. **Interpersonal** (empathy, social responsibility, and interpersonal relationships)
3. **Stress Management** (stress tolerance and impulse control)
4. **Adaptability** (reality testing, flexibility, and problem solving)
5. **General Mood** (optimism and happiness). (Bar-on as cited in Lievens & Chan, 2010, p. 6)

      Bradberry and Greaves. As presented in their popular book, *Emotional Intelligence 2.0*, Bradberry and Greaves (2009) identify four factors of emotional intelligence for the trait model:

      Self-awareness. It is the ability to accurately perceive one's own emotions in-the-moment and understand one's tendencies in various situations. This includes understanding one's typical reactions to specific events, challenges, and people. A keen understanding of one's tendencies is important because it allows for quickly making sense of emotions. It emphasizes a straightforward and honest understanding of what makes one "kick-in" emotionally (p. 61).

Self-management. It is the ability to use one's awareness of emotions to stay flexible and direct behavior in a positive manner. It is dependent upon the effective use of one's self-awareness. This includes managing one's emotional reactions to situations and people. Self-management also pertains to one's ability to tolerate and understand uncertainty in the process of exploring emotions and options in a given situation. A person using self-management strives to become comfortable with what is being felt and can identify the most logical course of action (p. 97).

Social-awareness. It is the ability to accurately identify the emotions of other people and understand what is really going on within others. This includes perceiving what other people may be thinking and feeling even if one does not have the same perceptions. It emphasizes not getting caught up in one's own emotions at the expense of being unable to cognizantly realize what is likely taking place emotionally with others. Listening and observing are the most important elements of social-awareness (p. 135).

Relationship management. It is the ability to use one's awareness of self-emotions—and those of others—to holistically and successfully manage interactions. This includes effectively handling conflict and building positive bonds and *connectedness* with others. It relies on integrating the skills of self-awareness, self-management, and social-awareness to be successful. Self-awareness and self-management are linked to a personal competency component, while social-awareness and relationship management are linked to a social competency component (p. 177).

Mixed Model

The Goleman (1995, 1998, 2018b) model of emotional intelligence is often referred to as a mixed model because it incorporates content represented in both the ability and trait models. Goleman's model is composed of five factors and competencies for each factor:

1. **Self-Awareness—**(a) Self-confidence, (b) realistic self-assessment, (c) self-deprecating sense of humor, and (d) thirst for constructive criticism
2. **Self-Regulation—**(a) Trustworthiness, (b) integrity, and (c) comfort with ambiguity and change
3. **Motivation—**(a) Passion for work itself and new challenges, (b) unremitting energy to improve, and (c) optimism in the face of failure
4. **Empathy—**(a) Expertise in attracting and retaining talent, (b) ability to develop others, and (c) sensitivity to cross-cultural differences
5. **Social Skills—**(a) Effectiveness in leading change, (b) persuasiveness, (c) extensive networking, and (d) expertise in building and leading teams

Summary of Emotional Intelligence Models

It is apparent that much commonality exists between the ability, trait, and mixed models; although each has unique aspects. A leader is encouraged to keep an open mind about all three models and select a specific model or choose to utilize a combination of models. Leaders are encouraged to assess their emotional intelligence via one of the instruments presented later in

this article. Such selection may determine which model a leader chooses to pursue.

Characteristics of Leaders With
High Emotional Intelligence

Hacks (2017) furnishes insights about characteristics of leaders who have high emotional intelligence that provide excellent reference points for self-assessment. Hacks' seven characteristics are: (1) *embrace change*, understand it is necessary, and adapt to it; (2) *self-aware* in the context of knowing what they do well and what they still need to learn, do not let weaknesses hold them back, and know what environments are optimal for their work styles; (3) *empathetic* by being able to connect and relate effectively with others' emotions by what others are experiencing and help them get through difficult times with minimal "drama"; (4) *do not attempt to be perfectionists*, even though they are highly motivated to achieve goals, know when to "roll with the punches and learn from mistakes" (p. 3); (5) *practice balance* maintaining a healthy perspective between professional and personal life; (6) *curious*, ask questions, and explore possibilities without being judgmental of others; and (7) *feel good about life*, be gracious by appreciating others and what they enjoy, and not distracted by critics or toxic people who create negativity (pp. 1-4).

Negative Thoughts are Counterproductive
to Nourishing Emotional Intelligence

It is not uncommon for leaders to have thoughts and feelings that are critical, doubtful, and even fearful of matters at work. According to David and Congleton (2018, pp. 121-122), these types of negative thoughts become problematic when the leader becomes *hooked on them* through: (1) buying into the negative thoughts even to the extent that they treat such thoughts as facts (e.g., I am a failure most of the time), and (2) avoiding situations that evoke or feed these negative thoughts (e.g., I am not going to take on a challenge because I will not be successful). The error in dealing with negative thoughts in these manners is that they can become the focal points for the leader in reacting to new job challenges. This results in leaders "burning up" considerable cognitive, emotional energy that does not move them forward to more positive thinking and, most importantly, being more productive at work.

David and Congleton (2018, pp. 125-128) propose four practices for leaders to utilize in productively dealing with negative thoughts:

1. **Recognize your patterns**—leaders acknowledge they are *stuck* in negative thoughts before initiating change is possible.
2. **Label thoughts and emotions**—this labeling process prompts the leader to view the thoughts as transient sources of information that may, or may not, prove helpful.
3. **Accept them**—the leader responds to the ideas and emotions with an open and objective attitude, paying close attention to them and allowing an in-depth self-reflection. Often the result is the leader realizes the importance of what is at stake if these emotions are not dealt with effectively.
4. **Act on values**—based on the leader's *positive* beliefs, values, and self-knowledge; how can the leader best respond to improve leadership and job productivity?

Skills to Enrich Emotional Intelligence

Optimism and Happiness

"Positive emotions [through optimism] can help you connect more with others, broaden your attention, make your thinking more flexible, and increase your ability to see the big picture" (Walsh, 2018, p. 27).

There are two fundamental ways leaders can view adverse events they encounter: (1) imagine the worst and wallow in self-pity; or (2) view such events as temporary, surmountable, and challenges to overcome (Seligman, 2006). Pessimistic leaders believe that an adverse event will last a long time, make them helpless, and is their fault. Optimistic leaders view adverse events as only temporary setbacks that do not permeate all aspects of their lives and, in most situations, are not their fault. They are not fazed by defeats, but rather motivated to try harder to overcome their obstacles. Being a pessimist or optimist can be habit-forming and become ingrained in a leader's character (Seligman, 2006).Pessimistic leaders who have negative emotions are likely to give up more easily, become depressed when facing adverse events, and have others question their ability to lead. Optimism—with proper training—can be learned through a new set of cognitive skills if a leader commits to doing so.

Happiness flows from leaders engaging their strengths and virtues with others in an authentic manner which results in positive emotions. Leaders need to stress the use of their virtues in good and bad times (Seligman, 2002; 2018). As the old proverb goes, "actions flow from character." Virtues like confidence, hope, trust, honesty, and relationship building with others serve leaders well—especially when times are difficult.

Seligman's model for happiness is represented by PERMA—Positive emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment (Seligman, 2002). *Positive emotions* include the leader being optimistic about the here and now, as well as feeling positive emotions for past experiences and future activities. Leaders find that enjoyment through intellectual stimulation and creativity will aid in experiencing positive emotions. *Engagement* means that leaders participate in work activities and tasks that fully challenge them to learn, grow intellectually, and experience positive emotions about their experiences.

Relationships refer to leaders socially connecting with others through authentic and meaningful interactions. It is especially important to have positive emotions about relationships with others at work during difficult and challenging times. *Meaning* refers to leaders truly understanding the important and positive impact their work has on the work unit/organization, staff, and other stakeholders. Meaning also includes leaders feeling good about pursuing their career and enjoying experiences related to the job in the context of accomplishments and relationships with others. *Accomplishments* are represented by leaders having achievement goals and being ambitious, motivated, and utilizing positive emotions to accomplish these goals with others. Such goals should include activities which prompt leaders to excel in performance and reward their efforts by seeing the benefits flowing from accomplishments and the accompanying positive emotions to self and others.

Mindfulness

Mindfulness means increasing awareness by focusing more specifically on what is

happening in the world around us. It represents being acutely aware of what is taking place "in the moment," with self and others. This compares to mindlessness in which people's thinking is on autopilot and not consciously processing what is going on around them (Seligman, 2002).

The repetitiveness of some activities of a leader's job can result in sleepwalking through the activities without intentionally paying attention to one's thoughts or focusing on what others are communicating and, possibly, thinking (Watt, 2012). Mindfulness includes self-reflections on thoughts, actions, and motives as well as an awareness and interest in what is going on regarding individuals with whom a leader is interacting. It also stresses being very observant and fully into the moment regarding what others are saying and the leader's emotions (Grenville-Cleve, 2012). This concept is similar to the reflection-in-action concept in which a leader uses emotions to adjust his/her thinking and what is being said, moment-by-moment, based on the topic at hand and feedback from others in the conversation.

Meditation

Meditation has gone from being a fringe ritual to a mainstream health movement. It is a technique for leaders to reduce stress and anxiety and help them have a clear focus on their emotions. The key question regarding the effective use of meditation for many leaders is, "Can modern-day multitaskers really learn to quiet their minds?" (Dunn, 2017, p. 44). In a practical sense, meditation is the intentional practice of uncritically focusing one's attention on his/her emotions for one thing at a time (Davis, Eshelman, & McKay, 2008). Some experts view meditation as "brain-based therapy" (Laurinavicius, 2016, p. 7).

Meditation can be setting aside a specific amount of time, from as little as two minutes to an hour or more, to focus one's thoughts and awareness inward for exploring her/his emotions to help clear the mind, reduce stress, and become acutely conscious of concentrating on objectively reviewing a problem or situation. Meditation means leaders are clearing their minds of clutterful noise and tension to help the brain focus clearly on emotions for a specific problem or situation. It stresses controlling emotions by creating a sense of detachment so that coping mechanisms and thinking processes are enhanced in solving a problem ("Mindfulness Goes Mainstream," 2017).

Three major aspects of meditation are: (1) breath awareness, (2) open-focus mindfulness techniques, and (3) guided mindfulness meditation practices (Kristeller, 2007).During meditation, training the mind to hold attention on breathing helps make the process more effective. Open focus, or awareness, is often considered the core of meditation because it stresses clearing the mind and focusing on one event at a time. Guided awareness means engaging in a particular event in a non-judgmental manner.

Mindset

Dweck's (2016) perspectives on mindset are more frequently being used by leaders to assess their emotions and general disposition toward self-development and developing others. According to Dweck, a leader can choose to believe one's intelligence, personality, emotional thoughts, and personal attributes are basically unchangeable (fixed mindset) or believe that these factors can be nurtured and developed (growth mindset) to enhance on-the-job performance and satisfaction.

Leaders should not stereotype themselves because this can contribute to the fixed mindset. Rather, leaders should view their personal attributes and emotions as being pliable and

amenable to growth and development. This means that training and professional development are key elements of the outward mindset (Bartz, 2016).

Critical components of Dweck's outward mindset for leaders are: (a) having purpose drive work; (b) dealing head-on with deficiencies as opposed to hiding or attempting to compensate for them; (c) viewing setbacks or adverse situations as opportunities to learn and do better in the future; (d) viewing those with whom leaders work as collaborators for problem solving; (e) striving to continue to be lifelong learners to improve knowledge and skills; (f) being motivated, inspired, and proud of the accomplishments of the individuals with whom they work; (g) believing that all individuals can grow and improve through passion, perseverance, effort, and application of their experiences; (h) being a calculated risk-taker and welcoming new challenges as opportunities to improve and get better, as opposed to being fearful of risk; and (i) focusing on relationship building with the people in the work environment (Dweck, 2016; Bartz, 2016). Mindset means how leaders view self, staff, and other individuals with whom they interact at work. The Arbinger Institute (2016) distinguishes mindset as being *inward* or *outward*. Being self-centered and paying little attention and giving minimal importance to the wants and needs of others is indicative of the inward mindset. The outward mindset is representative of leaders viewing the efforts and work done by others as important to everyone. In essence, the outward mindset means that leaders believe they, and those they supervise, are in this together regarding establishing and working to achieve goals. The outward mindset welcomes creative and innovative ideas when establishing goals from those who will be involved in doing the work to achieve the goals. The philosophy of helping others to be their best is emulated by the outward mindset.

Measures to Assess Emotional Intelligence

Examples of instruments for leaders to assess their emotional intelligence are:

- Bar-on Emotional Quotient Inventory 2.0
- Emotional and Social Competence Inventory
- Genos Emotional Intelligence Inventory
- Group Emotional Competency Inventory
- Mayer and Salovey Emotional Intelligence Test
- Profile of Emotional Competence
- Schutte Self Report EI Test
- Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire
- Work Group Emotional Intelligence Profile
- Wong's Emotional Intelligence Scale
- Emotional Intelligence Appraisal
- Emotional Competency Inventory 2.0 (Consortium For Research on Emotional Intelligence in Organizations, 2017)

The four selected for review are: (1) Emotional Intelligence Appraisal, (2) Bar-on Emotional Quotient Inventory 2.0, (3) Mayer and Salovey Emotional Intelligence Test, and (4) Emotional Competency Inventory.

Emotional Intelligence Appraisal

The Emotional Intelligence Appraisal is frequently used partly because it comes at no cost by purchasing Bradberry and Greaves (2009) bestselling book, *Emotional Intelligence 2.0*, and it is easy to access. This instrument uses 28 items to measure emotional intelligence via: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management. Reports are furnished for each of these four factors and subsets of each. Administration time is approximately 10 minutes. The Emotional Intelligence Appraisal can be purchased directly from TalentSmart for $40. The reports describing results are more in-depth when purchased from TalentSmart than through the *Emotional Intelligence 2.0* book.

Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQ-i 2.0)

The Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQ-i 2.0) developed by Bar-on is composed of 133 items and requires about 30-45 minutes to take. Scores are reported for five factors: intrapersonal, interpersonal, stress management, adaptability, and general mood. Fifteen subscales are generated, in total, for the five factors. A strength of this instrument is that it has a 360 version that provides feedback from those with whom the leader works. This instrument is likely more reliable than the Emotional Intelligence Appraisal because it uses significantly more items (133 vs. 28). The Emotional Quotient Inventory 2.0 is given through trained personnel (Bharwaney, Bar-on, & MacKinley, 2011).

Mayer Salovey Emotional Intelligence Test

The Mayer Salovey Emotional Intelligence Test consists of 141 items and requires about 45 minutes to complete. Reports provided include results for four branches: perceiving emotions, facilitating thoughts, understanding emotions, and managing emotions; and collectively eight task scores associated with these branches. The Mayer Salovey Emotional Intelligence Test provides area scores for *experimental* (perception and facilitation) and *strategic* (understanding and managing emotions. Interestingly, a portion of the items is measured by the use of faces and picture tasks. The large number of items (141) utilized enhances the likelihood of credible reliability. The cost is approximately $70.00 per test packet and is administered though trained personnel. More costs are associated with accompanying manuals and materials for administration (Mallery, 2008).

Emotional Competency Inventory 2.0

Emotional Competency Inventory 2.0, developed by Goleman and Boyatzis, is composed of 72 items that measure four clusters: self-awareness, self-management, social-awareness, and relationship management. Results are also furnished for 18 competencies spread out over the four clusters. The Emotional Competency Inventory 2.0 is designed for use as a 360 test to provide feedback from various groups with whom a leader interacts, as well as a self-assessment. It is administered by trained personnel. The reliability of the instrument is credible, although some subscores for 18 competencies may be marginal (Wolff, 2005).

Apart from the formalized assessments discussed here, leaders should establish goals for

the effective application of emotional intelligence and gain satisfaction from the successful achievement of these goals. For example, if a leader knows that he/she frequently reacts tersely in a non-productive manner in meetings, a goal would be to significantly minimize this behavior. The terse responses, by the leader's admission, often stifle needed input from staff. Decreased staff input reduces the quantity and quality of ideas for solving a problem. If this goal is achieved, the leader should relish the satisfaction, continue the behavior that achieves the positive results, and set another emotional intelligence goal.

Leaders Developing Their Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence is not a fixed quantity; it can be learned and improved at any age (Goleman, 2018a). While a leader does develop emotional intelligence skills through work and other life experiences, this is usually not enough to perform at a competent level. Goleman (2018a) advocates that leaders can improve their emotional intelligence if they have the information, guidance, support, and desire to do so. Feedback based on a candid assessment of the leaders' strengths and limitations from people who know them well, and whose opinions they trust, is crucial to emotional intelligence development (p. 172). Boyatzis (2018), opines that in the context of leaders enhancing their emotional intelligence skills that "the essential issue isn't a *lack of ability* to change; it is the *lack of motivation* to change" (p. 172).

Concluding Thoughts

Goleman (1998) cautions leaders that emotional intelligence *does not* mean: (1) merely "being nice" all of the time and even sometimes requires "bluntly confronting someone with an uncomfortable but consequential truth they've been avoiding;' or (2) "giving free rein to feelings—letting it all hang out" (pp. 6-7). Rather, it means managing feelings so that they are expressed appropriately and effectively, enabling people to work together smoothly toward their common goal (pp. 6-7); and (3) our level of emotional intelligence is not fixed genetically, nor does it develop only in early childhood. Emotional intelligence is largely earned and continues to develop through life, and one's competencies in it can keep growing (p. 7). In a practical sense, emotional intelligence is a leader's skills at: (1) identifying, controlling, and expressing one's emotions; and (2) understanding, interpreting, and responding to the emotions of others. The effectiveness for both of these skill sets is best measured *in the context* of a situation in which a leader is attempting to attain pre-determined results.

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