

Emotional intelligence: the key to effective performance

... and to staying ahead of the pack at times of organizational change

Employees are spending an increasing amount of time at work. If this time is to be used productively, they need to feel that the workplace is somewhere they want to be.

Job candidates are increasingly looking for a job that is a meaningful extension of themselves, as opposed to simply a way to make money. Motivating and developing people in modern, complex organizations therefore requires a management approach that recognizes how organizational decisions affect people.

All managers have to make decisions – and often these decisions are tough. The best managers make decisions based on a combination of self-management and relationship skills and an awareness of how their behavior affects others in the organization. Such managers are deemed to possess emotional intelligence. Studies suggest that emotional intelligence plays a greater role than “traditional” intelligence in determining leaders’ and organizations’ success.

What is emotional intelligence?

There have been numerous definitions of what constitutes emotional intelligence. All reference the thoughts and feelings behind people’s actions, which guide their response patterns in different situations. It therefore follows that people who are emotionally competent are able to recognize these different emotional patterns in themselves and others, and to direct them in appropriate ways.

Traditionally, the term “emotional intelligence” encompasses:

- Self-awareness – recognizing and understanding our own thoughts and feelings as they occur.
- Self-regulation – managing our responses appropriately.
- Social awareness – recognizing the thoughts and feelings of others, which includes having empathy at the individual, group and organizational levels.
- Social skills – inducing effective and desirable responses in others.

Emotionally intelligent managers, therefore, are likely to be able to manage both themselves and others more effectively.

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According to Daniel Goleman, a pioneer of emotional-intelligence research, effective leaders all have a high degree of emotional intelligence. Other researchers have concluded that people who manage their own feelings well, and deal effectively with others, are more likely to live contented lives.

In organizations, the inclusion of emotional intelligence in training programs has helped employees to co-operate better and be more motivated, thereby increasing productivity and profits. For example, one study concluded that experienced partners in a multinational consulting firm, who had above-average scores on emotional intelligence factors, delivered \$1.2 million more profit from their accounts than other partners. Another study of employees' competency levels in more than 200 companies worldwide suggested that one-third of this difference was because of technical skill and cognitive ability, while two-thirds resulted from emotional competence.

Why is emotional intelligence important?

There is growing evidence of a link between managing one's own emotions and managing those of other people.

Self-awareness is the most fundamental element in developing emotional intelligence. It is critical to understanding how and why people react emotionally to different stimuli in the workplace. By building self-awareness, people can cope better with change.

Managers must be able to connect with other people in the organization, not only on an intellectual platform but also on an emotional basis. Strong emotional reactions to business decisions and processes can hinder performance. Effective leaders are expected to modify these reactions, to coach employees to a better level of self-awareness and, hence, performance.

The impact of organizational culture on individual behavior has long been acknowledged. However, emotional-intelligence research is only now helping to explain the link between changing cultural norms and how people feel about what is required of them in their jobs. This is expressed through the "psychological contract", which involves the way people adapt to organizational change. An emotionally intelligent manager is able to address many of the strong feelings that people express during periods of major organizational change in a timely and appropriate manner.

It is important for organizations to encourage constructive self-expression in order to enhance communication between staff and management, within teams and between teams. Organizations that discourage self-expression not only restrict communication but also limit the potential for receiving innovative ideas and creative ways of approaching challenges from all levels of management and staff. Emotionally intelligent managers can help to ensure that their employees have effective self-expression.

Flexibility is another important prerequisite of high-performing individuals, teams and organizations. It also plays an important role in managerial competencies such as decision-making, conflict resolution and negotiation. Emotionally intelligent leaders show great flexibility themselves, and encourage it in others.

Can emotional intelligence be learned?

There are limits to how much people can improve their IQ. However, studies suggest that people can quite effectively increase their emotional intelligence.

Neurological research suggests that people develop their emotional intelligence in a sequential manner. They begin by developing their self-awareness through recognizing their own thoughts

and feelings towards people and situations. Once they build this self-understanding, they move towards understanding individuals, groups and the subtleties at play in the organization, and use this information to induce effective and desirable responses in others.

Emotional-intelligence development workshops include many practical activities designed specifically to help managers to understand the thoughts and feelings behind their actions and those of others, and help managers to direct their responses in appropriate ways. As a starting point, the workshops use a comprehensive 360-degree feedback process with input from managers, peers, direct reports, customers, and even family and friends. Participants work closely with a business coach to explore personal goals and to work through various job-simulation exercises, including role play and group activities, to build their self awareness and gain feedback on the impact of their style of behavior. Other techniques include analyzing self-talk and beliefs and using mental-practice techniques to increase effectiveness through visualizing development goals.

The result of the workshops is a personalized development plan that identifies the key areas of emotional intelligence for development. Learning can then be integrated into the workplace through follow-up coaching sessions.

Comment

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“ Emotional intelligence helps people to:

- be more aware of their interpersonal style;
- recognize and manage the impact of emotions on their thoughts and behavior;
- develop their ability to judge social dynamics in the workplace; and
- understand how well they manage relationships and how to improve. ”