

Emotional Intelligence: The Leadership Challenge

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Emotional Intelligence (EI) refers to a set of verbal and nonverbal abilities that allows all individuals, especially leaders, to use their emotions to guide thinking and action. It refers to the ability to recognize the meanings of emotions and their relationships, and to reason and problem-solve on the basis of them (Daus & Ashkanasy, 2003).

Emotional intelligence has been further defined as the ability to accurately recognize different emotions; use emotion to facilitate thought processes; understand emotions, emotional language, and the message conveyed by emotions; as well as, the ability to regulate emotion in oneself and others to meet specific goals (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2000; see Figure 1).

Emotions shape our lives and influence our decision-making. In fact, negative emotions, such as anger and fear, can hinder performance (Clemons, 2008). According to Salovey and Caruso (2004), emotions are not random events, they have underlying causes. Oftentimes, leaders try to ignore emotions, but it is quite impossible to do so given that they pervade our day-to-day lives. Emotions contain information that follows logical patterns. It informs us of various events and circumstances. It is therefore critical for leaders to judiciously use emotions as a guide for negotiation, reasoning, problem solving, and the display of other behaviors. Emotions serve as signals that relay importance in our environment. Universal emotions —happiness, sadness, fear, anger, etc.— exist across different cultures but there are also culture-specific emotions that help to relay messages that are contextual in nature. Leaders rely on the interaction of team members/direct reports in order to meet set goals. These interactions involve and evoke emotions by nature (Carmeli & Josman, 2006). The expression of such emotions is the result of a combination of innate factors and cultural display rules (Matsumoto & Juang, 2004). The ability to decipher emotions and deal with emotions is particularly important for leaders working in cross-cultural contexts. Hence, it is important to accurately identify,

understand, and manage emotions in ourselves and others to be able to communicate effectively in diverse contexts.

Being “emotionally intelligent” does not simply mean “being nice.” In fact, an emotionally intelligent individual is consciously and carefully processing and using emotional information and emotional energy in order to get tasks done (Trejo & Reid, 2011). As seen in the aforementioned model, emotional intelligence entails four skills. Emotion recognition requires that individuals are able to make sense of and evaluate emotional information, as well as, use others’ display of emotions as guides for their own behavior. Thus, the knowledge of emotional cues can in turn heighten people’s awareness about nonverbal communication (Lopes, Salovey, & Stauss, 2005) in a new environment, thereby, deeming them more effective in such contexts. Employees who accurately perceive emotions are better equipped to understand colleagues’ expressions and behaviors (Carmeli & Josman, 2006). For example, a person who ranks high in the ability to perceive emotions would be able to easily recognize when a colleague is upset and interpret exactly what emotion that colleague is feeling.

The second skill, facilitation of thought, entails the use of emotions as a means of communication, reasoning, and attention, among other skills (Lopes et al., 2005). It involves using emotions to aid in deductive reasoning, problem solving, creativity, and communication (Lopes et al., 2005). This ability serves to guide thinking and decision making whereby individuals high in this ability are better capable of assessing the consequences of their emotional reactions (Lopes et al., 2005). For instance, a leader may choose to forgo making an important decision about his/her future when angry, knowing that his/her decision may involve unreasonable degrees of risk when in that state of mind.

The ability to understand emotions involves the recognition of the relationships and the transitions among emotions in addition to the link between emotions and outcomes (MacCann & Roberts, 2008). For instance, sadness may transition into anger if a person chooses not to regulate that emotion. Understanding emotions reflects the capacity to analyze emotions (Brackett, Rivers, Shiffman, Lerner, & Salovey, 2006) and involves an individual's ability to reason with emotions (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2008). For example, a message of anger may indicate a desire to attack or harm others or may mean that the individual feels unfairly treated. This in turn may be associated with a specific set of possible actions such as an attack or retribution. Understanding emotional messages and the actions associated with them is an important aspect of this emotional ability (Mayer et al., 2000). Furthermore, understanding emotions involves the ability to comprehend basic emotions and to fully grasp how emotions can develop into complex ones. Consider an angry colleague; a message of anger may mean that the person feels unfairly treated. Understanding the message being conveyed by that emotion can lead another person to anticipate specific actions that may follow suit as a result, such as the colleague's possible desire to attack or harm others.

Finally, emotion management, otherwise called emotion regulation, involves the person's capacity to experience a range of emotions (Brackett et al., 2006) while being able to regulate the outcomes of such emotion in order to meet personal and social goals. For example, a colleague who possesses emotion management skills would be easily able to remedy a negative mood that is harming his/her performance. This person may also be able to effectively calm an angry team member.

An emotionally intelligent leader engages people through the above mentioned skills, as well as, listening and communicating, influencing the decision making process, and building

consensus. This is integral to relationship building given the interdependency on allies and locals for mission success. Being able to put people at ease prevents “knee-jerk” responses such as quick anger, thereby, allowing others to feel more comfortable to provide feedback and perform effectively.

EI contributes to a leader’s self-awareness as it enables him/her to assess their strengths and weaknesses. It equips them with the ability to withstand adverse events and stressful situations without falling apart. No matter the intellectual ability, leaders who do not possess emotional intelligence are setting themselves up for derailment. According to Ruderman, Hannum, Leslie, and Steed (2001):

Although the findings are not sufficient to state conclusively that leaders with high levels of emotional intelligence are better leaders, they do show that there are clear and basic connections between the higher ranges of emotional intelligence and the possession of skills and abilities associated with leadership excellence. Knowing and understanding these connections can give managers and executives additional ammunition in their efforts to enhance leadership performance. (p. 4)

Many competencies of effective leadership are emotion-focused. “We believe that the processes by which managers or leaders create a shared vision, motivate others, and encourage workers are likely based on the intelligent use of emotion and the integration of feelings with thinking” (Caruso & Salovey, 2004, p. 15). The table below helps to depict that integration of emotional intelligence in achieving set goals.

Emotional awareness and cultural awareness provide the framework for communication and competence in a diverse society. When people are more self-aware, they are better able to

predict the effects of their behavior on others. Hence, they are able to use their cultural “map” to modify their behaviors to meet the expectations of the new society (Zakaria, 2000).

The concept of emotional abilities may have highly significant applications in cross-cultural contexts, as they may contribute to the development of cross-cultural competence. Cross-cultural skills are highly generalizable to other cultures and they enable those working in other cultures to interact effectively across many domains (Abbe, 2008). Emotion management may help individuals follow the emotional display rules of other cultures, thereby, preventing negative interactions. The requisite cross-cultural skills that are needed to succeed abroad may be developed by means of effectively regulating emotions which leads to successful management of social interactions (Lopes et al., 2005). Emotion management is a proximal antecedent of cross-cultural competence in that an individual who is able to regulate his/her emotions is also more likely to use that ability to master cross-cultural knowledge, skills, and motivation (Reid, 2010). Furthermore, an individual’s ability to understand emotions significantly increases that person’s ability to manage such emotions. This in turn has a positive effect on cross-cultural competence, whereby, an individual who is able to effectively manage emotions is also more likely to display the cross-cultural competencies that are required to succeed in cross-cultural environments.

Cross-cultural and emotional skills training can be used as means for facilitating and improving cross-cultural competence for individuals, especially leaders, working abroad. These skills are increasingly important as they serve to provide a distinct advantage through means of a culturally appropriate, adaptable, and acceptable mode of management; an aid to improving coping mechanisms associated with culture shock and unexpected events; a means for reducing

the uncertainty of interaction with host nationals; and a means of enhancing the individual's coping abilities by reducing stress and disorientation (Zakaria, 2000).

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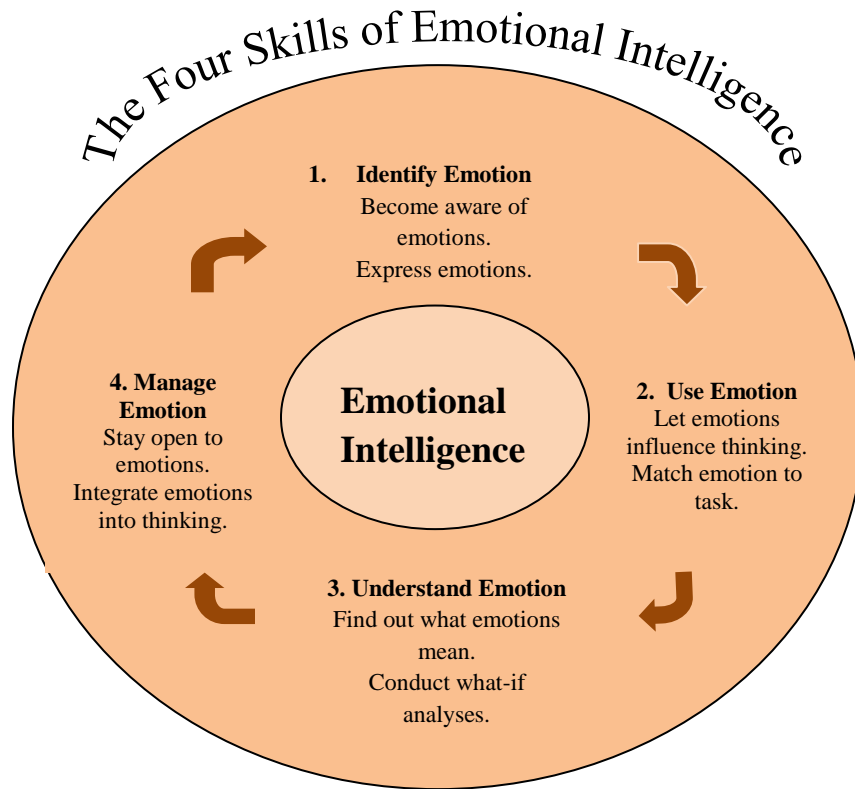


Figure 1. Emotional Intelligence (Adapted from Caruso & Salovey, 2004).

Table 1

An Emotional Blueprint

| Step | Goal | Action |
|----------------------------|--|--|
| <i>Identify Emotions</i> | Get complete and accurate data. | Listen, ask questions, and paraphrase to ensure you understand how your team feels. |
| <i>Use Emotions</i> | Have feelings help guide your thinking. | Determine how these feelings influence your thinking and that of the team. |
| <i>Understand Emotions</i> | Evaluate possible emotional scenarios. | Examine the causes of these feelings and what may happen next. |
| <i>Manage Emotions</i> | Determine underlying, root cause and take action to solve the problem. | Include the rational, logical information available with the emotional data you just gathered to make an optimal decision. |