

Faculty Research in Practice

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE: THE NEW SCIENCES OF INTERPERSONAL INTELLIGENCE

by

James Thomas Kunnanatt

Associate Professor of Strategic Management, United Arab Emirates University

Introduction

Studies of Harvard graduates and executives at leading global corporations including Pepsi, IBM and Volvo show that two-thirds of the competencies deemed essential to success are emotional competencies. Research further shows that the contribution of emotional intelligence to effective performance at work is as high as 66% for all jobs and 85% for leadership jobs (Goleman, 1995). H R researchers today see traditional intelligence, or IQ, as a necessary factor but not a sufficient condition for human performance in organizations (Sternberg, 1996). No wonder, in business and industry emotional intelligence is growing into a multimillion-dollar training enterprise.

What is emotional intelligence or EI? How is it measured? What brain processes are involved in it? Are there training processes to raise the level of emotional intelligence? Despite the increasing popularity of the concept, these questions are frequently asked by managerial communities and populations across the world. The rest of this article provides a clue to those interested in understanding this fast growing favorite of the corporate world.

The EI Personality – A Profile Description

Research in organizational behavior shows that managers, supervisors and leaders who excel in their organizations are emotionally intelligent personalities who display unique emotional competencies in dealing with themselves and with the people around them. These emotionally intelligent executives often show high "emotional literacy" in sensing, tracing and reading, correctly and in real time, the rational-emotional processes going on within their mind. They are better at handling their own emotions and are more effective at soothing themselves when upset. Most importantly, they get upset less often. They manage their impulsive feelings and disturbing emotions well and stay composed, positive, and unflappable even during trying moments. Moreover, they show remarkable tact in adapting to fluid circumstances (Lusch & Serpkenci,

1990; Abraham, 2004). Because of this capacity for "self-regulation", such people are also more relaxed biologically, with lower levels of stress hormones and other physiological indicators of emotional arousal (Kiechel, 1987; Tischler *et.al.*, 2002). Even in the midst of most complex social transactions, their superiors, colleagues, and subordinates experience them as emotionally comfortable companions and rate them as having fewer behavioral problems such as rudeness or aggressiveness (Abraham, 1999).

Socially the EI personalities produce win-win relationships, appear more "attractive" to their peers and associates and are seen by others as more interpersonally skilled and influential (Walter, 1996). While in leadership roles or when executing responsibilities, they display remarkable empathy in their feelings and approach toward people and make others feel understood, supported, trusted, remembered, involved, listened to, helped, empowered and rewarded. When in the midst of transactions, they can see things from the point of view of the other persons.

The net impact of the EI people on their organizations is that they act as powerful catalytic agents who transform both the character and performance of the organizations. Realization of this new truth has resulted in many organizations, including the famous and the rich, the big and the small, aggressively realigning their HR strategies in favor of emotional intelligence over the hitherto valued traditional intelligence or IQ, though not as replacement to the latter but as a supplement to it.

Emotional Intelligence - The Building Blocks

The founding authors and researchers define emotional intelligence as *the sum total of the mind capabilities that enable a person in understanding one's own and others' emotions correctly, in real time, and in managing these emotions intelligently so as to produce personally and socially desirable transactional outcomes*. Translated into practical terms, emotionally intelligent people are able to behave in rationally and emotionally balanced ways because they are in possession of certain attributes called EI competencies. EI theory classifies these competencies into 1) personal competence in understanding and managing one's "own self" and 2) social competence in knowing and dealing with the "self of others". Academic researchers have designed a plethora of measuring instruments aimed to help people gain insight into their EI competencies. The most common measuring instruments include Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test - MSCEIT (Mayer et al., 2002), Emotional Competence Inventory –ECI (Boyatzis et al., 2000), and Bar-On's EQ-I (Bar-On, 1997; Bar-On et al., 2005).

Brain Theory –The Biological Secret of Emotional Intelligence

Careful and intelligent use of emotion and reason is an art that calls for proper understanding of the operations of the human brain. Brain researchers suggest that there exists an ongoing relationship, a relationship of competitive inter-dominance, between the rational and emotional domains of the brain (Bear et al., 1996; Thompson, 1988; Edelman, 1987; Isaacson, 1982). In this inter-relationship, due to the genetic programming of human biological equipment and due to the type of conditioning received during socialization, in most individuals the emotion-regulating part of the brain (i.e. the amygdala along with other limbic structures) often tend to

dominate over the rational brain (neocortex) and controls or even suppresses the thought processes and actions of humans.

When emergencies or critical moments call for intelligent and careful action by the rational mind, the emotion-biased amygdala suppresses the rational processes of the neocortex thereby depriving the individual of his/her reasoning power to cognitively process and test the reality of the situation. Moreover, in many situations, the amygdala interprets and even exaggerates the events as hostile and dangerous and advises the bodily equipment of the organism to get ready for a fight or flight situation. In such cases, obeying commands from the amygdala, the person perceives the situation as threatening and starts engaging in defensive, emotionalized behavior that takes irrational dimensions, which, in turn, could harm him/her as well as the environment (Davidson et al., 2000; Holland, & Gallagher, 1990). The person can be depicted as operating in the emotionally less intelligent mode. At this point, he/she becomes emotionally excited and the body shows symptoms of palpitations, increased blood pressure, and other biological reactions. All these happen within the flicker of a moment and can be summarized as the "emotional game" played by the amygdala. In the daily life of most people, they experience many such series of emotional games.

The true role of emotional intelligence in managing a person's interactions lies here. In emotionally intelligent people, the mind is trained and tuned to detect this emotional game played by the amygdala and the capacities of the mind are so developed that the person exercises "controlled emotional involvement" during the process of dealing or negotiating with others or working through a critical problem in life. This ability of the EI person to pull back and recognize "what is happening inside the mind" is called 'meta-regulation of mood' (Mayer & Salovey, 1997; Mayer et al., 1997a). In the mature form of EI, the person is even able to channel his/her emotions constructively and use them as "motivational support" for the actions of the rational mind (George & Brief, 1996; Tischler et al., 2002).

Raising Emotional Intelligence –The Training Process

Aimed at helping people restructure their EI competencies, EI practitioners have developed a variety of EI development programs. In these programs the participants pass through a typical series of progressive stages such as emotional mapping, emotional diagnosis, emotional authentication, emotional navigation, empathy building, building social influence, etc. Well planned and carefully drafted emotional intelligence training programs that comprise all these stages can change both the inner minds and outside relationships of people and cultivate in them a host of personally and socially valuable virtues, attributes and assets. Specifically, these build and incorporate into the minds of people better attitudes, clearer perceptions, and productive social relationships. In most cases, EI development programs activate within people a burning spirit for pursuing noble goals, missions, and accomplishments in life that lead to definable progress in their own selves and in the organizations or communities where they work and live.

References

- Abraham, R. (1999). *Emotional intelligence in organizations: a conceptualization*", *Genetic, Social, and General Psychology Monographs*, 125, 2, 209-24
- Abraham, R. (2004). Emotional competence as antecedent to performance: A contingency framework. *Genetic Social and General Psychology Monographs*, 130(2), 117-145
- Bar-On, R. (1997). The Emotional Intelligence Inventory (EQ-I): Technical manual. Toronto, Canada: Multi-Health Systems, Inc.
- Bar-On, R., Handley, R. & Fund, S. (2005). The impact of emotional intelligence on performance. In Druskat, V., Sala, F. & Mount, G. (Eds.) *Linking emotional intelligence and performance at work: Current research evidence*. Mahwah, NJ, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates
- Bear M.F., Conners, B.W., & Paradiso M.A. (1996). *Neuroscience: Exploring the Brain*, First Edition, New York: Williams & Wilkins
- Boyatzis, R. E., Goleman, D., & Rhee, K. S. (2000). Clustering competence in emotional intelligence: Insights from the Emotional Competence Inventory. In R. Bar-On & J. D. A. Parker (Eds.), *The handbook of Emotional Intelligence: Theory, development, assessment, and application at home, school, and in the workplace*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass
- Davidson, R.J., Jackson, D.C., & Kalin, N.H. (2000). Emotion, plasticity, context and regulation: perspectives from affective neuroscience. *Psychological Bulletin*, 126, 890-909
- Edelman, G. (1987). *Neural Darwinism: The Theory of Neuronal Group Selection*, New York: Basic Books
- George, J. M., & Brief, A. P. (1996). Motivational agendas in the workplace: The effects of feelings on focus of attention and work motivation. In: B.M. Staw and L.L. Cummings (Eds.), *Research in organizational behavior*, Vol.18. Greenwich, CT: JAI Press, 75-109
- Goleman, D. (1995). *Emotional intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ*, New York: Bantam Books
- Holland, P.C. & Gallagher, M. (1990). Amygdala circuitry in attentional and representational processes. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 3, 65-73
- Isaacson, R. (1982). *The Limbic System*, New York, NY: Plenum Press
- Keichel, Walter, III. (1987). Attack of the Obsessive Managers, *Fortune*, February 16, 1987, 127-28
- Lusch, R.F., & Serpkenci, R. R. (1990). Personal differences, job tension, job outcomes, and store performance: A study of retail managers. *Journal of marketing*, 54(1), 85-1
- Mayer, J.D., & Salovey, P. (1997). What is emotional intelligence: Implications for educators. In: P. Salovey and D. Sluyter (Eds), *Emotional development, emotional literacy, and emotional intelligence*. New York: Basic Books, 1997, pp. 3-31
- Mayer, J.D., Salovey, P. & Caruso, D.R. (1997a). *Multifactor Emotional Intelligence Scale*. New Caanan, CT: Unpublished manuscript
- Mayer, J. D., Salovey, P., & Caruso, D. R. (2002). Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT) User's Manual. Toronto, Canada: MHS Publishers
- Sternberg, R. (1996). *Successful Intelligence*, New York: Simon & Schuster
- Thompson, J.G. (1988). *The Psychobiology of Emotions*, New York, NY: Plenum Press
- Tischler, L., Biberman, J., & McKeage, R. (2002). Linking emotional intelligence, spirituality and workplace performance: Definitions, models and ideas for research. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 17(3), 203-218

Walter V. Clarke Associates (1996). *Activity Vector Analysis: Some Applications to the Concept of Emotional Intelligence*, Pittsburgh, PA: Walter V. Clarke Associates