

Maximize Potential – Use Emotional Intelligence - Dr Anjana Sen

Abstract

A study by The Center for Creative Leadership in 1994 indicated that reasons behind 75% of derailed careers were lack of emotional competency of various types. Qualified and talented people cannot reach the level of success they are capable of because they lack emotional regulation, tolerance, ego balance and understanding. Unable to strike up and maintain meaningful relationships due to lack of empathy, they are isolated, shunned and passed over as their talents remain untapped and lost to the world. In order to maximize the realization of individual and team potential it is essential to pay heed to Emotional Competence as essential for survival, contributing significantly to progress and for surging ahead. This article discusses Daniel Goleman’s Emotional Competency Framework, Predictors of Success, and building understanding and resilience against stress. The use of Emotional Intelligence cannot be taught, but it can be learned. This learning must be preceded by awareness and acknowledgement of the contribution of Emotional Competencies to quality of both personal and professional life. Awareness will drive the reader to use and develop emotional competencies to prevent stress and maximize self-actualization, health and happiness. The acknowledgement and use of Emotional Intelligence leads to personal development, enhancement of teamwork, heightened creativity, loyalty and harmony and is thus beneficial to the individual as well as to the organization.

Key words – Emotional Intelligence, Emotional Competence, Regulation, Balance, Ego, Empathy, Stress, Resilience, Potential, Maximize.

Introduction

Every individual has a deep intuitive knowledge of his or her potential. Often this intuitive signal has not been addressed by the conscious brain, hence remains non-specific and inexpressible as an ‘*I just know*’ feeling. Perhaps a teacher or mentor can spot potential before the person is himself aware of it. The sensation of one’s own greatness is thus vague but undeniable. If life helps us to fulfill these self-expectations, we taste contentment, happiness and even surprise as we surpass these deep expectations.

If we did things we were capable of, we would astound ourselves – Thomas Edison.

But it turns out quite the other way for many as Abraham Maslow, the father of Modern Management Psychology observed

‘The unhappiness, unease and unrest in the world is because people are living far below their capacity’ -- Abraham Maslow

Factors that stand in the way of realization of potential are many. External and situational factors can be rationalized and the burden of sadness shifts. Fortitude can help us accept wars, recession, and poverty and family constraints as things beyond our circle of personal influence. But there is no respite from the burden of unhappiness if the factor that got in the way of individual success lies within the person and he has no one to blame but himself. Simmering anger against one’s own inadequacies and failure leads to chronically low self esteem, cynicism and negativity, which adds to the afflictions of society. (Ref VI)

What stands between potential and actualization?

Studies show that 75% of careers are derailed for reasons related to emotional competencies, inability to handle interpersonal problems; unsatisfactory team leadership during times of difficulty or conflict; inability to adapt to change or elicit trust (Ref 2). Since emotional factors cause a variety of diseases (Ref V), indirectly the figure of 75% concluded by this study could be pushed up higher by including diseases linked with poorly managed emotions. The significance of this statistic is at risk of getting brushed off like everything related to emotional matters. We take emotions for granted and tend to either ignore or repress them.

Nature’s Wisdom – Survival Kit

Humans are equipped with multiple intelligences but out of all (Linguistic, Numerical, Analytical, Spatial, Kinesthetic, Musical and Emotional) nature has bequeathed the new-born with only emotional intelligence somewhat developed and active at birth. New-born

babies can attune to the moods of their care-givers. Since we are hard-wired to respond with affection to objects with large heads and large eyes (that accounts for the thriving soft-toy industry) babies have the ‘cuteness’ advantage. But if they did not respond and attune to care-givers effectively they would run the risk of being neglected like a dusty teddy bear on the shelf. To ensure that it receives the level of care that a helpless human infant just cannot survive or thrive without, the default version baby comes naturally pre-loaded as a bundle of joy, exuding positive energy and contentedness. It can express feel-good and feel-bad with clarity albeit non-verbally as well as receive, process and store signals from others.

Babies have instinctive empathy and compassion, demonstrated by bawling that occurs instantly in response to the sound or sight of another baby crying. Older babies (14 months on) make proactive efforts to help other distressed babies and adults (Ref 4). No doubt these qualities enable the infant to climb into hearts of adults who will then rush to fulfill their every requirement. The power wielded by the infant is the power of emotional intelligence, deemed by nature to be the only intelligence that is essential for survival at that stage. As adults we ignore and take EI for granted, but this we do at our own risk as proven by the career derailment study cited above. Emotional Intelligence continues to be the single most essential survival kit in personal and professional life. Without these life-skills we may be able to earn a livelihood but would be unable to live a fulfilling life.

Emotional Competency Framework

Emotional Competencies have been categorized in the framework below by Daniel Goleman: Competency research in over 200 companies and organizations worldwide shows that technical skill and cognitive ability accounts for 1/3 of factors responsible for propelling people and companies towards success, while 2/3 is due to emotional competence (Goleman, 1998 Ref 5). The Goleman framework includes in the first column traits and skills that make us socially acceptable and employable. In the second column are listed abilities that make us socially and professionally effective and contribute to harmonious collaboration that can lead to progress and growth. Awareness

about the value of these skills draws attention to individual strengths and weaknesses in this realm so these can be strengthened and sharpened as tools that enable us to realize and achieve what we are capable of.

Table 1

EMOTIONAL COMPETENCIES FRAMEWORK <i>(Working with Emotional Intelligence, Daniel Goleman 1998)</i>	SELF	OTHERS
RECOGNITION	SELF AWARENESS Emotional Self-Awareness Accurate Self-Assessment Self-Confidence	SOCIAL AWARENESS Empathy Service Orientation Organizational Awareness
REGULATION	SELF MANAGEMENT Self-Control Self-Presentation Trustworthiness Adaptability Achievement Drive Optimism Initiative	RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT Influence Communication Negotiation Persuasion Conflict Management Inspirational Leadership Change Catalyst Building Bonds Teamwork & Collaboration

Predictors of Success

Academic brilliance and I/Q are not reliable predictors of success. Technical Competence and skill contribute to but do not predict success. *IQ may be related to as little as 4% of real world success – (R.J. Sternberg Ref 9)* Instead abilities like ‘Getting Along with Others’ and ‘Delaying Gratification’ and traits like ‘Optimism’, ‘Accurate Self-

assessment' and 'Adaptability' are more accurate in identifying future stars. Technical Brilliance gets you the job but your emotional competencies pull you up the hierarchy.

Sheer Brilliance

The stereotype of the mad genius is a romantic one. Emotionally unstable creative geniuses need to be backed up with mentors who recognize their talent and gently challenge them onto a path of constructiveness. They also need effective client interface in the form of marketing and production teams to shield the genius from the stress of industry and competition.

Passion and Composure

Passion is what drives a star performer towards excellence, but unbridled passion can send him hurtling over the edge if not balanced with constructive intent and the composure to receive and digest bytes from reality. Composure is possible in the presence of passion only in those who exercise emotional *intelligence*. Far from being an oxymoron, emotional intelligence is a vital function of the human brain. Animals have the ability to experience and express emotion and empathy; humans are animals that can choose a response option after processing the stimulus in the realm of conscious analytical thought.

In the ruthless race to get ahead, competition is cracked with the sharp edge of Creativity and Innovation. As a function of the brain, out-of-the-box thinking is a luxury available to emotionally stable persons who are passionate enough to recruit the workings of the whole brain (Right and Left hemispheres and the Emotional and Intuitive Mid-Brain) and to deploy full attention. Ideas bubble up in an excited and stimulated brain, but calmness is required for effective execution. Attentiveness, focus, purposefulness are available only to those who can regulate emotion.

Some who achieve success early get diverted from the path to realization of their own full potential by the pressure of competitiveness. In competing they chase other people's

goals and compare their strengths against other people's weakness. Some may even compare their weaknesses against another's strength. This skews the self-image leading to unrealistic target setting with consequent failure or underperformance in the light of the real caliber (Ref 1).

Early achievers may get swayed by the lure of popularity, which soon replaces their task-oriented goals. Celebrity status and public gaze can get stressful for persons who do not have secure balanced ego. They tend towards arrogance or pretense and ruin relationship support that could help maintain health and balance. These 'stars' succumb to psychological pressure and resort to substance abuse and addiction. Stress has felled many potential achievers by the wayside, leaving only those with better coping skills, ego balance and resilience as finalists in the Race of Reality.

To comprehensively maximize talent and human potential, it is imperative that we pay heed to Emotional Recognition and Regulation, Ego Balance, Empathy Enhancement and Stress Resilience to protect the genius hiding within each individual and allow it to blossom and bear fruit. Education systems till date have fallen miserably short in providing firmness and stability to the emotional platform upon which the intellect resides and tries to find its feet. On the contrary, the system as we know it, contributes to stress and hysteria giving the intellect a trough of emotional molasses to use as a launch pad.

Education is an admirable thing, but it is well to remember from time to time that nothing that is worth knowing can be taught - Oscar Wilde

Oscar Wilde's observation is perfectly applicable to Emotional Intelligence. The use of EI cannot be 'taught' theoretically, just as we cannot learn to drive a car in a crowded market place by enrolling in a classroom. However, the good news is that Emotional Competencies can be 'learned'. EI learning is experiential, slow and develops with

practice. Since it is a painstaking process this learning must be preceded and accompanied by a sense of importance of EI, which can be generated by awareness.

Emotional Recognition and Regulation

It helps to get to know the people who we are required to manage. If we must manage the Self – we will have to get to know the Self. All the special senses have been developed to take inputs from the outside. What then is the sense organ used to get to know you? Sensors in the muscles speak to the brain centers for coordination and balance giving us a sense of the configuration of the body and limbs so that even with the eyes closed we can tell how the right arm is poised. We can easily become aware of the depth and rhythm of our breathing and with some effort experience the beating of the heart. The gut makes its presence felt only when it is uncomfortable, which indicates that circuits carrying messages from the bowel exist, though silent in comfort. Through these intero-ceptive circuits the body speaks to the brain in a language of comfort and discomfort, health and disease, and informs of threats from the internal environment like toxins from disease causing organisms and neurotransmitters of sadness, low esteem, anger or stress. Beginning to recognize the somatic markers of emotion is an exercise in Emotional Recognition. The next step to recognition is Regulation.

Remember – *a matchstick has a head but not a brain!* If a flaming match is likened to anger, we can realize that fire is vital to human assertiveness and development, but for a short while, during the period anger holds sway in the brain, its higher thinking capability is short-circuited. Unless regulated fire can get fanned into a conflagration and wreak havoc all around. Unregulated anger leads to thoughtless reactive action and unconsidered decisions that are often not the best of the possible options.

A person who has tried and succeeded at emotional regulation gains in self-confidence. Others observe this regulation and come to respect and rely on such a person. Most mistakes are made in moments of excitement or anger (while under the influence of strong emotions). A person, who learns regulation of strong emotions (Ref 12),

consequently makes fewer mistakes and spends lesser resources (time and energy) on damage control measures.

Ego Balance

Our perception of Self includes the body and the personality (Ref 10). Together they make up the identity. Threats of bodily harm and threats to the virtual perception of self (Ego), are both reacted upon with fear, aggression, anxiety or defeat. A balanced ego that is in tune with the true worth of an individual seldom feels threatened and the person enjoys lower incidence of negative emotions, hence better health status (Ref IX). Developing a balanced ego should serve as a health strategy for prevention of stress-linked diseases, just as a vaccination program has been found to be effective deterrent of infective diseases in spite of exposure.

Empathy Enhancement

The ability to empathize contributes to starting and maintaining fulfilling relationships. People who are in secure fulfilling relationships have been found to be protected against the adverse health effects of stress (Ref IV). The protection could be due to the steady stream of mediators of positive emotions, viz oxytocin, endorphin and dopamine, which are known to boost immune functions and improve brain cognitive functions as well.

Empathy stirs in the mirror neurons scattered throughout the brain (Ref 3, 7, VIII). When we observe a facial expression, hear a tone of voice or see an action the same parts of the brain light up in the observer as the configuration of neurons that have initiated the expression/action in the observed subject. Because of this sameness of brain cells firing in resonance we wirelessly connect and feel the emotion the other is experiencing, at the same time we can interpret the intention behind the action. Mirror cells and their related circuits are responsible for the social intelligence (Ref 6) of creatures and account for the inherent compassion of animals and humans. (Reptiles do not display compassion as demonstrated by lab experiments).

Mirror neurons are also responsible for the way children learn from observation and copying. This function can be extended to the way adults emulate their role models and how by listening to stories of courage and perseverance we perceive the spiritual elevation experienced by the heroes and model and develop ourselves to become resilient.

Stress Resilience

The fine line separating optimum pressure or torque from stress varies with individuals. The reasons for stress may be internal or external. Stress is defined as:

STRESS: a condition or feeling experienced when a person perceives that demands exceed the personal and social resources the individual is able to mobilize. (Richard S Lazarus Ref 8).

The operative word in the definition is '*perceives*'. Since perception varies from person to person, people differ in the way they handle challenges. One who perceives challenge positively feels exhilaration of pushing the limits, while at the same pressure another might feel the build up of anxiety, become irritable and unable to think and therefore will deliver sub-optimal performance

**SOME COMMON EXTERNAL
CAUSES OF STRESS**

- Serious financial trouble
- Job crisis
- Lawsuit / divorce
- Isolation / love-lessness
- Illness of self or family members
- War / political instability
- Harassment

INTERNAL CAUSES OF STRESS

- **EMOTIONAL TURMOIL (anger)**
- **EGO IMBALANCE**
- **RELATIONSHIP TROUBLE**
- **FAILURE**
- **CRITICISM**

In order to deal with external stress generating factors we have to build resilience. Building something involves time and investment. This is not done at the time of crisis but continuously, throughout growth and development.

Building Self-Confidence

Self-Discovery is experienced every day as we face new challenges and situations. Becoming aware of one's abilities involves some introspection and mind-fullness. The accuracy of self-assessment is continuously tested by significant others in the immediate surroundings. The dynamic self-image we hold is the resultant of a tussle between the ego (appreciative) and the critical system we learn to internalize so we no longer need to carry significant others (parents, siblings, teacher, boss) around with us to tell us when we are making a fool of our self or how smart we are.

Reality Check

Accepting inputs from the external world is an important step in confidence building as it keeps us in touch with reality, preventing delusional images from forming. Shattering of delusions can be painful as and when inevitably reality does bite.

Inaccurately high self-assessors land up in situations that display their inadequacy and end up with egg on the face. Low self-image on the other hand results in ineffectiveness as one remains unsure of ones abilities and avoids challenging tasks, passing up opportunities thus falling behind competitors of lesser caliber.

Building Bonds

A large part of confidence rests on the team, organization or nation we are part of. To be trusted and loved by other members we have to be able to trust and love them as well. Relationship bonds work both ways and they are built slowly, brick by brick. Relationships rely on the power of empathy, to feel what the other feels, to understand and build rapport (Ref II). Trust is based on this connectedness as empathy circuits allow

us to perceive the intentions of others and sniff out insincerity. Emotional Intelligence is the foundation of any relationship, personal or professional, enabling social effectiveness and influence. Relationships based on strong bonds and trust, are seldom troubled. Dependability of time-tested bonds lends us strength and helps build resilience.

Building Positive Attitude

Perception of stress is affected by our view of the world. If we look at the world with jaundiced eyes everything is tinged with suspicion and alienation. If the view is too rosy, there may be many unpleasant surprises that eventually lead to a jaundiced picture. Keeping close to reality protects us from extreme attitudes that would otherwise rock the boat. Positive attitudes lead to optimism due to which we put in our best effort and achieve. Optimism drives us to take initiatives without which there would be no progress. Self-confidence balanced with caution of realism allows us to take the risk of enterprise in the face of uncertain outcomes and possible failure.

Attitude towards Failure

Failure is always disappointing. The way in which we look at failure decides how far we will proceed on the path to success. If failures are regarded as blots in history they will breed pessimism and become stumbling blocks. If the same failures are regarded as stepping stones they will carry us forward and we will be liberated from the recurrence of toxic negative emotion every time memory throws up mention of past failures.

Accepting Feedback

Criticism always carries a sting. If we learn to regard criticism as a painful injection that will make us better, we can even be grateful for it. Even when criticism is delivered with the intention of hurting or crushing, we can learn to pay enough heed to filter away the poison and look for the grain of truth within it and use it to improve and develop further.

To be able to handle criticism we will first need to set aside the inevitable hurt we feel when we first hear or see the feed-back. This ability, to turn around a bad feeling by looking past it towards more important issues, is a function of emotional intelligence.

Building self-confidence, fulfilling relationships, optimism and positive attitudes towards failure and feed-back have a protective role on physiology, keeping us healthy and vigorous. Good health itself contributes to self-confidence and we can perceive pressure at work and at home as challenging instead of stressful.

Appreciation of challenge is invigorating as having to stretch raises the bar and becomes an elevating and learning experience (Ref III). Endorphins are released in the brain giving a sensation of joy, improving cognitive capacity of the thinking brain empowering us to better our previous best. When stress is perceived high levels of cortisol course through the body and brain and shut down the thinking process (Ref I). Toxic stress levels kick off irritation, anger and fear mediated by noradrenaline and adrenaline compound the effect, by diverting blood supply to the muscles and away from the thinking brain.

The frequency and duration of threat perception dictates the time the brain spends in the short-circuited state, and it gradually gets used to by-passing the intelligent processes and using the automatic reflex processes. Brains generously endowed with intelligence fail to put it to use and function reactively from the middle levels. Over time unused circuits wither and new neurons fail to connect, hence perish (Ref VII).

The Scientific American Book of the Brain. 1999 (Ref 11) tells us that people use one to ten percent of the total capacity of the brain. Using Emotional Intelligence we could improve this ratio and justify Nature's bounty. Awareness and use of emotional intelligence is not just about using optimally our best assets, but also has immensely desirable fallout like:

Personal Happiness

Relationships and Rapport

Enhanced Teamwork and Productivity

Creativity

Research and Development
Inspirational Leadership
Soaring Profits and Economy
Social Harmony
World Peace

Definition:

Emotional Intelligence is the ability to sense and understand one's own emotions, to express and regulate them appropriately and to use them in the process of decision-making. It includes the capacity to understand and feel for others, and so set up and maintain quality of relationships

--Anjana Sen 2007

Emotional Intelligence provides stability to the other intelligences to perform vigorously, creatively and to collaborate effectively with other intelligent people with synergistic effect, thus maximizing potential of organizations and nations. We were equipped with a rudimentary measure of emotional intelligence at birth and as we grow we find emotional competencies increasingly called upon to help us deliver at the top of hierarchies. Leadership is totally an emotional competence. We must develop competencies for where we are heading long before we get there.

Conclusion:

Emotional Intelligence is one of the multiple intelligences humans are endowed with that serves us from birth through every stage of life. Emotional competence is called upon increasingly through career growth and rise in social stature. Highest EI Competence is demanded from people in positions of leadership. Opportunities to develop EIC are encountered everyday but without awareness of EI and its role in driving success, these opportunities maybe lost. Importance of EI must be developed early in expectant parents, teachers, mentors HR Professionals and leaders of academia and industry. Individual potential can be fully tapped only when the emotional platform is stable and resilient, contributing to both maximized use of the intellect and to positive levels of health and vigour. Emotional Competence contributes to enhancement in Teamwork and the ability to leverage the collective intellect leading to synergy, resonance and positivity. Emotional Intelligence when developed and used can make the world a better place.

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