THE BUSINESS CASE FOR EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Julian Talbot, 2013

INTRODUCTION

History may show that the early 21st century proved to be the early stages of a revolution in the way we do business. Certainly, during the last decade interpersonal skills have become more integral to effective leadership (Goleman, 1988). Any number of studies, as well as our own experiences within our group of associates, can offer evidence that people who are intellectually the brightest are often not the most successful, either in business or their personal lives. But if technical proficiency and intellect are not enough to ensure success, what is the crucial ingredient?

There is growing evidence from the latest scientific studies and real world examples the link between emotional intelligence and success. For many years however, we have been conditioned to believe that statistical analysis, total quality management, authoritarian relationships, and intellectual brilliance are what drive profitability. All that pure intellect and analysis certainly has its benefits, but not without cost.

A manager with a high IQ who is technically proficient but also has a high emotional intelligence (EI) is likely to communicate better and to more quickly address any emerging conflicts within an organisation that someone who has a low EI. Indeed, the world of human interactions is often much more about empathy, emotional intelligence and the resulting ability to build trust, establish rapport and achieve outcomes through consensus and communication.

WHY IT MATTERS

Many people can relate to stories of working in an organisation where trust is absent and where uncertainty, bullying and cynicism prevail. These sorts of environments stifle commitment and creativity while engendering fear, hostility and stress. In fact, a recent survey of Australian workplaces by The Australia Institute (TAI), found that 43% of those surveyed reported that their managers are poorly skilled in discussing sensitive workplace issues, and that people find talking about mental health issues with their manager ‘far harder than any other workplace issue’. (Denniss, 2012). Lest you think that it is a hidden cost, other researchers (Medibank Private, 2008) highlighted the following costs:

- Workplace stress is costing the Australian economy $14.81 billion a year.
- Stress related presenteeism and absenteeism are directly costing Australian employers $10.11 billion a year.
- 3.2 days per worker are lost each year through workplace stress.

As Robert Cooper and Ayman Sawaf so eloquently commented as far back as 1997, “We have paid a drastic price—not only in our organisations, but in our own lives—for trying to disconnect emotions from intellect. It can't be done. Not only do we know intuitively that it can't be done, modern science is proving every day that it is emotional intelligence not IQ or raw brainpower alone, that underpins many of the best decisions, the most dynamic organizations, and the most satisfying and successful lives.” (Cooper & Sawaf, 1997)
WHERE WE GO WRONG

Researchers from many disciplines continue to build evidence that link the various competencies of emotional intelligence to increased profitability in business. Despite this, every day around the world an untold number of bright and efficient managers and professionals leave the best of themselves at home, thinking that they need to be ruthlessly efficient and intellectually superior in order to get ahead at work.

Emotional intelligence however, requires us to ‘bring the whole person to work’. EI comes not from some notion of business perfection but from the workings of the human emotions. It is the ability to identify, assess, and control the emotions of oneself, of others, and of groups. But it is much more than that. A more complete definition of emotional intelligence might be “… the ability to sense, understand, and effectively apply the power and acumen of emotions as a source of human energy, information, connection, and influence.” (Cooper & Sawaf, 1997)

But EI isn’t about rote tricks or manipulating others. Nor is it about feeling happy all the time or learning to control our emotional state. At its core, EI motivates us to pursue our unique potential and purpose, and activates our innermost values and aspirations, transforming them from things we think about to what we live. Emotions are considered by many to be of such depth and power that in Latin, for example, they were described as motus anima, meaning literally 'the spirit that moves us'.

THE ROLE OF EMOTIONS

We often think of emotions as secondary to our intellect, yet the reality is that we make most of our decisions with our emotional brain. Our typical way of thinking holds that the mental process of decision-making is (or should be) rational: a formal process based on optimizing utility. (Kant, 1991). Rational thinking and decision-making however, does not leave much room for emotions. (Livet, 2010) In fact, emotions are often considered irrational occurrences that may distort reasoning. (Barnes, 1996)

Significant research however, indicates that emotions actually play a critical role in decision-making. Somatic marker hypothesis (SMH), proposes a mechanism by which emotional processes can guide (or bias) behavior, particularly decision-making (Damasio, 1994). Meanwhile, other research suggests that emotions have an integral function in decision-making rather than simply influencing decision-making. (Pfister, 2008)

We also like to think of emotions as being positive or negative, that isn’t necessarily the case. They can better be described as the one of the single most powerful sources of human energy, authenticity, and drive, and are capable of offering us an abundance of intuitive creative wisdom. Emotions provide us with information about ourselves, our colleagues, friends and family. They give us insights and help us make decisions.
CONCLUSION

Only relatively recently has the study of motivational processes been extended to integrate biological drives and emotional states in the explanation of purposeful behaviour in human beings, yet this field of study will increasingly offer us insights for both our personal and business lives. Emotions are what ignite our passion and creative genius, keep us honest with ourselves, help to shape trusting relationships, and provide our sense of right and wrong – our moral compass.

It is not enough, of course, just to have feelings. Benefitting from EI requires that we learn to tap into this wisdom to achieve our potential and to communicate better with our colleagues by ‘bringing the whole person to work’ not just a persona that we have come to believe belongs in the workplace.
Bibliography


