

## HIGH PERFORMANCE WORKFORCE: THE INFLUENCE OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND SOFT SKILLS

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### ABSTRACT

*The primary cause of leadership failure in business organization today is poor interpersonal skills. Especially technicians promoted into leadership positions without much thought as to their readiness or suitability for leading people. These managers fail due to underdeveloped soft skills and lack of emotional intelligence. Emotional Intelligence is about knowing how to manage inter-intra personal relationships successfully. In order to get on in the work place you need to know your own strengths and weaknesses, your own true beliefs and then you need to know those of other people in order to get on with them and motivate them to produce the best work they possibly can. The 'soft' leadership principles are the major factor in what makes a high-performance team or organization. A manager needs to know how to perceive their staff and they need to be able to trust you.*

*Key words: Emotional intelligence, soft skills, work place, human resource management, work performance and leaders.*

### Introduction

To survive in today's workplace that is dynamic and changing rapidly—it is crucial that executives must possess emotional intelligence and soft skills in addition to traditional leadership competencies. According to Abel (2002), work has changed radically for many people. Employers recognise that people are the key to their success, and these people require special qualities, primarily that enable them to participate fully in the evolving life of the organization. Leaders face more pressure than ever to strike just the right chord with employees, colleagues, and other stakeholders (Bunker & Wakefield, 2004). The primary cause of leadership failure in business organization today is poor interpersonal skills (McGee, 1996). Especially technicians promoted into leadership positions without much thought as to their readiness or suitability for leading people. These managers fail due to underdeveloped soft skills and lack of emotional intelligence. Having emotional Intelligence and soft skills will equip a leader about how to manage inter-intra personal relationships successfully.

An individual who is appointed to a managerial position has the right to command and enforce obedience by virtue of the authority of his position. Being a leader one need the ability to affect human behavior so as to accomplish a mission. Influencing a group of people to move towards its goal setting or goal achievement are some of the responsibilities of a leader. As such, he must possess adequate personal attributes to match his authority, because authority is only potentially available to him. In the absence of sufficient personal competence, a manager may be confronted by an emergent leader who can challenge his role in the organization and reduce it to that of a figurehead. However, only authority of position has the backing of formal sanctions. It follows that whoever wields personal influence and power can legitimize this only by gaining a formal position in the hierarchy, with commensurate authority. Leadership can be defined as one's ability to get others to willingly follow. Many business leaders agreed that success in the workplace is strongly influenced by personal qualities such as perseverance, self-control, and skill in getting along with others. In most literatures soft skills form the emotional competencies that are linked to emotional intelligence (EI). The researchers found out that it is quite

difficult to draw line between the two. As such EI and soft skills are importance for success of one's job in any type of organization.

### **The Soft Leadership Skills**

Being a leader is more difficult than a manager (Somerset, 2001). Leaders have to effectively use physical presence and voice to convey meaning. A leader must be able to communicate--influence, persuade and negotiate. These are the essential skills needed to people on his or her side, to defuse resistance and to build ownership and commitment. To motivate and inspire, a leader needs to be able to reach the hearts and minds of workers. This requires the ability to understand what is important to people and how to involve them in the process. The importance of soft skills in contributing to organizational success in the workplace for an employee, manager or leader has been recognized (Somerset 2001; Bunker & Wakefield 2004). Those who aspire to become a leader are not likely to succeed without highly developed skills in these areas. To be an effective leaders thinking systemically and acting strategically are very important, but superb soft skills are necessary to enable one to articulate a vision; to enroll others in possibilities; and to communicate values, standards, and expectations. Moreover soft skills are the essential tools for employees contributing to their fullest potential (Muir, 2004). Cole (1999) stressed that leadership involves ability to motivate staff to work together to achieve a common objective and resolve conflicts that may arise. Soft skills are also commonly known as interpersonal or social skills to become effective and efficient leaders. He further commented that unfortunately there is abundance of individuals assuming leadership roles that severely lack the soft skills necessary to create cooperative, as well as productive, and relationships with their followers. Crosbie (2005) has listed the eight soft skills that are needed by all individuals: collaboration/teamwork, communication skills, initiative, leadership ability, people development/coaching, personal effectiveness/personal mastery, planning and organizing, and presentation skills. Crosbie reported that a research by The Protocol School of Washington, DC and conducted by Harvard University, the Carnegie Foundation and Stanford Research Institute has shown that technical skills and knowledge account for about 15 percent of the reason an individual gets a job, keeps the job and advances in the job. The remaining 85 percent of job success is based on the individual's "people skills".

Emotional Intelligence encompasses abilities such as self-motivation, persistence in the face of frustration, mood management and the ability to empathize, think and hope. These factors are now considered to have greater impact on individual and group performance than traditional measures of intelligence. It is the ability to sense, understand and effectively apply the power and acumen of emotions as a source of human energy, information and influence. Emotional Intelligence emerges not from the musings of complex intellect, but from the workings of the human heart. As Dr. Reuven Bar-on concludes that 'one's ability to succeed in coping with environmental demands and pressures is a function of one's emotional intelligence. One of the reasons people leave organizations is because of a poor relationship with their boss. Emotional intelligence is not about sales tricks or how to work a room; it is not about putting a good face on things, or the psychology of control, exploitation or manipulation. It requires that we learn to acknowledge and value feelings in ourselves and others – that we appropriately respond to them, effectively applying the information and energy of emotions in our daily life and work. The arrival of the New Economy has made companies realize that what they need from their staff goes beyond hands, bodies, and eight-hour days. Emotional Intelligence can impact everyone in your organization – raising the level of performance from good to extraordinary.

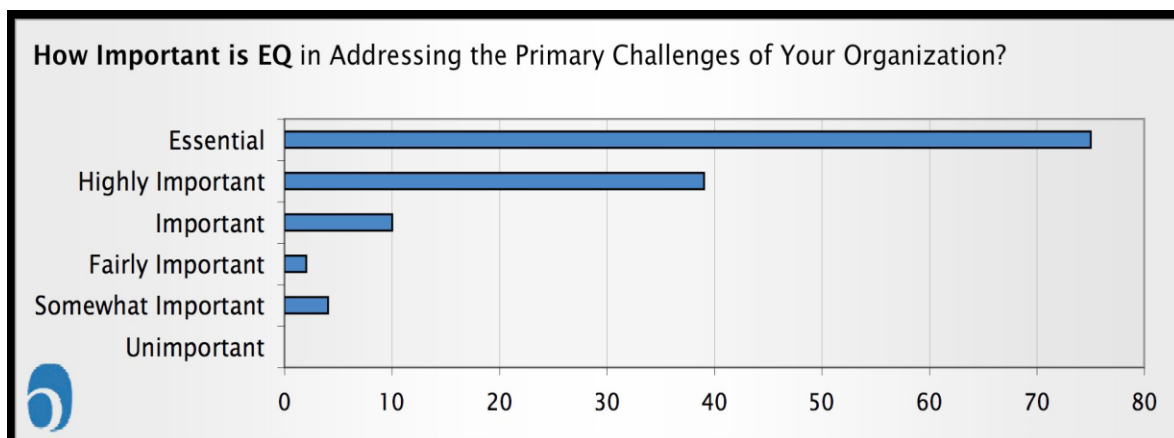
### **Emotional Intelligence Defined**

Many researchers are putting their great efforts to study on emotional intelligence. In the twentieth century, Edward Thorndike started this issue with social intelligence. Then, in 1990, the issue of EI made people started concerned. The literature in this emerging field contains a range of terminology which includes the terms emotional intelligence (Bar-On, 1997); Emotional quotient (Salovey & Mayer, 1990a); (Goleman, 1995); emotional literacy (Steiner, 1997), personal intelligence (Gardner & Hatch, 1989a, 1989b) and Social Intelligent (Thorndike, 1920; Thorndike & Stein, 1937). However, Salovey and Mayer (1990) was the first who defined the term as emotional intelligence. From that researchers have used the term extensively to describe the construct. Mayer separated the evolution of EI into five period, namely the first period, from 1900-1969, the second period, from 1970-1989, 1990-1993, the fourth period, from 1994-1997 and the current era (1997 till present). In this era, researchers are focusing more

on identifying the ways that EI facilitates reasoning and thought in life activities. Emotional intelligence refers to one's ability to be aware of one's own feelings, be aware of other feelings, to differentiate among them and to use the information to guide one's thinking and behaviour (Salovey & Mayer, 1990b). Salovey & Mayer (1990) originally defined EI as "the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them, and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions. In 1997, Mayer and Salovey (1997) expanded their definition to address the full meaning of EI behaviours. They suggested that EI involves four specific abilities including (a) the ability to appraise and express emotion, (b) the use of emotion to enhance cognitive processes and decision-making, (c) the ability to understand and analyze emotions, and (d) the reflective regulations of emotion (Salovey & Mayer, 1990).

### How the Organizations will benefit

Past studies have proven that there was a relationship between EI and work outcomes/behaviours (Prati, Douglas, Ferris, Ammeter, & Buckley, 2003). There was a high correlation between various measures of morale and stress at work and EI (Dulewicz, Higgs, & Slaski, 2003). The study also found significant relationships between EI and employee's current job performance. On the other hand, (Carmeli, 2003) found a relationship between EI and work attitudes, behaviours and outcomes among senior managers. The results showed that EI enhance positive work attitudes, altruistic behaviour and work outcomes, and moderates the effect of work-family conflict on career commitment but not the effect on job satisfaction. Emotional intelligence was significantly correlated with job performance and job satisfaction (Wong & Law, 2002).



Source: SIX Seconds

The emotionally intelligent executive can operate under extreme pressure, analyze problems accurately, generate creative solutions and make effective decisions. The emotionally intelligent salesperson overcomes barriers to achieve goals. A sales disappointment no longer leads to inertia but increased dedication and a redirected effort for positive results. The emotionally intelligent manager manages a diverse workforce and skillfully intervenes to help staff clarify issues and resolve conflict by listening and using feedback as a motivational tool. The emotionally intelligent employee is a team player who feels good about going to work and takes pride in delivering maximum performance on the job. Soft skills are skills relating to people issues. Having soft skills make clients and customers feel happy as well as keep them loyal. All these qualities makes individual with these skills very valuable. According to Dunn (2004), soft skills bring hard results in the workplace whereas emotional intelligence can bring positive effects to your bottom line. When employees feel good about them and feel appreciated and accepted, they will work better for the organization, stay longer, and pass the word that their organization is a good place to work. There are numerous literatures acknowledging that 'soft' leadership skills are the major factor in what makes a high-performance team or organization. The increasing research on emotional intelligence show that a leader's personal characteristics and leadership competencies have impact on personal performance as well as that of their team and organization.

### **Acquiring and Enhancing Emotional Intelligence and Soft skills**

The smooth running of an organization or business relies on harmonious relationships between staff, that personal interaction is perceived as critical to successful leadership, change and project management, supervision, appraisals, recruitment and customer support. It is centering around establishing rapport, questioning, listening, reading body language and closing techniques. A systematic and step-by-step experiential approach is needed to assist individuals to develop positive personal attributes and to take charge of their lives. Therefore developing emotional intelligence and soft skills takes work and practice just like any behavior modification. For organization serious about developing their human capital—it is absolutely essential that the soft skills and emotional intelligence be identified and integrated.

Cherniss and Goleman (1998) detailed out guidelines which are divided into four phases of the training process. The first occurs even before the individual begins formal training which is crucial for effective social and emotional learning, involves preparation for change. The preparation occurs at both the organizational and individual levels. The second phase, training, covers the change process itself. It includes the processes that help people change the way in which they view the world and deal with its social and emotional demands. The third phase, transfer and maintenance, addresses what happens following the formal training experience. The final phase involves evaluation. Altogether there are 21 steps. Soft skills training needs to have relevance to the tasks that the learners face in the real world such as sales people, managers, coaches or customer-care advisers. Training soft skills outside the context of such roles is likely to reduce the effectiveness of the transfer of learning (Macvicar, 2006). He further commented that using one-to-one coaching of soft skill is costly, lacks flexibility and sometime embarrassing for trainees to act out a variety of convincing roles. E-learning is an alternative whereby soft skills simulator allows an individual to practice privately and feeling secure where no-one is witnessing the performance. It is available at all times, and free the trainees from the tyranny of time, people and place. Although there are some weaknesses like limited option from lists, feedback is limited, lack realism we can still expect dramatic improvements in the future.

Laferty (2006) reported that a survey by Center for Creative Leadership (CCL) 2001 – 2003 identified that Europeans preferred face-to-face interactions, including peer/manager interaction and feedback. Coaching was found to be a very suitable method for learning soft skills (such as conflict management, negotiation and influencing). Jayne (2005) further stressed that coaching can work wonders to plug skill gaps, build leadership capability and create more effective teams. It can help bridge the gap in a faster and more focused way. It has to start from the top because when a senior executive is getting one-on-one coaching, it will give a positive impact. If those heading the company are not fantastic role models then ad-hoc interventions at lower levels of the company are a lot less effective. Coaching is a personal experience and individuals can be isolated which can cause more damages than good if this are not well understood. Somerset (2001) suggested that a leader must develop a self-awareness of their own soft skills inventory by a whole variety of self-assessment and 360-degree feedback tools, or by being conscious of how you exercise the skills on a daily basis. Develop a plan of action and set priorities for learning activities that could include training courses. Observe how others demonstrate these skills in different ways and different contexts. Practice your growing skills inside and outside the workplace. Crosbie (2005) stated that the learning of soft skills leadership does not happen conveniently and miraculously in a classroom. Successful leaders ascertain that first-person experience, communities of learners, support, self-assessment, and tireless effort of learning new skills and methods, all linked as closely as possible to the environment in which leadership will occur are needed, in addition to formal training.

### **CONCLUSION**

Acquiring emotional intelligence and soft skills are crucial because a highly skilled, innovative and 'high performance' workforce is essential for business and organizations to remain survive. People are the reservoirs of knowledge and have been said as the best asset. Leaders are the asset who should make the movement or change. Emotional intelligence is a recognized asset to the organization and is currently being integrated into the workplace. It is believed to help the management do the job better, and help their service better too. Many had said that the development of EI should be a priority in any organization because understanding of employees would help to foster a cohesive and pleasant work environment rather than the abusive environment that currently exists. It is a great place to work when the people are successful, adaptive, energetic, efficient and resilient. People are the key to the success or

failure of your organization. So it is crucial that people at every level add value and achieves their full potential. The goal is to create a workplace that encourages creativity and fosters a high-level of individual and group performance. Emotional Intelligence and soft skills are about knowing how to manage inter- and intra-personal relationships successfully. To survive in the workplace, leaders need to know their own strengths and weaknesses, true beliefs and then know those of their subordinates in order to get on with them and motivate them to produce the best work they possibly can. It is soft skills and emotional intelligence that will differentiate good leaders from the crowd. Managers or leaders need to have these abilities to understand the motivations, goals, and interest of their subordinates that they are responsible for leading. Leaders who can align his or her goals with those of the people on his or her team makes for an excellent manager and these traits translate into success in the workplace.

### MANAGERIAL AND RESEARCH IMPLICATION

Organizations that practice EI and soft skills may improve the productivity and promote job enjoyment, including: high self-awareness. An accurate understanding of your own personal communication style, behavior and responses as perceived by others and awareness of how you think, feel and behave at any given moment. People with high self-awareness are better able to navigate their own lives and are secure when making personal and professional decisions. Next, is the ability to manage emotion. This is where someone has the capacity to shake off anxiety, gloom, irritability and fear of failure. Those poor at managing emotions are in constant distress; those who excel bounce back quickly from setbacks and disappointments. On the other hand, EI also do increase self-motivation, the individual ability to channel emotions in pursuit of a goal, delay gratification and combat impulsiveness. People who are self-motivated are more productive and effective in all their endeavors. Someone with high EI will have empathy in themselves. Those with empathy have skill to recognize emotions and feelings of others. This sensitivity reflects the needs and requirements of others are crucial to managers. Good relationship skills is another competencies needed in organizing groups, negotiating solutions, making personal connections and social analysis. These people can connect, manage, and handle disputes. Since it has been established that EI affects work behaviours namely job performance, job satisfaction, loyalty, encourage employee displaying OCB and many positive impacts, this is the time now where management should consider EI in the workplace. Firstly, the HR people must take actions on the importance of EI. During the recruitment and selection process, the applicants at least must have moderate EI. New employees with high emotional awareness and regulation should be hired (Ashkanasy & Hartel, 2002; Jordon & Troth, 2002). Organizations also should apply EI training to the employees, to develop their soft skills. Given that EI abilities can be developed, training in specific facets of EI; appraising, understanding emotions and managing in self and others as well as utilizing emotions to facilitate performance would guarantee that the support staffs perform their job performance as expected by the management. Training in EI and soft skills is proven to enhance good work behaviours (Bardzil & Slaski, 2003).

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