

Emotional Intelligence in a modern workplace

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Abstract

In the early 1930's B.F. Skinner posited a theory that in the right situation, with the right control, and proper training an individual could be trained to do anything just as well as anyone else. Operant condition became one of the strongest influences in working environments throughout the majority of the 20th century; however by 1985 a new theory was starting to take hold regarding the employee and their capabilities. Our paper will cover the evolution from Darwin in the early 1900's first speaking about emotional expression to modern times.

Introduction

The term emotional intelligence was first coined by German researcher B. Leuner in the article Emotional intelligence and emancipation (1966)[1]; however it is argued that intelligence theory has a much lengthier past. The Greek Philosopher Socrates created the popular phrase “Know Thyself” that it is now the motto of many learning institutions. His thoughts on the ability of man to evolve and to learn, not simply about the environment, but also the person themselves laid down the initial groundwork into the study of humanity. Charles Darwin expressed his views in the 19th century in multiple books from *Origin of the Species and the Descent of Man* to *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*. In Origin he summarized “to avoid enemies or to attack them with success, to capture wild animals, and to fashion weapons, requires the aid of the higher mental facilities, namely, observation, reason, invention, or imagination … (skills and abilities) will, moreover, have been strengthened by use during this same period of life.” [2]. Moving into his follow up academic novel in 1872 Darwin “viewed the emotional system as necessary for survival and as providing an important signaling system within and across species” [3]. Due to B.F. Skinner and his work in 1952 around the “Skinner Box” the academic world was exposed to a new concept of reinforcement with regards to emotional and intellectual development[4]. Modern research has taken the concept of emotional intelligence from a simple “know thyself” statement to a series of rich tests designed to give employers the tools to select not only the applicants with the proper qualifications, but also the best emotional framework with which to complete assigned tasks making this particular sector of study one of the most critical elements in the workplace today.

Defining EI

The concept of emotional intelligence was launched by two articles that were published in 1990 scientific journals by Peter Salovey and John Mayer. The “new scientific idea behind emotional intelligence is that human beings process emotional information; they comprehend and utilize emotional information about social relationships”(5). There have been plenty attempts at trying to define the term of EI (Emotional Intelligence). John Mayer and Peter Salovey came up with their definition based on the two terms that make up the concept of EI, which is emotion and intelligence. Emotions are expressed by such words as happiness, sadness, anger; these terms are all used in how relationships work. Intelligence refers to the capacity to carry out abstract reasoning. Their definition is then “emotional intelligence, then, refers to the capacity to understand and explain emotions, on the one hand, and of emotions to enhance thought, on the other” [5].

Emotional Intelligence rose to prominence in psychological studies with the publishing of *Emotional Intelligence* by Daniel Goleman [6]. “Emotional intelligence is an important consideration in human resources planning, job

profiling, recruitment interviewing and selection, management development, customer relations and customer service” [6]. Goleman talked about the body having “two minds, one that thinks and one that feels” (7). “These two minds, the emotional and the rational, operate in tight harmony for the most part, intertwining their very different ways of knowing to guide us through the world. Ordinarily there is a balance between emotional and rational minds, with emotion feeding into and informing the operations of the rational mind, and the rational mind refining and sometimes vetoing the inputs of the motions” [7]. According to Goleman, emotional intelligence developed through learning and reinforcement involving the senses, specifically olfactory. [7]. This allows for a number of critiques that will be addressed later, but the essence of learning theory and reinforcement has been well demonstrated in studies done by Russian researcher Pavlov and later by American psychologist Skinner. Covering the topic of Self Science, Goleman, talks about the numerous ingredients of emotional intelligence: “self awareness, in the sense of recognizing feelings and building a vocabulary for them, and seeing the links between thoughts, feelings, and reactions; knowing if thoughts or feelings are ruling a decision; seeing the consequences of alternative choices; and applying these insights to decisions … Self-awareness also takes the form of recognizing your strengths and weaknesses, and seeing yourself in a positive but realistic light” [6].

“The idea that people differ in EI (Emotional Intelligence) has prospered because of a number of converging factors, including contemporary cultural trends and orientations. To begin with, EI has been the target of widespread interest owing to the increasing personal importance attributed to emotion management for people in modern society … there is currently a growing impetus towards the provision of personal, educational, and workplace interventions that purport to increase EI” [8]. Although a growing field of research emotional intelligence continues to be an elusive concept simply due to the complexity of definition. “Some commentators have assumed that it is a complex interaction of cognition, metacognition, emotions, mood, and personality that is applied in both interpersonal and intrapersonal situations (e.g., Bar-On, 2000; Goleman, 1995). Others have taken a more restricted view, arguing that EI is a form of cognitive ability, subject to lawful principles governing the realm of the intellect (e.g., Mayer, Salovey et al., 2000a, 2000b). Still other commentators appear to use the term in the most protean of ways, leaving EI bereft of conceptual meaning” [8]. “However, it could be concluded that existing models of EI tend to compliment, rather than contradict one another” [9]. In attempt to come up with a working definition of emotional intelligence the study of the biological aspect of emotion becomes necessary. Without diverging too far into biology a small summary is demonstrated by LeDoux in his statement “The brain states and bodily responses are the fundamental facts of an emotion, and the conscious feelings are the frills that have added icing to the emotional cake” [8]. Thus it is easily argued that emotional intelligence does exist, has a basis in biological studies, and can be defined in multiple ways. The question then becomes how do we adapt our understanding EI into the workplace and use it to better qualify our future employees for the jobs that we assign?

EI and the individual

As EI or EQ has become an increasingly popular field authors like Adele Lynn have come up with pathways to utilizing emotional intelligence in a personal framework. “The Seven Steps to Emotional Intelligence for the self-coach to master are (1) Observe, (2) Interpret, (3) Pause, (4) Direct, (5) Reflect, (6) Celebrate, and (7) Repeat” (10). Utilizing much of what Deming argued in his systems theory Lynn advocates that mastering emotional intelligence is simply a system of self monitoring, then interpreting the data from the environment, responding appropriately, verifying response achieved desired result, celebrate (reinforce) that response, and reassess the entire process. Personal mastery of emotional intelligence is only partially the goal of research in the EQ field though; the true issue lies within the workplace environment. “Lack of empathy is costing lost revenue, lost opportunities, and even lost lives in the workplaces of America. Customers become angry, and they take their business elsewhere” [10]. In two different studies the underlying conclusion was that the relationship in the business environment was a very large predictor in workplace success in all aspects of the business [10].

EI in the workplace

Understanding the concept that trust and workplace relationships is a critical factor to putting EI to work in the modern corporate structure. “There are at least three areas in which people differ and conflict occurs: personality conflict, perceptual conflict, and a conflict of interests” [11]. Feldman and Mulle advocate learning how to understand personal emotions to be a more effective team member in the workplace, learning how to interpret the emotions of co-workers, and how to optimize the give and take as part of team environment in using EI for success in places of business [11]. Emotional intelligence is not simply the building of teams though, in looking at a quote from Buck Rodgers, Vice President of Marketing for IBM he says, ‘People buy emotionally and then justify with logic’ [12]. “True *intelligence* is having the capacity to balance information from the emotional side of the brain as well as the rational side of the brain and deal with that information appropriately” [12]. Further justifying the need for EQ in the workplace researchers cite the shift from manufacturing to service in most American businesses, the greater expectations of the customer that they are to be treated with understanding, and the profitability in keeping customers satisfied and retained [12]. “The high unemployment rate that our nation is experiencing has made human resource management staff to change the hiring process that they were currently using to a different approach to ensure that they hire the best candidate for the position as well as being a great fit for the organization. Making a hire can be a hit-or-miss for some organizations, which is why some companies have turned to using Emotional Intelligence (EQ) as a tool to help in the hiring process” [13]. Bielaszka-DuVernay identifies three traits that managers should be on the lookout for in potential hires:

- **Self-awareness and self-regulation.** The candidate understands the needs and wishes that drive him/her and how they affect his/her behavior. He/She regulates his emotions so that any fear, anger, or anxiety he/she experiences does not spread to his colleagues or makes him lose control.
- **Reading others and recognizing the impact of his/her behavior on them.** The candidate has well-developed emotional and social “radar” and can sense how his words and actions influence his/her colleagues.
- **The ability to learn from mistakes.** He/She can acknowledge his mistakes, reflect critically upon them, and learn from them.

Case Studies

Thus far we have attempted to explain what emotional intelligence is, how it is generalized in personal and work environments, and steps on becoming more aware of how to understand EI and its implications. In the real world, however, generalities rarely hold true. To understand EI utilization in the workplace some specific case studies can help clarify previously ambiguous examples [14]:

- The US Air Force used the EQ-I to select recruiters (the Air Force’s front-line HR personnel) and found that the most successful recruiters scored significantly higher in the emotional intelligence competencies of Assertiveness, Empathy, Happiness, and Emotional Self Awareness. The Air Force also found that by using emotional intelligence to select recruiters, they increased their ability to predict successful recruiters by nearly three-fold. The immediate gain was a saving of \$3 million annually.
- At L’Oreal, sales agents selected on the basis of certain emotional competencies significantly outsold salespeople selected using the company’s old selection procedure. On an annual basis, salespeople selected on the basis of emotional competence sold \$91,370 more than other salespeople did, for a net revenue increase of \$2,558,360. Salespeople selected on the basis of emotional competence also had 63% less turnover during the first year than those selected in the typical way.
- In a large beverage firm, using standard methods to hire division presidents, 50% left within two years, mostly because of poor performance. When they started selecting based on emotional competencies such as initiative, self-confidence, and leadership, only 6% left in two years. Furthermore, the executives selected based on emotional competence were far more likely to perform in the top third based on salary bonuses for performance of the divisions they led: 87% were in the top third. In addition, division leaders with these competencies outperformed their targets by 15 to 20 percent. Those who lacked them under-performed by almost 20%.

Critiques

The previous studies help to signify the benefits to be gained from the utilization of emotional intelligence screening and application in the workplace, but it is also important to note critiques of tests and screening measures that have been engaged. In a debate between psychologists three main issues were identified with emotional intelligence tests: “1. Emotional intelligence is little more than a loose conglomeration of extant personality traits. 2. Emotional intelligence does not meet psychometric standards. 3. Emotional intelligence has no clear measurement rubric-it changes all the time” [15]. Further critique of emotional testing state that EI tests cannot measure a person’s innate EQ, testing is unable to identify the difference between the varying levels of emotional competency, the subjectivity on the tests, lack of accounting for personality differences, and no true measure of potential, only current abilities [16].

Conclusion

As emotional intelligence continues to evolve as a field of study and practice new concepts will crystallize in the workplace. Studies have demonstrated that in service industries emotional intelligence is a critical factor but also a necessity in every workplace environment. Critics of EI testing have thrown down the gauntlet on validity issues regarding the testing but as case studies point out even without all problems addressed emotional intelligence continues to have a very strong standing with regards to performance for management and companies. As previously noted emotional intelligence has, as a concept, been around since the beginning of philosophical doctrine and has evolved to a complex framework of biological and environmental interaction designed to maximize workplace efficiency for employees. This document along with research in the future should help to lay the groundwork into further studies as to the effectiveness of current testing procedures, how to identify potential problems in those tests, and the course of action needed to remedy those issues. In summary emotional intelligence remains at the conceptual stage of the research realm but has proven to be, not only an exciting field, but as financial accounts continue to demonstrate, a very lucrative field of research and investment.

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