

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND TEAM EFFECTIVENESS

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Abstract: Students need to develop a wide range of skills as part of their education. Professional skills are only a part of the abilities required by employers. Other skills like problem solving, communication, collaboration, interpersonal skills, social skills and time management are proven to be useful at the workplace. Employment authorities consistently mention collaboration and teamwork as being a critical skill, essential in almost all working environments. The results of a team are far more superior to the achievements of one individual, as long as the team has harmony, cooperation and is effective. One of the tools used by team leaders or teachers to facilitate group effectiveness is developing a high level of Emotional Intelligence. Emotional intelligence is important among team members to carry out their roles and tasks in a cooperative and collaborative manner. It helps in reducing conflicts and can create a more comfortable and cooperative work environment. Having high levels of Emotional Intelligence facilitates various aspects of the team process including effective problem solving, high quality production and performance, trust, commitment, interpersonal relationships, and collaboration.

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence, teamwork skills, effective teams, competencies.

INTRODUCTION

There is a growing emphasis that students should develop professional skills as part of their education. Skills such as problem solving, communication, collaboration, interpersonal skills, social skills and time management are actively being targeted by prospective employers as essential requirements for employability especially in team environments. Of these, employment authorities consistently mention collaboration and teamwork as being a critical skill, essential in almost all working environments.

Teams have more talent and experience, more diversity of resources, and greater operating flexibility than individual performers. Research in the last decade has proven the superiority of group decision-making over that of even the brightest individual in the group. But the exception to this rule is when the group lacks harmony or the ability to cooperate.

The important difference between effective teams and ineffective ones lies in the emotional intelligence of the group. Teams have an emotional intelligence of their own. It is comprised of the emotional intelligence of individual members, plus a collective competency of the group. Everyone contributes to the overall level of emotional intelligence.

Emotional intelligence is important among team members to carry out their roles and tasks in a cooperative and collaborative manner. It helps in reducing conflicts and can create a more comfortable and cooperative work environment. Team members need to be aware of their feelings as they may allow uncontrolled emotions to affect the dynamics and culture of the team. The skill of regulating emotions during work stress and conflict would help to smooth the project and enhance working relationships effectively with other members. Team members are not only responsible for their own motivation but also play a key role in motivating the

team and colleagues. Empathic team members think from various points of views and they accept the diversity of people.

EXPLORING EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

An emotion is an individual experience. It is a personal experience in the sense that Student A cannot feel “happy” in the precise way that Student B does. Accompanying this individualized experience is the feature that emotions are influenced by a person’s interpretation of his or her present situation. Emotions can have a positive, negative, or possibly neutral feature that accompanies them (Magill, 1993). Emotions have functions. They are not only purposeful but also enlightening and informative. They greatly affect decisions, behaviors, and communications with others. An understanding of emotions and the ability to use them to understand and direct decisions, behaviors, and communication is the basis of theories of Emotional Intelligence.

Only in the past decade or so has the study of Emotional Intelligence begun to emerge. Since then, several theorists have studied Emotional Intelligence and developed their own definition and construct for measuring this ability. EI has been described as “the capacity to effectively perceive, express, understand and manage emotions in a professional and effective manner at work”. Several schools of thought exist which aim to accurately describe and measure Emotional Intelligence.

Mayer and Salovey first formally defined Emotional Intelligence when they theorized about a person’s management of emotions. They expanded on Gardner’s theory of intrapersonal and interpersonal intelligence theory by hypothesizing that there were five sub-domains included in Emotional Intelligence (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2004). “Emotional Intelligence involves the ability to perceive accurately, appraise, and express emotion; the ability to access and/or generate feelings when they facilitate thought; the ability to understand emotion and emotional knowledge; and the ability to regulate emotions to promote emotional and intellectual growth” (Salovey & Sluyter, 1997).

Goleman’s theory emerged a few years after Mayer and Salovey. Goleman adapted Salovey and Mayer’s model as a basis for his discussion of the theory of emotional intelligence and its implications for everyday life including the world of work. Credit is given to Goleman for making the notion of Emotional Intelligence popular. He states that Emotional Intelligence is an ability that one acquires. His theory includes “zeal” and “persistence” and can be associated with personality theories. Goleman theorized that Emotional Intelligence consisted of varying dimensions. These dimensions can be divided into two subgroups: interpersonal relationship management and self-management. Each of these subgroups is comprised of self-management, awareness of self, zeal, empathy, persistence, social skills, and finally, social awareness (Hamarta, Deniz, & Saltali, 2009). Goleman included “abilities such as being able to motivate and persist in the face of frustrations; to control impulse and delay gratification; to regulate one’s moods and keep distress from swamping the ability to think; to emphasize and to hope” in his definition of Emotional Intelligence (Feyerherm & Rice, 2002). Goleman puts a strong emphasis on Emotional Intelligence and success in life, relationships, and work, and academic-related activities.

Reuven Bar-On presents another model of Emotional Intelligence that can be classified under a mixed model. His model incorporates a social competency aspect as well as the ability to manage stress. Bar-On defines his Emotional and Social Intelligence model as “a cross-

section of inter-related emotional and social competencies that determine how effectively we understand and express ourselves, understand others and relate with them, and cope with daily demands and pressures” (Bar-On, 2004).

Between Mayer and Salovey, Goleman, and Bar-On’s theories, there are significant similarities between them that all combine to form a general outline of Emotional Intelligence. Each theorist believes that Emotional Intelligence involves the awareness and understanding of one’s emotions as well as the emotions of others. Another commonality between their theories is the need for emotional regulation and self-management. Emotional Intelligence affects one’s relationships with others, work performance, and overall success, so the use of emotional information is another part that comprises Emotional Intelligence.

EFFECTIVE TEAMWORK

Teamwork is defined by Harris and Harris as “...a work group or unit with a common purpose through which members develop mutual relationships for the achievement of goals/tasks”. Teamwork implies that individuals work in a cooperative environment in the interests of a common goal by sharing knowledge/skills and being flexible enough to serve multiple roles. The literature consistently highlights that one of the essential elements of a team is its focus toward a common goal and a clear purpose (Fisher, Hunter & Macrosson, 1997).

Team management is the most challenging task since it involves complex processes. A number of factors may affect team effectiveness even at its early stage of development. There are studies that look into the role of positive and negative emotions in team. Positive affective tone groups had lower absenteeism, and less negative tone teams exhibited more helping behaviors.

Teams are most effective when all members participate and collaborate with one another, assuming that the members have already developed a team identity, mutual trust, and a feeling of efficacy. One model of team effectiveness includes a claim that Emotional Intelligence is necessary for a team to build an identity, mutual trust, and feelings of efficacy, thereby becoming a successful collaborative team. Druskat and Wolff, state that Emotional Intelligence is not the only factor that makes an effective team, but is more of a foundation upon which to build a team. They divide Emotional Intelligence within a team into three divisions:

1. Members being aware of their own emotions, as well as the other member’s emotions, and understanding how that affects the team process,
2. Members being aware of the emotions and moods that the team experiences as a group,
3. Members being aware and understanding the emotions of those individuals that are not in the team.

In the article entitled “Building the Emotional Intelligence of groups”, Vanessa Urch Druskat and Steven B. Wolff (Harvard Business Review, March 2001) identify three conditions essential to a group’s effectiveness:

- Trust among members
- A sense of group identity
- A sense of group efficacy.

To be most effective, the team needs to create emotionally intelligent norms — the attitudes and behaviors that eventually become habits — that support behaviors for building

trust, group identity and group efficacy. Group identity is described as a feeling among members that they belong to a unique and worthwhile group. A sense of group efficacy is the belief that the team can perform well and that group members are more effective working together than apart.

Joe Luca and Tarricone suggest that skills needed for successful teamwork can be viewed from different perspectives, ranging in nature from “Visible to Invisible”. A programmer in a team has technical skills which can be tested for competence, and classified as a “visible skill”. Also, having acceptable generic and team skills is highly desirable but not always easily testable i.e. testing for time management, problem solving or collaboration skills can be difficult. Another skill set, known as „Emotional Intelligence” is increasingly being promoted as being necessary for successful teamwork. Emotional intelligence consists of five main elements – self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, motivation and social skills which are difficult to test for, and certainly are not as “visible” as technical skills. The study showed a compelling relationship between students’ emotional intelligence and their ability to work effectively within a team. Visible skills and emotional intelligence should both be considered when selecting team members for a collaborative environment.

Figure 1: A spectrum of skills needed for teamwork ⁵⁰

	Technical Skills	Generic Skills	Team Skills	Emotional Intelligence	
“Visible” Skills					“Invisible” Skills
	Programming Design Authoring Other...	Time Management Problem Solving Setting Priorities Other...	Collaboration Communication Negotiation Other...	Empathy Self-awareness Social awareness Other...	

It was found that there was much commonality between successful teamwork and emotional intelligence, there is a strong relationship between successful teamwork and emotional intelligence and contend that emotional intelligence competencies are more important than the “Visible skill” set shown in Figure 1, such as technical competencies. There is more to effective teamwork than a keen intellect and grasp of technical knowledge. The difference between success and mediocrity in working relationships, especially in a team environment, can be attributed to a team member’s mastery of the softer skills – abilities and approaches grounded in emotional intelligence. (Grossman, 2000).

Positive, effective interpersonal relationships are an important element of successful teams. Emotional bonding that exists between team members has a profound effect on the work produced and the overall success of the project. Teams that care about each other at a personal and professional level are more likely to be successful than teams that ignore the importance

⁵⁰ Gujral, H., Ahuja, J., (2011). Impact of Emotional Intelligence on Teamwork – A Comparative Study of Self Managed and Cross Functional teams. International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research, Vol.1 Issue 6, October 2011, ISSN 2231

of the relationship between positive interpersonal relationships, professional relationships and goal achievement. Developing positive relationships where team members are aware of the impact their emotions can play on the effectiveness and success of the team should be the aim of each team member. A positive emotional climate should be developed so that all energies can be focused on the attainment of mutual goals including the success of the project (Johnson & Johnson, 1999).

In order to promote positive, progressive, effective working environments, team members need to have a combination of technical knowledge and well-developed emotional intelligence including self-awareness, empathy, social awareness and be highly motivated and be able to inspire and motivate their colleagues.

Table 1. Emotional Intelligence and attributes of successful teams (Luca & Tarricone, 2001)⁵¹

	Definition	Relationship to Successful Teamwork
Self-Awareness	The ability to recognize and understand one's moods, emotions, and drives, as well as their effect on others	Having positive and productive teamwork skills Controlling emotions and understand the impact of emotions on the team Being self-confident, high self-esteem and a coherent and integrated self-identity Promoting psychological health including a happy disposition
Self-Regulation	The ability to control or redirect disruptive impulses and moods The ability to think before acting	Handling emotions and putting the team task first Using emotions to facilitate the progress of the project Regulating emotions during conflict, pressure, stress and deadlines Coping with stress, frustrations through creating and contributing to caring, supportive relationships
Motivation	A passion to work for reasons that go beyond money or status An inclination to pursue goals with energy and persistence	Motivating other team members to contributing their best Openness, flexibility and motivation to change, innovation, creativity and collaborative problem solving Creating an environment that stimulates, enhances and empowers team members to become motivated and apply themselves fully Showing initiative, perseverance and dedication, goal orientation and focus Having a sincere interest and motivation for the group and individual's achievements and goals Considering team morale and aiming to maintain a positive productive work environment

⁵¹ Luca, J., Tarricone, P. (2001). Does emotional intelligence affect successful teamwork? In Meeting at the crossroads. Proceedings of the 18th Annual Conference of the Australasian Society for Computers in Learning in Tertiary Education. Melbourne, Australia, 9-12 December 2001

Empathy	The ability to understand the emotional background of other people	Understanding, interpreting and identifying with colleagues' feelings Cultivating rapport with people from different backgrounds Showing emotional concern including reassurance and caring for other team members Helping to create a team environment where members can express their feelings
Social Skill	Proficiency in managing relationships and building networks An ability to find common ground and build rapport	Creating a team culture which is supportive, informal, comfortable, and non-judgmental Developing professional as well as positive personal relationships with other team members Developing intense, short-term relationships and being able to disconnect and work in another team environment with the same sincerity and motivation Helping to establish a positive team climate and promoting support and respect for one another Having the ability to interact with team members and deter conflict, be aware of, ease and dissipate underlying tensions

CONCLUSION

Emotionally intelligent teams are more apt to participate in a collaborative culture because they are able to understand their own emotions as well as the emotions of the other team members, which in turn enables them to regulate their emotions and actions. Emotional Intelligence, with regard to management of others emotions and management of one's own emotions, was significantly positively correlated with team trust, which in turn facilitated a collaborative team.

Emotional Intelligence within a team allows members to be in control of their emotions and aware of team member's emotions, which enables a trusting relationship to emerge. Emotional Intelligence also allows teams to communicate well and make decisions that are best for all members. Although Emotional Intelligence alone does not guarantee a team's effective performance, it does enrich the team process. An emotionally competent team can control their own emotions, understand the emotions of their teammates, understand the emotions of the group as a whole, and ultimately use this information to help guide them through the group process. Having high levels of Emotional Intelligence facilitates various aspects of the team process including effective problem solving, high quality production and performance, trust, commitment, interpersonal relationships, and collaboration.

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