

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE - INPUT

INTRODUCTION

The art of sustained leadership is getting ourselves and others to fulfill the mission entrusted to us, and high IQ alone is insufficient to that task. Studies cite a lack of sufficient emotional intelligence amongst leaders to respond to the relational demands of 21st century leadership (Goleman, 2011)¹. From a scientific standpoint, emotional intelligence (EI) is the ability to accurately perceive and manage our own and other's emotions, and use this understanding in managing our relationships. Emotional intelligence can be learned and improved at any age and consists of five basic capabilities, or domains (Goleman, 2000). These are:

1. Self Awareness (the ability to recognize our emotions and understand our strengths and shadows)
2. Self Regulation/Management (the ability to manage our emotions and control our impulses)
3. Self Motivation (the ability to channel our emotions for good purposes and motivate ourselves)
4. Empathy and Social Awareness
5. Relationship Management or Social Skills

MAIN IDEAS

Developing familiarity with our emotions

Since the beginning of the 20th century, mainly with the discoveries of Freud about the unconscious, psychology has become the science of the “psyche”, of the soul. And recently, with Daniel Goleman among others, sciences about emotional awareness has developed. Feelings and intuitions are both a form of intelligence and a source of insight. They can actually help us make sense of an issue, understand its dimensions, and indicate what the stakes really are.

From the research of Carl Jung (Psychological Types, 1921) it has been showed that feeling and thinking are like our two hands. At the beginning of our human growth, we privilege unconsciously the use of one of our hands. We do the same with our rational intelligence and our emotional intelligence. We mainly use the one which is, for us, easier to use. Doing this, we leave in the dark a part of reality. To become a complete adult, we need to open ourselves to the use of the intelligence that has been less used.

Our upbringing and cultures may have impacted how we relate to emotions, viewing them as good or bad, whereas basic emotions are “innate and universal, automatic, and fast, and trigger behaviour with a high survival value”.

Whether we experience them as pleasant or unpleasant, our emotions serve as data about how we relate to a certain situation, and are an engine to our actions. They guide our decisions and determine our choices (be it at work, in relationships, in community...). They are inherently good and are at the core of our humanity.

Understanding the link between our emotions and our needs

In a survey conducted with over 70,000 people, results show that a third of participants either judge themselves for having so-called "bad emotions," like sadness, anger or even grief, or actively try to push aside these feelings.

There is high cost to avoiding our feelings or trying to power through "negative" ones rather than paying attention to them. Research on emotional suppression shows that when emotions are pushed aside or ignored, they get stronger. We may think we're in control of unwanted emotions when we ignore them, but in fact they control us. Suppressing them and being unwilling to understand them negatively impact the quality of our decision-making and relationships.

Marshall Rosenberg emphasized the link between feelings and needs (Nonviolent Communication : A language of compassion - 1999 & 2015). Joy for example reveals a fulfilled need. Unfulfilled needs are revealed by sadness, fear, anger and culpability. During a conversation, you learn more by paying attention to your feelings and those of the other person, than to the ideas which are shared. You learn the best if you become able to make the link between feelings and needs. For example: "This person is angry. Does she need attention, trust, security, gratitude, respect...?"

Research confirms that the unconditional acceptance of all emotions -- especially the messy and difficult ones -- is the foundation for resilience, thriving, and genuine happiness. As we allow ourselves to welcome our feelings and those of others without censorship and listen to them and the data they carry, we increase our ability to practice emotional intelligence.

Developing our emotional intelligence goes hand in hand with broadening our emotional vocabulary. As we improve our ability to "name" our emotions and consider their intensity, we are able to see the red issue at hand, understand the experience more clearly and build an adapted course of action to address the problem. This also helps us better understand another person's emotions and grow in our understanding of others.

Managing our emotions:

Our ability to manage our emotional state is critical for leadership work (our moods and reactions impact the results and environment around us). While our emotions are data about our needs and values, they are not final directives. Uneducated emotions may hold us back, and lead us astray. Thus the importance of growing our ability to manage or redirect disruptive impulses/moods and to think before acting.

Self-management does not mean suppressing the emotions. There will be instances in which anger or sadness are healthy and reasonable responses. In these settings, we can show up to our emotions and welcome them openly without necessarily needing to act upon them. The critical issue is to have the awareness and mindfulness to name them and express them in appropriate ways (channeling them to serve our purpose and mission).

Often, as we take the opportunity to name what we feel, we gain control over the situation, and awareness of our ability to choose an appropriate reaction to the feeling we named rather than just blindly reacting to it.

IGNATIAN NOTE

Emotional awareness and affectivity are at the core of Ignatian discernment and decision-making. The Spiritual Exercises were written as Ignatius was attempting to understand his own emotional state. It is therefore not surprising that in this document he gives special emphasis to the rules on how to discern affective movements (Spiritual Exercises 313-336). Ignatius lived his life as a soldier seeking the glories of warfare. Following his leg injury he had a lot of time to re-think his priorities on his recovery bed in Loyola. His life changed totally when he gradually became conscious of what had been left unconscious within him: feelings of joy and feelings of sadness. Amazed, he discovered that his feeling of lasting joy could be a criterion of discernment.

Ignatius spent time understanding his own affections and distinguishing between authentic and ephemeral desires. His experience can help us understand our own emotions and attachments in order to redirect them in a healthier direction just like he did. The Exercises that he wrote aim to develop our sensitivity to our interior movements, and train us to recognize those inviting us to fuller forms of life and relationships. Such an exercise is not always easy as it involves noticing our inner chaos and confronting difficult parts of our experience such as our shame, confusion or sadness. However, without listening and working through all the emotions we are feeling we might miss on recognizing vital moments of consolation and peace and fall into emotional numbness .

FINAL THOUGHT

Stirred up hearts

Then the two men said to each other, "Were not our hearts stirred up within us [i.e., our emotions thrilled] when Jesus spoke to us along the road and opened up the Scriptures [to our understanding]? Luke 24:32

EXPECTED LEARNINGS AND OUTCOMES

1. Introducing Daniel Goleman's theory of Emotional Intelligence
2. Increasing awareness of our own emotions
3. Providing tools to improve their emotional awareness and self-management

"Are you brave enough to be vulnerable?"

Justin Baldoni

[1] It is important to mention that although widely used, Emotional Quotient (EQ) is not as easy to assess scientifically as the Intelligence Quotient (IQ), a reduced number of experts go as far as saying that there are not reliable EQ empirical research. In any case, these two concepts are not substitutes for each other rather than complementary