

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Is emotion opposed to reason?

With the advent of scientific management, from the late nineteenth century, the protocol of workplace was to keep a check on emotions. The prevailing culture was to consider emotions as the antithesis of rationality. A well-run organization didn't allow employees to express frustration, fear, anger, hate, love, joy, grief, and similar feelings. Emotions were moreover associated with strong negative feelings like anger, and hence considered as disruptive – interfering with the employee's ability to work effectively thereby affecting his (her) productivity. Emotions were viewed as anything but constructive, or contributing to performance enhancement. Said Horace Walpole "Life is a comedy for those who think and a tragedy for those who feel."

From the above context, can we conclude that emotions obstruct rationality? Let us take the case of Phineas Gage, a railroad worker at Vermont. One September day in 1848, while Gage was setting an explosive charge at work, a 3'7" iron bar flew into his lower left jaw and out through the top of his skull. Remarkably, Gage survived this injury. He was still able to read and speak, and he performed well **above average** on cognitive ability tests (unchanged IQ). However, it became clear that Gage lost his ability to experience emotion. He was emotionless even at the saddest misfortunes or the happiest occasions. Now you may conclude from the context of the previous paragraph that Gage's performance will be superlative because he is emotionally flat. But the reality was that Gage's inability to emote took away his ability to reason as well. He started to make irrational choices about his life, often behaving erratically and against his self interests. Despite being an intelligent man whose intellectual abilities were unharmed by the accident, Gage drifted from job to job, eventually taking up with a circus. This case has parallels to several such instances of brain injuries affecting the emotional centers of the brain or in a disease which psychiatrists call *alexithymia* (Greek *a* – for "lack", *lexis* - for "word", and *thymos* - for "emotion").

Let us examine another case. It was a tragedy of errors. Fourteen-year old Matilda Crabtree was just playing a practical joke on her father: she jumped out of a closet and yelled "Boo" when her parents came home at one in the morning from visiting friends. But Mr. Bobby Crabtree and his wife thought that Matilda was staying with her friends that night. Hearing noises as he entered the house, Crabtree reached for his .357 caliber pistol and went into Matilda's room to investigate. When his daughter jumped out of the closet, Crabtree shot her in the neck. Matilda died twelve hours later. One emotional legacy is fear that mobilizes us to protect our family from danger; that impulse impelled Bobby Crabtree to get his gun and search the house for the intruder he thought was prowling there. Fear primed Crabtree to shoot before he could fully register what he was shooting at, before even he could recognize his daughter's voice.

In commenting on analogous cases, one expert noted, "Reason may not be so pure as most of us think it is or wish it were .. emotions and feelings may not be intruders in the bastion of reason at all: they may be enmeshed in its networks, for worse *and* for better." Certainly, some emotions, particularly when exhibited at the wrong time, can hinder employee performance. But this doesn't change the fact that employees bring their emotional sides with them to work every day (for good or evil) – no study of organizational behavior will be worthwhile without considering the role of emotions in workplace behavior. Emotions don't make us irrational, nay they are actually critical to rational thinking, because they provide important information about how we understand the world around us. The key to decision-making is to employ both thinking and feeling in one's decisions. A service employee who feels empathy for a customer will provide better customer service than a seemingly unfeeling employee. So says Antoine de Saint-Exupery: "It is with the heart that one sees rightly; **what is essential is invisible to the eye.**"

EMOTIONS

As has been digressed earlier, each one of us brings with him or her, a range of emotions to the workplace. Given the obvious role that emotions play in our everyday lives, it might surprise you to learn that, until very recently, the topic of emotions was given little or no attention in the field of organizational behavior. When emotions were considered, the discussion focused on strong negative emotions—especially anger—that interfered with an employee’s ability to do his or her job effectively. Emotions were rarely viewed as constructive or able to stimulate performance-enhancing behaviors. But now it is clear to all psychologists that employees do bring their emotional sides to work – emotions cannot be avoided – in fact they are essential for reason and wise decision making. However, while positive moods enhance creativity, negative emotions may lead to deviant behaviors. Hence managers need to study emotions and use this knowledge for performance (productivity) enhancement, mitigation of organizational deviance, and promotion of organizational citizenship.

What Are Emotions?

Emotions are intense feelings that are directed at someone or something. Emotions are different from **moods**, which are feelings that tend to be less intense than emotions and that lack a contextual stimulus.

Emotions are *reactions* to an object; they are not lasting personality traits. You show your emotions when you are “happy about something, angry at someone, afraid of something.” Moods, on the other hand, are not directed at an object. Emotions can turn into moods when you lose focus on the contextual object. So when a colleague criticizes you for the way you spoke to a client, you might become angry at him. That is, you show emotion (anger) toward a specific



Figure 1

object (your colleague). But later in the day, you might find yourself just generally dispirited. You cannot attribute this feeling to any single event; you are just not your normal, upbeat self. This state describes a mood.

Research has identified six universal emotions: anger, fear, sadness, happiness, disgust, and surprise. One factor that has strongly shaped what is and isn’t listed in this basic set is the manner in which the emotions were identified. Researchers tended to look for universally identified facial expressions and then convert them into categories. Emotions that could not be identified readily by others through facial expressions, or that were considered a subset of one of the basic six, were not selected.

Figure 1 illustrates that the six emotions can be conceptualized as existing along a continuum. The closer any two emotions are to each other on this continuum, the more people are likely to confuse them. For instance, happiness and surprise are frequently mistaken for each other, while happiness and disgust are rarely confused. Beware that cultural factors can also influence interpretations of facial expressions. For instance, US managers in Japan should know that while the US culture views smiling positively, the Japanese attribute frequent smiling to lack of intelligence.

Choosing Emotions: Emotional Labour

Sometimes individuals are required to manage their emotions. For instance, you may be very angry with a co-worker or manager, but you may choose to suppress that anger in the interest of keeping the peace and/or your job. The display of emotions is governed somewhat by workplace norms and the demands of particular situations. For instance, crying is generally viewed as inappropriate in the workplace, particularly when it is a response to being criticized. Crying would be viewed more acceptably if someone were just notified of the death of a close relative, however. The ritual look of delight on the face of the first runner up as the new Miss India is announced is the produce of the display rule that losers should mask their sadness with an expression of joy for the winner. However, recent research suggests that negative emotions, even when controlled, generally lead to poorer performance.

Emotional labour refers to the requirement that employees express particular emotions at work (for instance, enthusiasm or cheerfulness) to maximize organizational productivity. This term was first coined by Professor Arlie Hochschild of the University of California, Berkeley, and refers to the demand organizations make on their employees to display “appropriate” emotions during interpersonal transactions.

The concept of emotional labour originally developed in relation to service jobs. Flight attendants, for instance, are expected to be cheerful, funeral counsellors sad, and doctors emotionally neutral. Studies of emotional labour have explored how smiling flight attendants, cheerful grocery clerks, gossipy hairdressers, and nasty bill collectors are expected to control their emotional expression to improve productivity, customer satisfaction, efficiency, and even profitability. But today, the concept of emotional labour seems relevant to almost every job. You are expected, for example, to be courteous and not hostile in interactions with coworkers. And leaders are expected to draw on emotional labour to “charge the troops.” Almost every great speech, for instance, contains a strong emotional component that stirs feelings in others.

As these studies show, however, managing emotions can take a toll when there is a discrepancy between the outward behaviour the person is required to display as part of his or her job and the inward feelings that the person has. Therefore, while emotional labour can have positive implications within the workplace, it can also have negative personal consequences when a person consistently hides real emotions behind a work “face.” Flight attendants use the phrase “go robot” to describe how they separate their private feelings from their public behaviour. Other researchers have discussed both the individual effects of emotional labour, such as distancing, burnout, and phoniness, and the organizational effects, such as suppressed disagreements, reduced upward information flow, and loss of “voice.” A shopping mall employee described her company’s requirement to smile at all shoppers: “My personal opinion is, they’re expecting us not to be human. I just can’t walk around with a smile on my face all day.”

Emotional labour creates dilemmas for employees when their jobs require them to exhibit emotions that are inconsistent with their actual feelings. Not surprisingly, this is a frequent occurrence. There are people you have to work with to whom you find it very difficult to be friendly. Maybe you consider their personalities abrasive. Maybe you know they have said negative things about you behind your back. Regardless, your job requires you to interact with these people on a regular basis. So you are forced to pretend to be friendly.

Why Should We Care About Emotions in the Workplace?

There are a number of reasons to be concerned about understanding emotions in the workplace. People who know their own emotions and are good at reading others’ emotions may be more effective in their jobs. That, in essence, is the theme underlying recent research on emotional intelligence. The entire workplace can be affected by positive or negative workplace emotions, another issue we consider below. One recent study found that when leaders were in a positive mood, individual group members experienced better moods, and groups had a more positive tone.

Groups whose leaders had a positive mood also found it easier to coordinate tasks, and expended less effort when doing their work.

Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence (EI) refers to an assortment of non-cognitive skills, capabilities, and competencies that influence a person's ability to succeed in coping with environmental demands and pressures. It's composed of five dimensions:

- *Self-awareness.* Being aware of what you are feeling. Inability to notice our true feelings leaves us at their mercy. People with greater certainty about their feelings are better pilots of their lives. It is exhibited by self-confidence, realistic self-assessment, and a self-deprecating sense of humour.
- *Self-management.* The ability to manage your own emotions and impulses. This gives us the capacity to console ourselves, shake off rampant anxiety, gloom and irritability and the consequences of failure. With this skill one can bounce back more quickly from life's setbacks and distress, and those lacking this skill are constantly battling with feeling of distress. Evidence of this personality trait is exhibited by trustworthiness and integrity, comfort with ambiguity, and openness to change.
- *Self-motivation.* The ability to persist in the face of setbacks and failures. Emotional self control – delaying gratification and stifling impulsiveness – underlies accomplishment of every sort. It is exhibited by a strong drive to achieve, optimism, and high organizational commitment - keystones of high productivity.
- *Empathy.* The ability to sense how others are feeling – a fundamental “people skill”. People who are more empathetic are attuned to subtle social signals that indicate what others need, want and aspire. It is exhibited by expertise in building and retaining talent, cross-cultural sensitivity, and service to clients and customers. This skill is highly priced in such (people processing) professions as teaching, sales, customer care, and management.
- *Social skills.* The ability to manage the emotions of others – the art of relationships. These are abilities that undergird popularity, leadership and interpersonal effectiveness. It is exhibited by persuasiveness, and expertise in building and leading groups and teams. If you excel in these skills, you will be a social star – successful at anything that relies on interacting smoothly with others.

EI differs from emotional labour because the latter is a job requirement (the demand to smile, express enthusiasm, etc.) while the former is regarded as a personality trait. A person with low EI may control his emotions because of a request from a manager (thus engaging in emotional labour), but might otherwise not do so.

Several studies suggest EI may play an important role in job performance. For instance, one study looked at the characteristics of Bell Labs engineers who were rated as stars by their peers. The scientists concluded that stars were better at relating to others. That is, it was EI, not academic IQ, that characterized high performers.

Another study of US Air Force recruiters generated similar findings. Top-performing recruiters exhibited high levels of EI. Using these findings, the US Air Force revamped its selection criteria. A follow-up investigation found that hires who had high EI scores were 2.6 times more successful than those who did not.

Corporations are acting on the results of these studies. A recent poll of human resource managers asked: How important is it for your workers to demonstrate EI to move up the corporate

ladder? Forty percent replied “Very Important.” Another 16 percent said “Moderately Important.” Irene Taylor, a consultant with Toronto-based Praxis Canada, says her company “has conducted EQ assessments on about 300 Canadian lawyers over the past five years.” She also says that demand to get into the company’s EI coaching program is high. Professor John Oesch of the Joseph L. Rotman School of Management at the University of Toronto explains why coaching in EI has become popular: “It’s a solid psychological construct that can be measured and, to a certain extent, taught.”

Tony Comper, president and CEO of the Bank of Montreal, certainly agrees with the importance of understanding EI. He cites Daniel Goleman’s *Working With Emotional Intelligence* as one of his favourite books on leadership. This article’s *From Concepts to Skills* gives you some insight into reading the emotions of others.

Negative Workplace Emotions

Negative emotions can lead to a number of deviant workplace behaviours. Anyone who has spent much time in an organization realizes that people often engage in voluntary actions that violate established norms and threaten the organization, its members, or both. These actions are called **employee deviance**. They fall into categories such as production (leaving early, intentionally working slowly); property (stealing, sabotage); political (gossiping, blaming co-workers); and personal aggression.

Many of these deviant behaviors can be traced to negative emotions. For instance, envy is an emotion that occurs when you resent someone for having something that you don’t have but strongly desire. It can lead to malicious deviant behaviors. Envy, for example, has been found to be associated with hostility, “backstabbing,” and other forms of political behavior, as well as with negatively distorting others’ successes and positively distorting one’s own accomplishments.

From Concepts to Skills

Reading Emotions

Understanding another person’s felt emotions is very difficult. But we can learn to read others’ displayed emotions. We do this by focusing on verbal, nonverbal, and paralanguage cues.

The easiest way to find out what someone is feeling is to ask. Saying something as simple as “Are you OK? What’s the problem?” can often provide you with the information to assess an individual’s emotional state. But relying on a verbal response has two drawbacks. First, almost all of us conceal our emotions to some extent for privacy and to reflect social expectations. So we might be unwilling to share our true feelings. Second, even if we want to verbally convey our feelings, we may be unable to do so. As we noted earlier, some people have difficulty understanding their own emotions and, hence, are unable to express them verbally. So, at best, verbal responses provide only partial information.

You are talking with a co-worker. Does the fact that his back is rigid, his teeth are clenched, and his facial muscles tight tell you something about his emotional state? It probably should. Facial expressions, gestures, body movements, and physical distance are nonverbal cues that can provide additional insights into what a person is feeling. The facial expressions shown in Figure 2, for instance, are a window into a person’s feelings. Notice the difference in facial features: the height of the cheeks, the raising or lowering of the brow, the turn of the mouth, the positioning of the lips, and the configuration of muscles around the eyes. Even something as subtle as the distance someone chooses to put between him- or herself and you can convey how much intimacy, aggressiveness, repugnance, or withdrawal that person feels.

When you speak with someone, you may notice a sharp change in the tone of her voice and the speed at which she speaks. You are tapping into the third source of information on a person’s emotions—paralanguage. This is communication that goes beyond the specific spoken words. It includes pitch, amplitude, rate, and voice quality of speech. Paralanguage reminds us that people convey their feelings not only in what they say, but also in how they say it.

Each picture portrays a different emotion. Try to identify them before looking at the answers.



Top, left to right: neutral, surprise, happiness. Bottom: fear, sadness, anger.

Figure 2: Facial Expressions and Emotions

A Game you can play

Part A. Form groups of two. Each person is to spend a couple of minutes thinking of a time in the past when she or he was emotional about something. Examples might include being upset with a parent, sibling, or friend; being excited or disappointed about an academic or athletic achievement; being angry with someone over an insult or slight; being disgusted by something someone has said or done; or being happy because of something good that happened. Do not share this event with the other person in your group.

Part B. Now you will conduct two role plays. Each will be an interview. In the first, one person will play the interviewer and the other will play the job applicant. The job is for a summer management internship with BSNL. Each role play will last no longer than 10 minutes. The interviewer is to conduct a normal job interview, except you are to continually rethink the emotional episode you envisioned in Part A. Try hard to convey this emotion while, at the same time, being professional in interviewing the job applicant.

Part C. Now reverse positions for the second role play. The interviewer becomes the job applicant and vice versa. The new interviewer will conduct a normal job interview, except that he or she will continually rethink the emotional episode chosen in Part A.

Part D. Spend 10 minutes analyzing the interview, with specific attention focused on these questions: What emotion(s) do you think the other person was conveying? What cues did you pick up? How accurate were you in reading those cues?