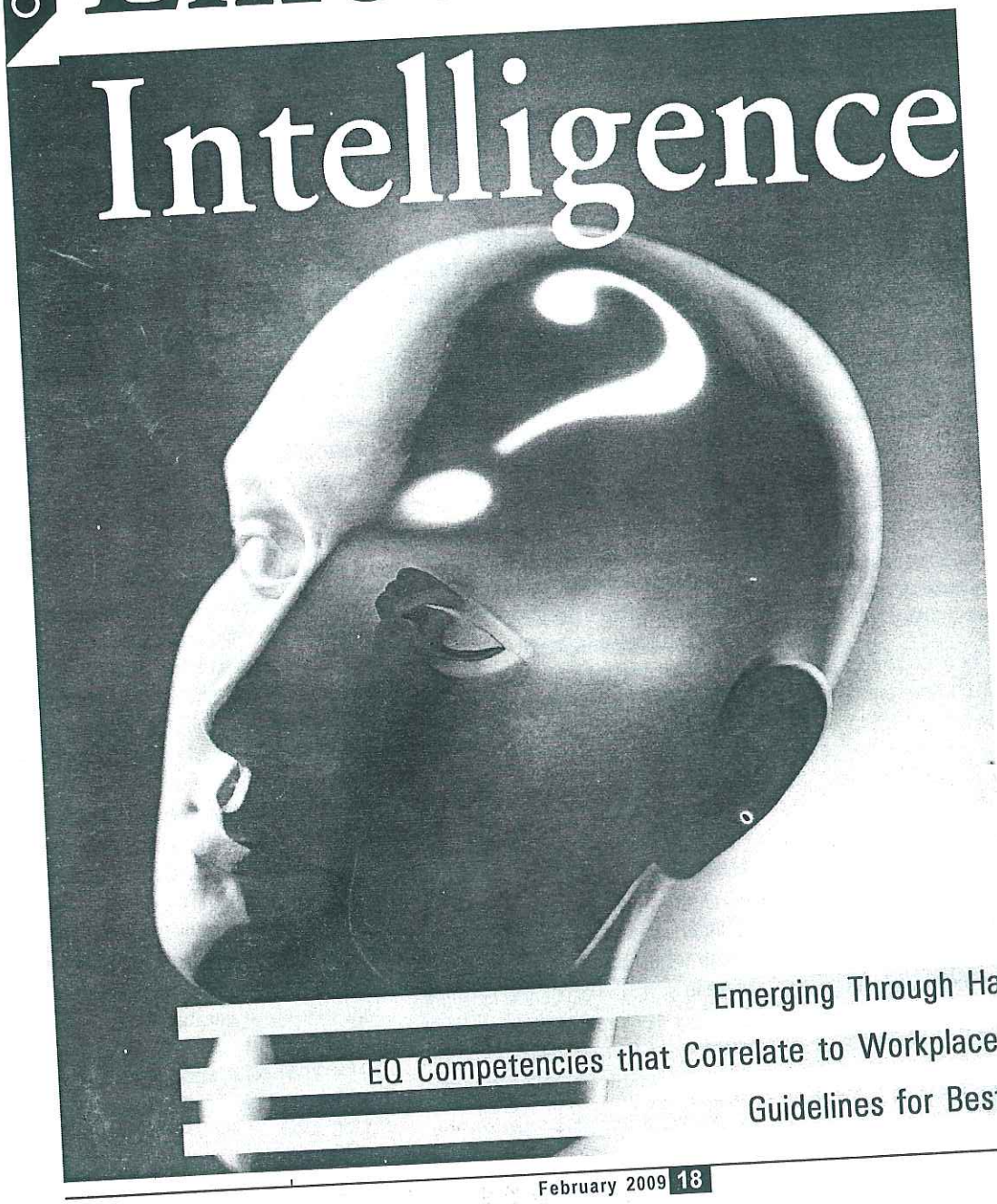
Cover Feature

Workplace Emotional Intelligence



Emerging Through Hard Times

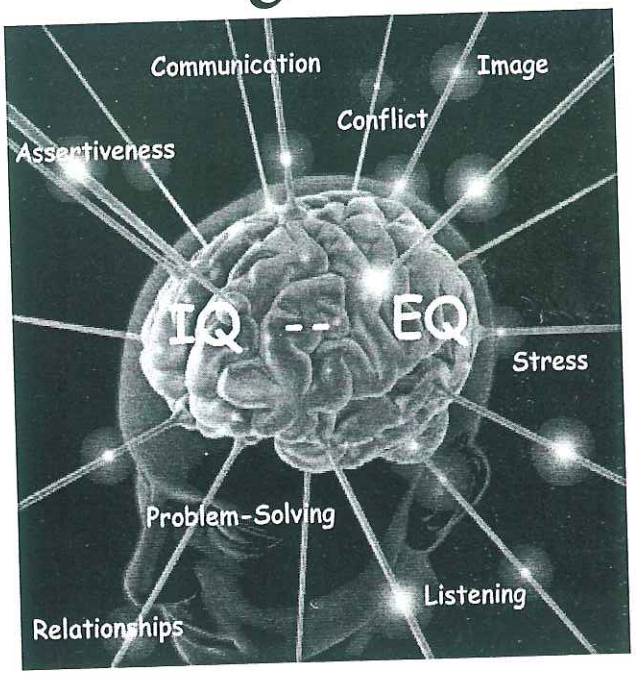
EQ Competencies that Correlate to Workplace Success

Guidelines for Best Practice

Cover Feature

Emerging Through Hard Times with Emotional Intelligence

A ship is not considered sea-worthy until it is equipped with life-boats as there is no scope for building one when the storm whips up. Investing resources in developing emotional competencies, building relationships, positive attitude and positive health is undoubtedly worth its while as these boost confidence to levels that integrate resilience into character. Resilience is a quality that needs to be built during times of peace and well-being, with the foresight that things could go wrong. The emotional brain empowers individuals with the competence to emerge from adverse circumstances, wiser and stronger than before.



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We cannot build a bridge when the waters are swirling or build strength when faced with a fight. In that challenging moment we have to make do with what we already have. If we are brittle we crack up and get shattered, and we have seen suicides, murder of whole families by their own protector, depression, desertion and desperate crimes in the wake of the global financial meltdown. Yet there are many who can stoically weather such storms and emerge wiser, more stable and confident than before. The quality that underlies the capability for such buoyancy is called 'Resilience' as displayed by the tree that bends before the fury of the storm and sprouts new leaves when the wind abates, nourished by the nitrates generated by the lightning.

Resilience

Resilience is a learned quality developed by observing how others weather their storms. Learning by watching is a function of mirror neurons. Collectively the mirror neuron system in the brain functions as a wireless receiver that internalizes the experiences of others. If we wait to learn only from our own experiences we would have to wait for hundreds of years for wisdom to take root and constantly reinvent every wheel. This invaluable mechanism in our heads allows us to empathize and learn from example, from fables, books and films.

Relationships

Internalizing the experience of others is the mechanism we use to empathize. Because we have empathy we can sense what is appropriate and acceptable to others. The neural system for empathy forms the basis of social

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EQ Competencies that Correlate to Workplace Success

Mike Poskey, ZERORISK HR, Inc.

The following outlines a set of five emotional intelligence competencies that have proven to contribute more to workplace achievement than technical skills, cognitive ability, and standard personality traits combined.

Social Competencies-
That Determine How We Handle Relationships

Intuition & Empathy. Our awareness of others' feelings, needs, and concerns. This competency is important in the workplace for the following reasons.

- Understanding others: an intuitive sense of others' feelings and perspectives, and showing an active interest in their concerns and interests
- Customer service orientation: the ability to anticipate, recognize, and meet customers' needs
- People development: ability to sense what others need in order to grow, develop, and master their strengths
- Leveraging diversity: cultivating opportunities through diverse people

Political Acumen & Social Skills. Our adeptness at inducing desirable responses in others. This competency is important in the workplace for the following reasons.

- **Influencing:** using effective tactics and techniques for persuasion and desired results
- **Communication:** sending clear and convincing messages that are understood by others
- **Leadership:** inspiring and guiding groups of people
- **Change catalyst:** initiating and/or managing change in the workplace
- **Conflict resolution:** negotiating and resolving disagreements with people
- **Building bonds:** nurturing instrumental relationships for business success
- **Collaboration and cooperation:** working with coworkers and business partners toward shared goals
- **Team capabilities:** creating group synergy in pursuing collective goals

Personal Competencies-
That Determine How We Manage Ourselves

Self Awareness. Knowing one's internal states, preferences, resources, and intuitions. This competency is important in the workplace for the following reasons.

- **Emotional awareness:** recognizing one's emotions and their effects and impact on those around us
- **Accurate self-assessment:** knowing one's strengths and limits
- **Self-confidence:** sureness about one's self-worth and capabilities

Self Regulation. Managing one's internal states, impulses, and resources. This competency is important in the workplace for the following reasons.

- **Self-control:** managing disruptive emotions and impulses
- **Trustworthiness:** maintaining standards of honesty and integrity
- **Conscientiousness:** taking responsibility and being accountable for personal performance
- **Adaptability:** flexibility in handling change
- **Innovation:** being comfortable with an openness to novel ideas, approaches, and new information

Self Expectations & Motivation. Emotional tendencies that guide or facilitate reaching goals. This competency is important in the workplace for the following reasons.

- **Achievement drive:** striving to improve or meet a standard of excellence we impose on ourselves
- **Commitment:** aligning with the goals of the group or organization
- **Initiative:** readiness to act on opportunities without having to be told

Optimism: persistence in pursuing goals despite obstacles and setbacks

interaction and relationship building. Stable nourishing and fulfilling relationships provide us support and boost confidence during stressful times. It has been observed through evidence based studies that people who maintain fulfilling relationships fare better in health and performance when faced with stressful situations.

Two or more persons who bond with each other and are well attuned affect each other physiologically through emotional contagion. They wirelessly pick up non verbal cues and pick up the dominant emotion and each other's mood. Moods and emotions are mediated biologically by specific hormones. Most hormones associated with positive moods (endorphin, dopamine, oxytocin) boost immune functions and enhance health and healing, while the chemical that mediate anger, fear and anxiety (noradrenaline, adrenaline and cortisol) dampen immune functions and natural replacement of cells lost in wear and tear. Bonding repeatedly, many times a day keeps up a regular infusion of oxytocin that further strengthens the bond by improving levels of trust, loyalty and generosity. The health of our relationships will soon reflect on our physical and mental health and vice versa.

Attitude

In tough times attitude is the filter through which we view the challenge. Some are stimulated by challenge while others experience distress. A person who has a robust lifeboat rushes out to ride the flood waters. Others who have leaky boats make an attempt but don't get far, while those who do nothing but curse their fate get sucked beneath the swirling currents. Many factors contribute to attitude so here I would like to mention only a few:

1. Realistic Self-Image.
2. Clarity about what constitutes Identity e.g. someone may confuse social position, wealth, ideas or life-style as an integral part of the core. When one of these is lost, defeated or altered, they feel broken. The core is best kept lean, containing ones values, character and learning (as distinct from knowledge).
3. Ego in proportion to skill sets and influence.

Balance and realism act as ballast, steadying the floundering life-boat

Direction

Being in touch with the internal value system with one's individual set of priorities, coupled with focused aspirations and goals we are passionate about, act as the rudder, so the lifeboat can be steered towards a destination instead of being helplessly washed up with the prevailing winds and currents.

Neurological Life-boat

In neurological terms the orbito-frontal cortex acts as a lifeboat that carries us past the flash floods of misery. It is a strap of brain tissue that connects the thinking analytical mind (Pre-frontal cortex) with the spontaneous and perceptive emotional center (Amygdala). The OFC is a very capable raft. It tethers the emotional brain to its thinking counterpart thus exerts a calming influence, making it pause long enough to see reason, thus making the individual capable of delaying gratification, of regulating reaction with inputs about what is most appropriate for the situation by weighing the pros and cons and arriving at a balanced judgment.

The Emotional Center by itself is very capable. It has the advantage of superior speed over the thinking cortex because it generates reaction without thought, so the reactions are usually characteristic and well rehearsed moves, regardless of political correctness, in line with the individual value system, current emotion and ego state. If unregulated, reactiveness initiated from this level can be extreme. Nature has provided the apparatus for regulation, but the thinking levels have many connections that significantly slow down the process. Hence a pause as long as a fraction of a second is necessary to bring emotion into the stratum of thoughtful analysis and allow for the process of evaluation of a situation and choice of response from a range of options. Perhaps evolution has noted that decision making is a slow process and designed super-fast plump spindle shaped neurons named VEN (Von Economo Neuron) after their discoverer, to make up for this tardiness.

VEN are found abundantly in the OFC of humans, more abundant than in other primate species. The purpose behind the peculiar top-heavy, front-loaded design of the human brain, armed with superfast processors seems to suggest that social intelligence has been selected for further evolution and 'responsiveness' has been favored over 'reactiveness' in human beings. The frontal lobe of the brain houses the Emotional Manager and connects to the Emotional mid-brain via the bridge formed by the OFC. Signal traffic on this highway is considerably accelerated by presence of VEN cells so only a fraction of a second is required to pull emotions into the level of awareness and analysis. A considered responsive action can then be initiated from the thinking level rather than the faster 'reactionary' type of action that comes from the middle spontaneous sub-conscious brain. Responsive people can adapt to changes and adjust with set-backs. They

can proactively turn around negative moods and look for opportunity within a down-turn. They can maintain optimism in the face of failure and bounce back to equanimity after episodes of agitation. But for all this one must have a well developed OFC (Emotional Regulator).

Brain tissue does not develop overnight. OFC development begins at the age of two and carries on well into adulthood. Children quietly observe how their significant adults handle their emotions and learn. They notice whether adults react or respond by reading non-verbal cues. They see just how long it takes for adults to lose their cool, display irritation and impatience. They observe how long adults remain in altered mood states, how they manage their anger and joy. This learning is experiential and is boosted by multi-sensorial inputs. Nurturing of the child with loving care, attunement and provision of secure comfortable environments enhance brain development as the chemical milieu within the happy appreciated child is rife with hormones that are conducive to growth and maintenance of neurons.

Stories of heroic deeds, of persistence under adverse circumstances and using the thinking processes to get out of unpleasant situations, like the classic Panchatantra Tales play an important role in a child's development process. They demonstrate through mirror cell mechanisms how to bring the thinking circuits into the action loop instead of functioning only from the lower reflex arcs.

Personal Discipline

Learning to delay impulse and apply thought before action has been demonstrated in toddlers as seen in the famous Marshmallow Test conducted on four year olds (Walter Mischel from Stanford). The ability to delay gratification, while remaining focused on higher expectation, is a remarkable ability at that age and stands one in good stead throughout adult life. It marks the laying down of the framework for integrity and dependability. With such a framework in place it becomes possible to take on responsibility. As a child grows in physical strength it is essential to realize that 'with great power comes great responsibility (Spiderman)'

Much of life's lessons are learned outside the classroom. Experiences during travel and camping teach children adaptability, while craft work and experiments uncover their innovativeness allowing them to break moulds and think out-of-the-box. These experiences impart self-knowledge and confidence of 'I can' encouraging development of self-esteem creating positive internal environment.

The feel-good of self-confidence needs to be balanced with a touch of realism. Parents and teachers have the tight rope task of balancing appreciation with criticism. As a child grows and cannot always look towards significant adults for praise or chastisement they internalize this function as the 'Parent' of Transactional Analysis (Superego of Freud), the critical nature of this mechanism has also earned it the name of 'Critical Pig' Overactive ego could lead to overconfidence while overactive critical systems lead to self-loathing and guilt. A child needs a mature mentor to assist in maintaining a balance between the praise and criticism and help him stay in touch with reality. Staying real makes a person effective and prevents neuroticism. Balancing self-esteem with inconvenient truth is the first lesson for achieving a balanced personality and psyche.

Personal Discipline is visible early in life marked by the invaluable abilities of: Delaying Gratification, Taking Responsibility, Adaptability, Balancing between extremes.

These traits enable individuals to strike up and maintain relationships based on trust. They are by habit optimistic and positive and are found on an average in positive mood states. Internal discipline results in equanimity that serves them in good stead during adolescence when peer pressures tend to swerve the less balanced persons away from the focus on progress. The follow up of the marshmallow kids who had delayed gratification showed they performed better at SAT scores and reached further professionally than those who had succumbed to the tempting sticky sweet-meat.

Emotional Inputs for Analytical Processes

Paying conscious heed to the valuable information input from the Emotional Center is an important step in the process of analytical thought as this acts as a compass pointing towards the direction favored by the individual value system and away from innately fearful options. Inputs from Emotional system also bring the wisdom of intuition and greatly speed up the process of decision making and response.

Brain circuits like all biological processes need to be exercised to remain fit. Regulating emotions a little every day will ensure robustness of this tissue. Interestingly studies by Antonio Damasio on his patient Elliot who had the connection between the emotional brain and the frontal thinking brain severed by surgery that was necessary to remove a tumour have demonstrated that without this bridge the individual is rendered emotionally unaware, unable to

decide as he had no preferences and was sadly bereft of intuition. We realize that the emotional information that comes from the Amygdala is invaluable to the process of decision making. Interaction between the thinking and emotional levels is not merely in sending calming and delaying signals one-way, but also in receiving vital information and inputs that contribute towards decisions.

In hard times people have to make vital decisions and sense opportunity through intuitiveness. The decisions usually have to be quick, hence emotional information may be the only information available. Intuition is reliable because the emotional brain is honest. (You may have noticed that it is impossible to lie without engaging the thinking brain). Although intuition should not be ignored, its information should be corroborated with hard fact at the first opportunity. Make a habit of noting down a hunch as soon as it comes through on a napkin, on the margin of your notebook, diary, in your mobile text box – anywhere.

The Whole Brain

The thinking cortex is divided down its middle into the right and left hemispheres held together by a thick band called the Corpus Callosum. Persons used to functioning dominantly from the levels of logic, thought, linguistics or calculations tend to get lateralized and use one side of the brain more than the other. Those who use the left side more are analytical while artists and designers tend to function from the right brain. The emotional level is in the mid brain and though the mid-brain has its right and left too it is not demarcated so acutely and has plenty of connections with both sides of the brain. Invoking the emotions helps to connect the two sides of the brain gently goading it on to whole-brained function. Humour is one mechanism by which the emotional brain can be brought into play while lightening up the mood and initiating wholesome laughter. The process recruits the emotional circuits and releases a dollop of endorphin (happiness hormone), creating a potent milieu for creative genius to flourish. An idea, they say, can turn your life around.

Approach to Stress

Stress is a condition or feeling experienced when a person perceives that demands exceed the personal and social resources the individual is able to mobilize (Richard S Lazarus). Hence stress is a matter of perception and different individuals would perceive it in different measure. One's ability to cope would soften the effect of circumstances upon the person. Coping is based on internal and external factors:

Factors that Enhance Coping Ability

INTERNAL- Self Confidence, Skills, Knowledge

EXTERNAL- Resources, Dependable Team, Dependable Relationships.

Coping ability could get undermined if perception of stress is complicated by insidious factors as listed here:

Factors that Increase Stress Perception

INTERNAL- Ego Imbalance, Emotional Turmoil, Difficulty in Maintaining Relationships, Negative attitude towards Failure, Negative attitude towards Criticism illness.

EXTERNAL- Serious financial trouble, Job crisis, Lawsuit / divorce, Isolation / love-lessness, illness of family members, War / political instability, Harassment

Awareness about the internal factors is likely to encourage people to seek basic understanding about Ego, Emotions, Empathy and Relationship. If we find negative attitudes affecting the way in which we view failure or criticism and feed-back, we can seek guidance and alter these attitudes. At the root of these factors lies Emotional Intelligence, the ability to sense and understand one's own emotions, to express and regulate them appropriately and to use them in the process of decision making. It includes the capacity to understand and feel for others, and so set up and maintain quality of relationships. Instruction about Emotional Intelligence is sadly missing from formal education curricula at present. Readers are urged to obtain guidance from books and Consultants for comprehensive understanding applicable to everyday life. To deal with external factors we can do only one thing that is – Build Resilience and resilience is built with Emotional Intelligence.

EMERGENCY KIT

Here is a checklist of assets that serve to carry us safely through hard times: Healthy body and mind, Genuine Friends and associates, Loving Relationships, Sense of humour, Creativity, Personal Discipline, Connectedness with Reality, Positive Attitude.

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