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Emotional Intelligence

The missing ingredient to
leadership success?



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Traditionally organisations have focused most of their money and efforts on hiring individuals with high IQ and strong technical skills/knowledge. When you combine this with information about personality, one would assume you would not only have a good indication of whom to hire, but also some clarity surrounding your organisation's future leaders. Correct?

Growing research over the past fifteen years suggests that another key ingredient distinguishes good leaders from great leaders – Emotional Intelligence or EI. Having a good understanding of others' EI will help you to attract, retain and grow a robust leadership pipeline.

Daniel Goleman (1998) analysed the competency frameworks of 188 organisations across varying industries, only to discover that EI is twice as important as technical skill and cognitive ability when trying to predict high performance; particularly in regards to leadership roles. This is not to say that intellect and technical skills are not important contributors to leadership success, but rather, they are 'threshold capabilities', i.e. they are the entry level requirements for executive positions. Further, a recent meta-analytic investigation by O'Boyle et al. (2010) found that EI measures are more important predictors of job performance than personality.

So what does emotionally intelligent behaviour entail?

According to Goleman, there are five components to emotional intelligence at work.

Self-management skills:

1. *Self-Awareness*: The ability to recognise and understand your moods, emotions and drivers, as well as your effect on others. Leaders who are self-aware have a firm grasp of their capabilities and are less likely to set themselves and their teams up to fail.
2. *Self-Regulation*: The ability to control or redirect disruptive impulses and moods and the propensity to suspend judgment – to think before acting. Leaders who are in control of their feelings and impulses are able to create an environment of trust and fairness, reducing politics and infighting, and increasing productivity.
3. *Motivation*: A propensity to pursue goals with energy and persistence. Highly effective leaders are motivated by the internal drive to achieve rather than external rewards.

Relationship-management skills:

4. *Empathy*: The ability to understand the emotional makeup of other people and the skill in treating people according to their emotional reactions. Empathy allows a leader to understand their teams' emotional makeup, appreciate diversity and retain key talent.
5. *Social Skill*: Proficiency in managing relationships and building networks, and the ability to find common ground and build rapport. This is critical to a leader whose task is to get work done through others.

So can emotional intelligence be learned?

The good news is yes. Research suggests that while there is a genetic component to EI, nurture plays a role as well. To enhance emotional intelligence, organisations must focus training on the brain's limbic system, in particular the amygdala, which governs feelings, impulses and drives.

According to Goleman, the human reactions stored in the amygdala can be altered. For example, with repeated practice, a normally 'short tempered' individual can learn to manage and even relearn those initial reactions to frustration or discomfort. More importantly, over time, emotional information which has been stored in the brain can be modified and replaced with effective reactions and responses.

Alissa Bartlett Organisational Development Consultant


Alissa has over nine years consulting experience, specialising in the areas of Organisational Development and psychometric assessment for selection and employee development. During her career she has worked across a number of industries, including financial services, FMCG and healthcare. Her work has spanned different organisational levels and included such clients as Macquarie Group, Deloitte, Veda Advantage, Coca-Cola Amatil, Eli Lilly, nib Health Funds and Amgen.

With Maximus International, Alissa plays a key role in the design, delivery and facilitation of tailored Organisational Development solutions including learning centres, assessment and development centres, competency profiling, 360 degree feedbacks and performance management solutions.

Alissa holds a Post-Graduate Diploma of Psychological Practice from the College of Psychological Practice as well as various professional accreditations. She is a Registered Psychologist with the NSW Psychology Board.

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