

Developing Emotional Intelligence: The Role of Higher Education

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Emotional Intelligence (EI) has been found to be an important aspect of individual and organizational success. To date, much of the effort to develop EI has emphasized workplace training and career development. We suggest that institutions of higher education (colleges and universities) can play an important role in the development of EI by incorporating various techniques and methodologies into educational processes, pedagogy, and curricula. A review of the literature on EI development is aligned with development opportunities in the higher education setting. Recommendations for implementing EI as part of the higher education experience are presented and discussed.

Keywords: emotional intelligence, education, colleges and universities

INTRODUCTION

Research shows that “soft skills” and emotional intelligence are essential for success at most organizations (Abraham, 2006; Serrat, 2017; Sigmar, Hynes, & Hill, 2012). Employers have expressed frustration that new college graduates are deficient in these skills upon entering the workforce. (Wilkie, 2019). Herein lies an opportunity for higher education institutions: to enhance students’ emotional intelligence through appropriate experiences and position students for lifelong success and satisfaction in the workplace.

The concept of “emotional intelligence” was first analyzed in 1990 in Salovey and Mayer’s work. (Mayer J. D., 2004; Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Salovey and Mayer initially defined “emotional intelligence” (EI or EQ) as “the subset of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one’s own and others’ feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one’s thinking and actions.” (Salovey & Meyer, 1990, p. 189). The definition of EI was further refined to be “the capacity to reason about emotions, and of emotions to enhance thinking. It includes the abilities to accurately perceive emotions, to assess and generate emotions so as to assist thought, to understand emotions and emotional knowledge, and to reflectively regulate emotions so as to promote emotional and intellectual growth.” (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2004, p. 197).

EI is generally considered to have five domains that include both personal components (self-awareness, self-regulation, and self-motivation) and social components (social awareness and social skills). (Daff, de Lange, & Jackling, 2012). Self-awareness addresses an individual's emotional awareness, self-assessment accuracy, and self-confidence. Self-regulation encompasses self-control, trustworthiness, adaptability, conscientiousness, and innovativeness. Self-motivation addresses the qualities of achievement drive, commitment, initiative, and optimism. Social awareness includes empathy, service orientation, developing others, leveraging diversity, and political awareness; and social skills assesses skills related to influence, communication, leadership, change catalyst, conflict management, building bonds, collaboration and cooperation and team capabilities (Serrat, 2017). In summary, emotional intelligence assesses whether a person knows their own emotions, can manage those emotions, is able to self-motivate, is able to recognize and understand other people's emotions, and is able to manage relationships.

The Value of Emotional Intelligence

It has been suggested that Emotional Intelligence is necessary for success in the workplace (Brackett, Rivers, & Salovey, 2011) and research supports the need for training on emotional intelligence skills to prepare students for workplace success (Abraham, 2006). In a survey, nearly 90 percent of employers found EI as essential or highly important in meeting the top challenges facing different organizations. (Daff, de Lange, & Jackling, 2012). Emotional intelligence is also credited with other ingredients for success in the workplace, such as finding a good mentor, thinking outside the box, self-confidence, willingness to try new things, and listening and learning (Daff, de Lange, & Jackling, 2012). Some graduate employability models consider EI to be a key component; thus higher education institutions should consider how they might incorporate EI concepts into the curriculum (Dacre Pool & Qualter, 2012; Finch, Hamilton, Baldwin, & Zehner, 2013).

In assessing the value of EI, certain emotional intelligence skills have been found to enable individuals to be more effective in the workplace. These include items such as self-motivation, which enables employees to take initiative and strive for excellence (Abraham, 2006); develop positive work attitudes and behaviors (Carmeli, 2003); and enhances task performance and organizational citizenship behaviors (Carmeli & Josman, 2006). Other emotional intelligence skills enhance an employee's ability to work with others or as part of a team; for example, empathy skills support building healthy relationships (Abraham, 2006); social skills enhance problem solving and conflict resolution (Jordan & Troth, 2004) and team learning (Clarke, 2010).

Several professions recognize the importance of emotional intelligence in enhancing performance in specific work environments or occupations. In a study on accounting students, most employers indicated that the accounting programs adequately prepared the graduates with the appropriate technical skills, but that interpersonal skills were deficient. (Daff, de Lange, & Jackling, 2012). Accordingly, the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants (AICPA) and the Institute of Management Accountants identified the importance of emotional intelligence competencies among accountants, particularly the importance of good communication and interpersonal skills (Abraham, 2006). Legal scholars have also recognized the importance of emotional intelligence skills as essential for good lawyering (Silver, 1999). Others have identified the importance of emotional intelligence for such diverse occupations such as nursing (Raghubir, 2018), higher education (Parrish, 2015), and software engineering (Kosti, Feldt, & Angelis, 2014).

Research indicates that where IQ is equal, individuals with higher emotional intelligence have a superior ability to engage in skills that are important in business, namely persuasion, influence, and communication. (Montgomery, 2008). Moreover, the research indicates that emotional intelligence is more predictive of career success than IQ and grade point averages. A Harvard Business School study revealed little or no correlation between career success and IQ (Abraham, 2006). Further, these effects have been found to have implications for individuals in international and global organizational contexts (Colfax, Rivera, & Perez, 2010).

While some jobs are becoming increasingly automated, this has only increased the need for skills that machines, technology and automation cannot replace. For example, approximately half of all employers say skills related to memory, computer and technical skills, and quantitative skills are necessary to achieve leadership positions at their organizations, whereas three-quarters of the employers surveyed stated that skills in communication, listening, critical thinking and interpersonal relations are needed to advance. (Wilkie, 2019). Hence it appears that emotional intelligence is essential for organizations to achieve maximum performance, outcomes, and results.

However, there is data that suggests employers are frustrated with the knowledge deficiencies of college graduates and expect college graduates to enter the workforce with emotional intelligence skills (Joyner & Mann, 2011; Wilkie, 2019). In a 2019 report, the Society for Human Resources Management reported that just over half of its members said that education systems have done little or nothing to help address the soft skills shortage, with problem solving, critical thinking, innovation and creativity, the ability to deal with complexity and ambiguity and communication topping the list of missing skills. (Wilkie, 2019). Of the knowledge deficiencies attributed to students in technical fields (e.g., computer science, information systems and information technology), deficiencies related to emotional intelligence are most prevalent (Radermacher & Walia, 2013). The most identified knowledge deficiencies include communication (both written and oral), project management, teamwork, problem solving and critical thinking, followed by personal skills, ethics and leadership (Moore & Morton, 2017).

The research and literature on Emotional Intelligence suggests that EI is vital to personal and organizational performance and success (Salovey & Grewal, 2005). Yet to date many institutions of higher learning have tended to emphasize development of the so-called “hard” knowledge skills and abilities associated with various disciplines and have not done an adequate job of developing in students the complementary “soft” skills necessary for personal success. We therefore ask: how might institutions of higher learning (colleges and universities) become more effective in developing EI in students by incorporating various techniques and proven pedagogical methodologies to increase students’ EI and ability to be effective as members of organizations?

THE DEVELOPMENT OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Research indicates that, with time and training, a person can enhance their abilities related to emotional intelligence and can significantly improve job performance in many occupations, including management and professional jobs (Bar-On, 2007; Boyatzis R. E., 2001). Within the college and university context spanning two to five years, students demonstrated strong evidence of improvement on 71 percent of the competencies in the Self-Management cluster, which includes Efficiency Orientation, Planning, Initiative, Flexibility and Self-Confidence; 100 percent of the competencies in the Social Awareness cluster, which includes Empathy and Social Objectivity; and 50 percent of the competencies in the Social Skills cluster, which includes Networking, Oral Communication, and Group Management. Additional research has demonstrated that emotional intelligence capabilities can be developed over time (Seal, Boyatzis, & Bailey, 2006).

To increase emotional intelligence, a number of criteria must be satisfied, including individual motivation to improve emotional intelligence, extensive practice of new skills, receipt of feedback, and reinforcement of newly developed skills. (Serrat, 2017). Emotional intelligence is multi-faceted, and the skills that comprise emotional intelligence do not usually develop simultaneously. In fact, neurological research indicates that people develop EI in stages. Self-awareness in recognizing thoughts and feelings is generally developed first, understanding other individuals and social groups comes next, and then people learn to apply this information to induce responses in others. (Sigmar, Hynes, & Hill, 2012).

There are a number of training programs designed to enhance emotional intelligence., as well as training programs designed to increase specific components of emotional intelligence. For example, self-awareness can be enhanced through a 360-degree assessment and through coaching interventions, whereas self-regulation can be developed through some anger management programs (Cherniss & Goleman, 2001). Many business schools have identified the need to increase EI skills and have

incorporated such programs into their curricula (Bellizzi, 2008; Myers & Tucker, 2005; Sigmar, Hynes, & Hill, 2012). A sample of these classroom programs include lecture learning groups, self-assessments on emotional intelligence, journaling, role-playing, interviews, and case analyses; however, more experiential learning opportunities such as service learning and academic civic engagement may complement the pedagogy (Sigmar, Hynes, & Hill, 2012).

Developing Emotional Intelligence: The Role of Higher Education

We have incorporated research on the development of Emotional Intelligence with various development processes available in higher education to identify opportunities for colleges and universities to make EI a part of the pedagogy and curriculum. Table 1 describes some of the established means by which emotional intelligence competencies can be enhanced, and the ways in which higher education institutions might put these established tools into practice to benefit both students and employers.

TABLE 1
DEVELOPMENT OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION:
OPPORTUNITIES FOR INTEGRATION AND EDUCATION

Development of Emotional Intelligence	Potential Development Process(es) in Higher Education
Self-Awareness, Empathy and Leadership competencies can be improved through Human Relations Training. (Cherniss & Goleman, 2001; Nelis, Quoidbach, Mikolajczak, & Hansenne, 2009)	Similar to the actual training, students would receive training in three phases, starting with a lecture on management styles, followed by experiential learning through self-assessments, listening exercises, and role play of a corrective interaction, ending with a discussion of motivational theories.
Accurate Self-Assessment, Self-Confidence, Self-Control, Conscientiousness, and Achievement Drive can be improved through Self-Management Training. (Cherniss & Goleman, 2001; Frayne & Geringer, 2000; Gist, Stevens, & Bavetta, 1991)	Self-management training can be implemented through an introductory university course that would include a lecture on the principles of self-management, followed by interactive sessions and written assignments that include identification of problem behaviors, conditions that elicit and maintain the behavior, possible strategies for coping with such conditions and behaviors, goal setting, self-monitoring of behaviors through logs, charts or diaries, rewards and punishments, and maintenance of positive developments.
Accurate Self-Assessment, Adaptability, Initiative and Innovation, Empathy, Communication and Social Skills can be improved through Behavior Modeling Training. (Boyatzis & Boyatzis, 2009; Cherniss & Goleman, 2001).	Each module in Behavioral Modeling training addresses a different employee problem through a content-focused presentation, viewing of a positive way to manage the situation, and then a role-play followed by feedback, and a similar format could be employed in more advanced university classes.

Development of Emotional Intelligence	Potential Development Process(es) in Higher Education
<p>Self-awareness can be increased through 360-degree assessments and coaching. (Boyatzis R. E., 2007; Cherniss & Goleman, 2001; Dulewicz & Higgs, 2000)</p>	<p>In an upper-level seminar-type class, students could ask a supervisor (which could also be supervising faculty), peers/friends/family, and those they provide direction to (which could be in a job-setting, student organization or sports team) to provide ratings of the students on a variety of aspects through a specific online instrument. The students would go through a careful debriefing regarding interpretation of the feedback, noting areas of strength and opportunities for development. This course would also include a journaling exercise whereby each student would make a daily entry reflecting on how they felt and reacted in at least one specific situation, with an emphasis on what worked and what didn't work, and what they might try next time. Finally, the student would participate in an exercise where they would be video-recorded in a particular interaction in a controlled environment so that both the student and the instructor could discuss and share feedback.</p>
<p>Self-Regulation, Self-Awareness and Empathy can be improved through Anger Management programs. (Cherniss & Goleman, 2001; Singh, 2006)</p>	<p>Through a course geared towards interpersonal relationships or through a program within Student Affairs/Student Conduct and/or Human Resources, the university could help students (and employees) learn how to become more aware of their thoughts and feelings by writing them down as they notice them (increasing awareness), along with the reactions of others, and controlling themselves if the thoughts are negative by replacing the negative thoughts with positive or at least neutral thoughts. The exercise can then be used to enhance empathy by encouraging people to listen to what others are saying and to read their underlying emotional reactions.</p>
<p>Self-Motivation and Self-Regulation competencies can be enhanced through the use of cognitive strategies, self-management training and achievement motivation training. (Cherniss & Goleman, 2001; Cherniss, Goleman, Emmerling, Cowan, & Adler, 1998)</p>	<p>In a university environment, a course or program could engage students in small group discussions regarding sources of achievement motivation and charging the students with writing stories demonstrating an achievement mindset, followed by the development of a personal action plan with faculty feedback.</p>
<p>Emotion Identification and Emotion Management (self and others' emotions) can be improved through EI Intervention. (Nelis, Quoidbach, Mikolajczak, & Hansenne, 2009).</p>	<p>EI intervention could be implemented through sessions over a minimum four-week period that included short lectures, role plays, group discussions, two-person works and readings.</p>

RECOMMENDATIONS

The extant research supports the incorporation of emotional intelligence skills into higher education to prepare students for success in the workplace. (Abraham, 2006). Consistent with the missions of many higher education institutions, student success is paramount and, accordingly, higher education must provide students with opportunities to increase their emotional intelligence before they enter the “real” world.

The research on the development of EI in stages dovetails with the different EI domains. For example, the self-awareness components of recognizing and managing one’s own emotions is generally developed first, so programs introducing concepts of self-awareness, which include emotional awareness, accuracy in self-assessment and self-confidence should be introduced early in the educational process. These skills can be developed through implementation of an introductory university course that would include a lecture on the principles of self-awareness, particularly emotional reactions, followed by interactive sessions and written assignments that include identification of problem behaviors, conditions that elicit and maintain the behavior, possible coping strategies, goal setting, self-monitoring of behaviors through logs, charts or diaries, rewards and punishments, and maintenance of positive developments.

The literature and research indicate that emotional intelligence is best developed over time and that practicing and reviewing the skills are necessary for long-term implementation. (Sigmar, Hynes, & Hill, 2012). Self-awareness could be reviewed and further developed through an upper-level seminar-type class that would include a 360-assessment. In this class, students could ask for a variety of feedback from a supervisor (which could also be supervising faculty), peers/friends/family, and those to whom they provide direction (which could be in a job setting, course project teams, student organization or sports teams) to provide ratings of them on a variety of aspects through a specific online instrument. The students would go through a careful debriefing regarding interpretation of the feedback, noting areas of strength and opportunities for development, and prepare an action plan. This course would also include a journaling exercise whereby each student would make a daily entry reflecting on how they felt and reacted in at least one specific situation, with an emphasis on what worked and what didn’t work, and what they might try next time. Finally, the student would participate in an exercise where they would be video-recorded in a particular interaction in a controlled environment so that both the student and the instructor could discuss and share feedback.

Once there is a foundation for self-awareness, higher education institutions could help students develop skills in self-regulation and self-motivation. These skills are closely linked to self-awareness because they are all personal to the individual (as opposed to the emotions of others). Self-regulation can be enhanced by teaching students how to become more aware of their thoughts and feelings by writing them down as they notice them (which increases self-awareness) and controlling or regulating themselves if the thoughts are negative by replacing the negative thoughts with positive or at least neutral thoughts. Self-regulation and self-motivation can be enhanced in a university environment through a course or program that engages students in small group discussions regarding sources of achievement motivation and charging the students with writing stories demonstrating an achievement mindset, followed by the development of a personal action plan with faculty feedback.

Social Awareness enables students to recognize and understand the emotions of others. One of the primary components of social awareness is empathy and empathy can be enhanced through training programs based on human relations, behavior modeling and anger management. (Cherniss & Goleman, 2001). EI intervention training with sessions that include short lectures, role plays, group discussions, two-person works and readings may also enhance these competencies because this training program is focused on identifying and managing emotions, both in oneself and in others. (Nelis, Quidbach, Mikolajczak, & Hansenne, 2009).

Finally, higher education institutions can help students develop their social skills through a variety of formal and informal opportunities. Some of the formal opportunities include courses on communication, listening, negotiation and persuasion, which should also include group work components to develop communication, leadership, conflict management, building bonds, collaboration/cooperation and team

capabilities. Additionally, these same skills can be enhanced by requiring freshman and sophomores to live on campus in a residence hall community, and providing opportunities to participate in student government and other student organizations. Some of the greatest opportunities for students to develop social skills will arise in less structured or informal environments such as dealing with different relationships, whether it be friends, roommates, Greek life, romantic relationships, or in an employment or internship setting, and the university should strive to provide resources, such as counseling or coaching, to students as they are navigating these situations as well.

The depth and value of these different courses could be developed into a concentration or even a minor program of study. As higher education institutions seek to distinguish themselves in an increasingly competitive environment, offering students a concentration or minor in human relations could increase these important skills, the students' employment prospects, and most importantly, graduates' job satisfaction. In the current environment where people are questioning the value of a college education, higher education institutions must continue to demonstrate their contribution and value.

As outlined in Table 1, higher education institutions have a number of opportunities to introduce students to the concept of emotional intelligence and expand this skillset during the four-plus years that a student is enrolled in college. As part of the freshman experience, many higher education institutions require students to complete training on topics related to the prevention of sexual assault and drug and alcohol abuse. Some of the emotional intelligence competencies may complement these concerns on college campuses as well. For example, increased empathy may reduce sexual assaults and increased self-regulation may reduce drug and alcohol abuse. In addition, college graduates with higher EQ get more interviews, more job offers, and are, in the long-term, more satisfied in their jobs than individuals with low EQ.

Traditional higher education courses and programs have usually been presented in "disciplinary silos with the emphasis on analysis rather than on synthesis." (Joyner & Mann, 2011). Incorporating aspects of EI may create a productive change in how colleges and universities deliver instruction and may create a more interdisciplinary approach to higher education. Where students in business disciplines are usually taught how to value a company and students in technology fields are usually taught about computer programming, both would now be taught about emotional awareness of self and others and how to manage relationships.

CONCLUSION

Emotional intelligence comprises a critical set of skills that are necessary for success in the workplace. As institutions of higher education prepare students to enter the workforce, these institutions play a key role in establishing these skills to position students for success in the workplace. Developing these skills in students benefits colleges and universities as well. In addition to improving statistics measuring student placement after graduation, student engagement and overall student satisfaction, these institutions can further their missions related to student success.

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