



Improving employee satisfaction and well being using Emotional Intelligence

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Introduction

Emotional Intelligence, the term originally conceived by Salovey and Mayer (1990) and later in 1996 being popularised by Goleman (Chapman M. 2002), has been increasingly gaining acceptance during the last years (Orme, G. Bar-On, R., 2002). Nowadays, Emotional Intelligence “the ability to identify and manage feelings, both one’s own and other people’s” is one of the key issues when talking about improve people and business performance and job satisfaction (Collins, S. 2000).

Emotional Intelligence seems to be a powerful tool to understand and manage feelings and emotions. Extended literature has been written in “emotions”, an issue not being totally considered in the classic definition of intelligence. Furthermore, the increasing concernedness in improving well being, job satisfaction and stress levels in the workplace brings about the issue of which this article is about: How can organizations improve employee satisfaction and well being using EI?



This article goes in its beginning in the search of the meanings and needs for emotional intelligence in the workplace and then showing the effects that the use of it can have upon well-being and employee satisfaction. It finishes with an exploration in the ways that companies can use to enhance emotional intelligence.

Definitions

Well-being and employee satisfaction

Well-being is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as “the state of being or doing well in life; happy, healthy, or prosperous condition; moral or physical welfare (of a person or community) (OED, 2007). It is used in this article a context-specific well-being particularly job-specific Well-being and it is useful to remember the relationship between job satisfaction and life satisfaction which indicates that there is mutual effects between both of them (Judge and Watanabe,

1993 as cited in Warr, P. 2002). More specifically it is focus on emotional well-being as the psychological aspect of well-being. However it is fair to say that the consideration of the person a “whole” lead to understand that psychological aspects in some way have physical consequences as it will be seen forward.

Summarizing the suggested key features of job specific well-being from Peter Warr (2002, p6):

- Opportunity for personal control, decision, autonomy, absence of close supervision.
- Opportunity for skill use and multi-skilling tasks.
- Externally generated goals, job and task demands, workload, role responsibility.
- Skill and task variety, job content and location.
- Environmental clarity, information of required behaviour, feedback.
- Availability of money, income level, amount of pay, financial resources.
- Physical security
- Supportive supervision.
- Opportunity for interpersonal contact, interaction with others, social density, supportive colleagues.
- Valued social position.

Research shows that satisfied employees are highly motivated, have good work morale, and work more effectively and efficiently (Eskildsen & Dahlgard, 2000 as cited in Matzler, K *et al*, 2004). Is considered employee or job satisfaction as the positive pole of one of the three axis for the measurement of well-being defined by Peter Warr (2002) and therefore a component of well-being.

Emotional Intelligence

Emotional Intelligence is “the ability to perceive and express emotion, assimilate emotion in thought, understand and reason with emotion, and regulate emotion in self and others” (Mayer, J.D. *et al* 2000 as cited in Luthans, F. 2002). It includes:

- Self-awareness: Knowing our feelings at the moment and using them as a guide to our decision making.

- Self-management: Handling our emotions so that they facilitate rather than interfere.
- Social awareness: Sensing people feelings, the ability to take their perspective.
- Social skills: Handling emotions in relationships well and reading carefully social situations, interacting in a smooth way.

(Watkin, C. 2000)

Summarizing what EI comprises it is shown The Emotional Competence Framework (Goleman, D. 1998).

Personal Competence			Social Competence	
Self-awareness	Self-regulation	Motivation	Empathy	Social skills
Emotional self-awareness	Self-Control	Achievement drive	Understanding others	Influence
Accurate Self-assessment	Trustworthiness	Commitment	Developing others	Communication
Self-confidence	Conscientiousness	Initiative	Service orientation	Conflict management
	Adaptability	Optimism	Leveraging diversity	Leadership
	Innovation		Political awareness	Change catalyst
				Building bonds
				Collaboration and cooperation
				Team capabilities

The measurement of EI can be done with different tests between them, are worthy of consideration the 360 Emotional Competence Inventory, the Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire, the Multi-Factor Emotional Intelligence Scale test, the BAR-On EQ-360 and the HearthMath (Orme, G. 2000).

The need for considering emotions

The balance between life and work life has become more important in last times, people try to force so much their lives attempting to be successful and happy. Working longer hours under more pressure than ever before and leading to a situation with high levels of stress (Collins, S. 2000). In the increasingly changing and competitive market in which we are working, so often companies do not pay enough attention to employees' wellbeing, forgetting the fact that people have emotions, feelings and then to work effectively, these emotions should be understood and managed properly. Data show that over 70% of all change initiatives and mergers and acquisitions fail not putting the enough attention on people (Watkin, C. 2000).

If people are overloaded and under stress, they shut down their sensitivity to their feelings and to those of other people, becoming angry, insensitive and very difficult to work with (Collins, S. 2000). This attitude in the long term made suffer people and companies causing stress related illnesses. Many people are not used to listen to others and to sympathise with their feelings, in the long term, valuable members of staff are leaving the organisation (Collins, S. 2000). People can have a brilliant educational background and possess high IQ

scores, by they can be difficult to work with lacking understanding of themselves and of others.

Research carried out among 568 employees by the Chartered Management Institute in different companies for the DTI in 2004 found what employees are inspired by leaders who listen to them, involve them giving freedom and support, encourage them to have fun at work, trust them, appreciate them and value them and encourage them to value themselves (Collins, S. 2000). It seems looking at the Emotional Competence Framework and trying to match it with what employees seek we find some similarities, therefore it can be said that we seek and need the consideration of emotions in the workplace.

The Emotional Intelligence well-being link

It is believed then that improving the EI competences wellbeing should as well show significant positive effects. People with high levels of EI would have greater feelings of emotional wellbeing (Goleman,1995; Saarni, 1999; Salovey & Mayer,1990; Salovey, Mayer, Goldman, Turvey, & Palfai, 1995 as cited in Schutte, N. et al, 2002). They argue that those who are able to understand and regulate their emotions should be able to, in general, have better emotional health. Empirical evidence comes from research showing suggesting that there is a link between high EI and emotional well-being (Schutte, N. et al, 2002).

As EI includes the ability to understand and regulate emotions, emotional well-being includes positive mood and high self-esteem (Schutte, N. et al, 2002). Three different studies carried out in the US among retail employees, students and nursing home employees, demonstrated how high EI was associated with positive mood and high self-esteem and how individuals with higher levels of EI had more resilience against negative situations (Schutte, N. et al, 2002).

Positive effects upon well-being using Emotional Intelligence in the workplace

Several examples and research has shown the positive effects upon well-being of having high levels of EI in the workplace either if the high levels are a intrinsic characteristic of the employees or those were achieved after interventions designed to enhance EI.



One of the most important findings is that EI can be an antidote against stress, as Lazarus (1999 as cited in Chapman, M., Clarke, R. 2003) quoted "Where there is stress, there are also emotions". A study made between police officers in the UK, a profession in which the employees should

deal frequently with strong emotions from one's self and others tried to found some empirical evidence. It was found a strong correlation between lower levels of stress and higher levels of EI (Chapman, M., Clarke, R. 2003) . Matthew & Zeidner (2001 as cited in Chapman, M., Clarke, R. 2003) quoted that "successfully coping with stressful encounters is central to EI", they suggest that EI can not only be developed, but that high levels of EI show a difference to the way in which people experience stress. Has been found as well that even though is positively related to stress management, EI may not show any advantage in the case where people do not experience enough emotions or are overwhelmed by them (Gohm, Corser, and Dalsky, 2004 as cited in Salovey, P et al. 2004)

EI skills may play an important part talking about low performance, morale and turnover. The events experienced at work are cognitively processed by employees, leading to intrinsic thoughts and reactions. When the interpretation of an event is driven by negative thoughts, an employee's inability to regulate their emotions can affect their decision-making and behaviour (Richards, D., Pryce, J. 2006).

It is proved that high levels of EI is associated with coping better with difficulties and stressful situations (Wong and Law, 2002 as cited in Richards, D., Pryce, J. 2006). One of the measures that prove this is the measures of level of cortisol (secreted by the body as stress response) and blood pressure (Salovey and Mayer, 1990; Mayer and Salovey, 1995; You, Lee and Lee, 1999 as cited in Richards, D., Pryce, J. 2006).

A study made by Deborah Richards and Joanna Pryce in four local public authorities in London showed the correlation between job control (to what extend employees had control over their work), job demands and EI over job performance and well-being. The study showed "EI could be used as a useful individual-level tool for managing performance and wellbeing at work" Richards, D., Pryce, J. 2006). However it is fair to say that high levels of demands and control play a important role in suffering negative health illnesses and coronary hearth disease (Karasek, 1979; Bosma et al, 1997 as cited in Richards, D., Pryce, J. 2006).



Understanding and managing one's self is fundamental as a way of improving well-being. Emotional Intelligence gives people space to reflect on their roles and enables them to develop their self-awareness and recognise their emotions having control upon them (Chapman, M. 2002).

Ways of doing it

In the nature versus nurture debate and giving some hope to all the people and organizations committed with improve well-being, the majority of the authors agree that emotional competences can be learned (Bharwaney, G. 2003/04) and all emotional competences can be cultivated with the right practice (Goleman, D. 1998, p239).

It is fair to say that when talking about learning emotional competencies, the right solution is not by doing but by being. People can learn why empathy is such an important tool to make feel others better in the workplace but if they are not more emphatic at the end nothing has been done. As Goleman (1998, p242) states "intellectual understanding of a competence may be necessary, but it is not sufficient in itself to result in behaviour change".

In designing a program to enhance EI in the workplace, it becomes necessary to know that people often are against anything that probes their emotions, until and individual is willing to embrace them because knows that this will bring positive outcomes, an EI program will not be successful (Chapman, M. 2002).

Goleman's work on Guidelines for emotional competence training (Goleman, D. 1998, p251) is a reference to follow on how organizations can improve emotional competences of their employees. These guidelines can be summarised as:

- Assessing what the job and the individual need to improve and delivering this assessment with care.
- Being prepared for the training, motivate people and make the change self-directed.
- Focus on clear and achievable goals and evaluate the achievement of them.
- Give performance ongoing feedback.
- Encourage practice during the process, offer support, provide models and reinforce change.

Some research has been made in the efficacy of EI training workshops. As Dulewicz and Higgs have studied, training have positive results over employees in enhancing some emotional competencies but surprisingly not others as show his study among 59 middle managers in a retail company (McBain, R. 2004). As Barbara et al (2004) found, small but positive improvements in EI were made after a one-day intervention between the employees of a multisite dental practice.

As Barbara Fredrickson (Bharwaney, G. 2003/04) shows in his "broaden and build" theory of positive emotions, we need three times as much positive emotions as negative and a way to learn this skill closely related to 11 of the 15 components of the Bar-On EQ-i (Emotional Quotient Inventory) is by asking questions instead of say straight forward our particular point of view, by ensuring that people make positive interventions when they say something in a group and

concentrating more on others than in themselves (Bharwaney, G. 2003/04).

Another important tool is the work developed by Martin Seligman which is Positive psychology: This term is characterised by the focus on the positive emotion and character traits, it represents a huge change in social sciences that goes from an exclusive concern in healing and repairing, focusing on weaknesses to a psychology of understanding and building virtue and strength (Bharwaney, G. 2003/04). Seligman's work is about interventions that are concerned with developing self-regard, self-esteem and pushing the boundaries of self-confidence (Bharwaney, G. 2003/04) all closely related to some of the competencies of EI.

Another issue that can bring organisations useful ideas is as Robert Putman shows with the concept of enhancing well-being through the construction of "social networks and the associated norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness" which is the concept of "social context". This concept is strongly linked to well-being as it relates to all three components of the interpersonal dimensions of the EQ-i: "empathy", "social responsibility" and "interpersonal relationships" (Bharwaney, G. 2003/04).

Even though there is not strong evidence which justifies the best ways to improve EI within organisations, the gradually accumulating evidence suggests that in time a better desirable state will be achieved, but at the moment the level of credibility for measures of EI remains a particularly critical issue. (McBain, R. 2004)

Conclusion

The way in which Emotional Intelligence improves employee well-being is being nowadays clearly evidenced by research. Even though this evidence is not enough yet to make strong affirmations, the main reason why this is happening is because Emotional Intelligence as a term has been only 10 years being significant since Goleman wrote his famous book in 1996 Emotional Intelligence.

Emotions have been by far a term that was difficult to talk about in some companies when "classic" cognitive approaches were the used way to solve problems in dealing with people, difficulties and conflict. Nowadays we are being more aware that people take decisions, learn, make relationships through emotions and then I recognise the use of them in the workplace as a facilitator to understand and deal with employees enhancing well-being.

Emotional Intelligence Competencies enhance the understanding of one's self and others and then, with better understanding we will get better awareness of where we are and if this is the place where we want to be. Subsequently managing our emotions and those of others we can build paths to go forward. All the Personal and Social competencies are ways that will lead to self-awareness, self-actualisation and to the building of trustworthy social relationships, considering then that Emotional Intelligence improves well-being and employee satisfaction.

The use and training in EI can be quite a difficult task because we are talking about "being" and not "doing" what can include some changes in people beliefs and values.

Because of that reason training through the classic workshops will not be always as effective as we initially thought. To make companies more emotionally intelligent we need to consider them as a "whole" and the intervention need to be a holistic and tailored solution, gaining the buy-in from the employees as a first step.

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