



Why should school leaders develop emotional intelligence?

Daniel Xerri

continues his series on leadership.

This article is the sixth in a ten-part series that examines some of the key concepts that leaders of private language schools might find it useful to be familiar with.

Introduction

Emotional intelligence is increasingly recognised as being fundamental to leaders' competencies and to how well they perform. In fact, research indicates that there exist statistically significant differences between effective and ineffective leaders in terms of their level of emotional intelligence, with the former

scoring much higher than the latter (Kotzé & Venter, 2011). For example, the emotional intelligence of effective leaders is seen as a predictor of employees' organisational citizenship behaviour (Dartey-Baah & Mekpor, 2017), and is associated with employee engagement (Smith, 2017). This article first considers some of the key merits of emotional intelligence for leaders of private language schools and then examines how it can be developed.

Acknowledging vulnerability

Emotional intelligence enables school leaders to acknowledge their vulnerability and cultivate more meaningful connections with their followers. Being vulnerable might be difficult for a leader but it deepens one's capacity for interdependency, allows one to encourage

leadership from below and recognises that others within the organisation may be right (Shapiro, 2016).

When school leaders share their vulnerability with employees, this acts as a significant mechanism for the development of relationships and the enhancement of charisma; this is due to the fact that employees are able to connect with them on an emotional level (Ito & Bligh, 2017). In fact, vulnerability is considered to be a powerful means by which leaders can foster social connections in the workplace (Brecher, 2017). Some of the ways in which leaders can exhibit vulnerability traits in their practices is by: asking for and accepting advice and help; admitting when uncertain about something; accepting mistakes from others; and acknowledging and being accountable for their own mistakes (Brecher, 2017).

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Integrating vulnerability and professional identity is an important means by which to achieve authenticity and strength (Kern, 2014), these two factors being particularly important for school leaders. Vulnerability is fundamental for authentic leadership and it acts as a significant factor in the cultivation of innovation, creativity and change (Wright, 2015). Authentic leadership requires the confidence to: accept vulnerabilities; learn to make decisions without all the necessary information; and risk failure as a means of fostering creativity and innovation (Clare, 2018). The humility associated with leaders who demonstrate their vulnerability encourages employees to be more proactive (Chen *et al.*, 2018) and to have more trust in them, the latter factor being key to fostering an innovative work culture (Lei *et al.*, 2019).

Regulating emotions and behaviour

One of the chief values of emotional intelligence is its capacity to enable individuals to better regulate their emotions and reduce aggressive behaviour. The latter is particularly pertinent for leaders in private language schools given the demands of the job and the competitiveness of the sector. While aggressive behaviour might be valued by some leaders as a means of achieving one's goals, research indicates that there exist negative outcomes associated with such behaviour. For example, the kind of leaders who typically exhibit aggressive tendencies tend to be narcissistic and their behaviour can be seen as abusive by employees, affecting mostly those who have low self-esteem or a low core self-evaluation (Nevicka *et al.*, 2018). These employees end up being less productive and are much more likely to experience burnout when working for such leaders (Nevicka *et al.*, 2018).

Moreover, an autocratic leadership style is a predictor of passive aggressive behaviours (Johnson & Klee, 2007). In a diverse workplace, one of the reasons why leaders might adopt such behaviours as a coping mechanism is that they have diversity intelligence deficiencies which hinder them from protecting employees and harnessing their potential to attain organisational objectives (Hughes & Brown, 2018). This leads employees to experience a toxic and hostile work environment that might eventually lead to high attrition, low productivity and a range of negative emotions (Hughes & Brown, 2018).

While aggressive behaviour on the part of leaders might be masked as humour, aggressive humour is negatively related to leader-member exchange, and the relationship between the two phenomena lacks the mediation of employees' identification with the leader (Pundt & Herrmann, 2015). This implies that leaders should avoid aggressive humour and should seek to improve their relationship with followers by using affiliative humour (Pundt & Herrmann, 2015). Furthermore, aggressive humour is negatively associated with employee creativity (Lee, 2015).

Engaging employees

Leadership and employee engagement are connected because school leaders who wish to create engaging work climates need to develop their emotional intelligence, especially their capacity for self-awareness (Shuck & Herd, 2012). The latter is the basis for the other three dimensions of emotional intelligence, i.e. self-management, social awareness and relationship management. Harter *et al.*'s (2002) model indicates that leaders manage to engage their employees when they: respond to their basic needs;

communicate role-related expectations; provide developmental feedback; and explain how employees fit in the organisation. This is somewhat related to Herzberg's (1968) motivational theory, given that it underscores the significance of providing employees with clear expectations and good working conditions as the foundation for engagement. However, in order for the latter to be boosted, school leaders also need to give attention to such authentic employee motivators as achievement, recognition, responsibility and personal growth (Herzberg, 1968).

Developing emotional intelligence

Despite recognising the value of emotional intelligence, some school leaders might not be fully aware of their emotional intelligence competencies or else only possess a conceptual understanding of what these consist of (Roseberry, 2018). Hence, it is vital that leaders are provided with the means to develop their awareness further. Raising leaders' awareness of their emotional intelligence through self-assessment tools can play an important role in leadership development (Czabanowska *et al.*, 2014). However, most often leaders require feedback on their reflective process so as to fully understand their emotional intelligence competencies (Boyatzis *et al.*, 2013). 360-degree survey feedback is particularly helpful, since it can establish whether there is alignment between a leader's self-assessment and the ratings provided by colleagues and other people within an organisation (Gregory *et al.*, 2017).

Feedback can be followed up by coaching sessions that enable individuals to further develop their ability to engage in emotionally intelligent leadership (Boyatzis *et al.*, 2013). School leaders can enhance their emotional intelligence by means of a range of strategies. These include: keeping a journal that records their emotions; engaging in meditation; deploying positive visualisation; conducting appreciative inquiry; thinking before acting; and listening empathetically (Scott, 2013). Self-awareness, self-management, social management and relationship management are four skills that can also bolster a leader's emotional intelligence (Scott, 2013).

Conclusion

School leaders' ability to develop their emotional intelligence will have an impact not only on their behaviour but also on the wellbeing of their staff. Despite the fact that private language schools operate in market conditions that are at times of a cut-throat nature, leaders must always remember that the way they interact with their staff, and the manner in which they handle interpersonal communication, can either serve to enhance satisfaction and performance or else severely dampen it. When leaders develop the necessary awareness that enables them to harness the power of their emotional intelligence, it is the entire school community that benefits.

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Dr Daniel Xerri is a senior lecturer in applied linguistics and TESOL at the University of Malta. He chairs the ELT Council and holds an MBA from the University of Essex. www.danielxerri.com