

LEADERSHIP

How Emotional Intelligence Improves Workplace Efficiency

EQ creates a sense of psychological safety, where people feel safe to speak up, share ideas, to give and receive feedback.

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Strong emotional intelligence is increasingly touted as a top quality in business leaders. EQ can be defined as the ability to understand your emotions and the emotions of others, and use that knowledge to guide your thoughts and behaviors to better manage yourself and influence others. Different from the more fixed traits of our personality, it can be strengthened to the benefit of any work environment.

There has never been a greater need for emotional intelligence, or EQ, than there is right now, argued Kelly Newman, emotional intelligence consultant and leadership facilitator with consultancy BlueEQ. He spoke on the topic recently to attendees of ISA's Women in Industry virtual event.

Awareness of other people is critical to EQ. With 2020 leaving us more isolated, communicating digitally or in person but through masks that make it more difficult to read others, it is all the more reason to focus on becoming more aware of each other, Newman said.

Different from personality, where basic disposition and temperament are generally fairly fixed, EQ is learnable and improvable.

There are five primary skills and associated dimensions of emotional intelligence, according to BlueEQ:

1. **Self-regard:** optimism, self-respect, self-confidence, motivation, independence
2. **Self-awareness:** openness, self-knowledge, integrity, monitoring, introspection
3. **Self-control:** impulse control, stress tolerance, emotional stability, resilience, delayed gratification
4. **Social perception:** empathy, observation, anticipation, interpretation, mindfulness
5. **Social effectiveness:** influence, conflict management, relationship management, accountability, ego management

According to BlueEQ assessments administered around the world both before COVID-19 hit and after, scores for every dimension associated with EQ have gone down — except for one. Introspection has increased 6.4%, up from about 71% to 78%. “How do we define introspection? Looking inward, consciously analyzing yourself, examining your thoughts, feelings and behavior, reflecting on your personal performance,” Newman said. “Perhaps you’ve seen that your introspection has increased over COVID.”

EQ helps to create psychological safety, which is a shared belief that it’s safe to discuss ideas, to experiment, to take risks, to give feedback, to be able to learn from mistakes. “Can you see how critical psychological safety is to the modern workplace, to teams,” Newman asked.

No one wants to look ignorant, incompetent, intrusive or negative. But they may try to manage these fears in an unproductive way, especially at work.

If you don’t want to look ignorant, don’t ask questions. If you don’t want to feel incompetent, don’t admit to a weakness or a mistake. If you don’t want to be intrusive, don’t offer up ideas. And if you don’t want to be negative, don’t critique the status quo.

But no one wants to work in an environment where nobody asks questions or admits to mistakes or offers ideas or critiques the status quo, Newman pointed out.

Work Environment Safety

There is a direct connection between EQ and safe or unsafe work environments, he added. Low emotional intelligence creates a “red zone” environment where people reserve themselves, are careful and walk on eggshells. Some of the behaviors:

- manipulation
- intimidation
- lack of transparency
- no trust
- won’t take feedback
- confrontational

- favoritism
- inconsistent

By contrast, a “blue zone” environment encourages employees to learn from mistakes. Some of the behaviors:

- value employees
- solicit ideas
- personal connection
- transparent
- clear expectations
- supportive
- empathetic
- permission to fail

A 2016 Google research project, Project Aristotle, sought to find why some teams are more successful than other teams by studying 180 of its internal teams to find out what is the common denominator as to why some teams are more successful than other teams. The No. 1 success factor by far was the level of psychological safety on the team, Newman noted. With “psychological safety, team members feel safe to take risks and be vulnerable in front of each other,” he said.

Adding, “Can you see how your emotional intelligence, based on behaviors and attitudes, can create safer environments for the people you interact with? For your team, for your family, for the community, for your clients and customers? The application is universal, which then helps your career, helps your business, helps your team.”

Newman focused on three dimensions: self-confidence, stress tolerance and influence.

Self Confidence

Self-confidence has decreased 6.5% worldwide since the COVID-19 pandemic started. What does that have to do with creating psychological safety at work?

Newman provided several reasons:

- It leads you to take action and open up new possibilities.
- It influences and persuades other people to act.
- It makes you more likely to earn additional rewards, recognition and responsibility.

Newman highlighted three ways to improve self-conference.

1. **Write and maintain a list of your strengths and assets — and look at them often.** “I think we’re over programmed to look at our weaknesses, what are we doing wrong? That really degrades our self-confidence,” he said.
2. **Consider failures as learning opportunities.** “We’re so over-programed. It’s OK to fail. It’s a part of life, we want to learn from that.”
3. **Take calculated risks.**

Stress Tolerance

Stress tolerance has declined almost 16% worldwide since COVID-19. Stress tolerance is not stress relief but rather measuring your ability to tolerate stress and positively deal with stressful or difficult situations. “The key word there is ‘positive’ and not becoming overwhelmed by adverse or demanding circumstances,” Newman said.

Ways to improve stress tolerance include:

1. **Know your limits.** Practice saying no so that you feel comfortable saying no to additional assignments or projects that you know you cannot handle effectively right now. “It’s so hard because internally we feel like we’re on some blacklist at work or we will look bad for a boss,” he said.
2. **Think, reflect, write.** “There’s huge psychological benefits from doing this. It’s simply taking a pause out of our busy schedules, our busy lives to just think and reflect. ... There’s a lot going on. Take some opportunity to articulate that. it’s very therapeutic. It’s an excellent way to process,” he said.
3. **Better sleep, nutrition, exercise, meditation.** “Those kinds of things are critical to managing large amounts of stress,” Newman added.

Influence

Influence has decreased 5.1% during the pandemic. But the ability to influence other people “is absolutely critical to your success,” Newman said.

His tips for improvement in this area include:

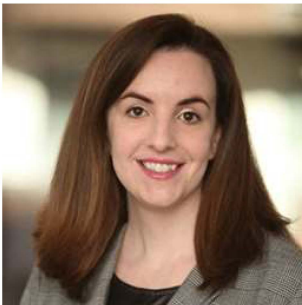
1. **Show genuine interest and concern for others.** “Sometimes we just get right down to the business of things. It’s important that we’re generally showing interest in personally connecting with people,” he said.
2. **Model proper behavior.** “We’re so good at the ‘tell’ model; we need to focus more on the ‘show’ model — showing how we want things done and then modeling that behavior,” he said.
3. **Use a sense of humor.** “It is quite often that we connect with people or influence people because they make us laugh,” he said.

In closing, Newman reiterated that improving EQ is a learnable skill for everyone. Although it is not something we can automatically turn on, we can work on individual qualities and see measurable improvement.

“As you do that, you’ll notice you create a safer environment for the people you interact with, whether it be at work or at home or in the community. And that’s going to enhance your career. That’s going to improve your team and your organization,” he said.

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