

WORKPLACE RELATIONS AND EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

GABRIELA DUMBRAVĂ *

ABSTRACT. *The paper resorts to the instruments of social anthropology and psychology to quantify the role of non – cognitive aspects of intelligence, generically known as 'emotional intelligence', in the professional success of the individual and, implicitly, in the efficiency of business communication as a specific form of social interaction. In this sense, relying on research conducted in the field over the past decades, this study is an attempt to substantiate the theory according to which career accomplishment depends not so much on people's IQ as it does on their EQ, the indicator of their capacity to react and adapt to the working environment.*

KEY WORDS: *cognitive; non-cognitive; emotional intelligence; workplace relations; IQ; EQ.*

JEL CLASSIFICATION: *D83.*

1. EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE. HISTORY, DEFINITIONS AND RESEARCH PREMISES

Although the launching of emotional intelligence as a fundamental principle of social interaction is largely attributed to Daniel Goleman's book, *Emotional Intelligence* (1995), the history of the concept goes as far back as the 30's and the 40's of the twentieth century, appearing under different names and definitions in the work of psychologists and sociologists long before Goleman placed it at the center of his research. These two decades marked the beginnings of a more profound approach to communication, as a result of a focus shift from the cognitive to the non – cognitive aspects of intelligence. From this new and more complex perspective, therefore, psychologists and sociologists began to acknowledge that the non – cognitive, affective side of the individual, manifest in empathetic interpersonal relations, plays an equally

* *Assist. Prof., Ph.D., University of Petroșani, Romania, gbrldumbrava@yahoo.com*

important role in personal development as such cognitive skills as problem – solving, decision – making and memory.

Actually, the existence of non – cognitive skills was acknowledged as early as 1937, when R. L. Thorndike and S. Stein identified them generically as *social intelligence*, defined as “the ability to understand and manage people” (Thorndike & Stein, 1937). Three years later, D. Wechsler was to write an article on the non-intellective elements of human intelligence and their role in the individual’s capacity to deal effectively with the social environment (Wechsler, 1940).

The interest in this topic was resuscitated in the 80’s, when there was an ever more obvious need to build the somewhat fuzzy and haphazard theoretical inheritance into a clearly defined, scientifically based system. Thus, starting with Howard Gardner, researchers in the field of human intelligence became aware that affective information is processed differently from the cognitive one, consequently requiring a specific set of skills. In 1983, Gardner set forth his theory of multiple intelligences, according to which individuals display two types of personal intelligence – intrapersonal and interpersonal – governing their capacity to understand and manage their own emotions, as well as to anticipate and react efficiently to the their interlocutors’ behavior.

By the early 1990s, when Salovey and Mayer introduced the term *emotional intelligence* as such, there was already a long tradition of research on the non – cognitive aspects of intelligence and their role in efficient everyday and business communication. The two psychologists identified emotional intelligence as a form of social intelligence involving the ability to assess and manage one’s own and others’ feelings and emotions in such a way as to use them as effective guidelines of individual thinking and action.

Behavior researcher Daniel Goleman used this study as a foundation for his book, *Emotional Intelligence* (1995), which aims at elucidating the mechanisms by which cognitive intelligence by itself is not a very good predictor of personal success or job performance. Actually, the book completes a series of studies conducted in the 80s and the 90s, which estimated that IQ accounts for the individual’s evolution in a proportion ranging from 25 percent (Hunter and Hunter, 1984) to 10 percent (Sternberg, 1996). On grounds of observation and statistics, these researchers prove that, although cognitive ability is relevant for career success, the latter has to do more with social and emotional skills than with a person’s IQ. In other words, if the IQ ensures momentary success, such as passing exams or writing complex reports, the EQ is the source of skills with long – term impact, such as determination in the face of difficulties, flexibility and tact in relation with colleagues, subordinates, or the management, and a reasonable approach to decision making.

Another important detail to be remembered when discussing emotional intelligence is that cognitive and non-cognitive abilities are not only closely related, but there is research suggesting that emotional and social skills actually help improve cognitive functioning, since people with a high EQ are able to channel their energy constructively, concentrating on essential aspects, rather than dissipating it in useless details (Schulman, 1995). As we have shown, the history of personality and social psychology has generated an impressive body of research pointing to the following abilities pertaining to emotional intelligence: *The ability to manage feelings and handle*

stress, which fosters efficient workplace relations and increased productivity (Lusch and Serpkenci, 1990); *Knowing when and how to express emotion*, as warmer, outgoing, emotionally expressive, and sociable individuals establish more productive personal and business interactions (Bachman, 1988); *Empathy*, a particularly important aspect of emotional intelligence, as researchers have shown that people who are able to perceive, identify and manage emotions were more successful in their work as well as in their social lives (Rosenthal, 1977).

2. WORKPLACE RELATIONS AND EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Organizational behavior consists of a complex network of human relations built and maintained by bridging the gap between significant behavioral differences. The quality of these relations defines the so – called organizational climate or atmosphere. Therefore, organizational atmosphere depends on such social skills as communication, flexibility, and accommodation, as well as on the individuals' capacity to deal with the perceptions, views, attitudes and responses of their co – workers. Under the circumstances, people's ability to deal with one another makes the difference between a productive, supportive and collaborative work environment, in which the employees focus on common goals, and an unproductive, hostile and rigid organizational climate, where energies are channeled into conflicts and reluctance.

The communication skills mentioned above are referred to with the generic term Emotional Intelligence Quotient (EQ) which is defined as “a set of competencies demonstrating the ability one has to recognize his or her behaviors, moods, and impulses, and to manage them best according to the situation”. (Poskey, 2001)

Typically, emotional intelligence involves the following: emotional empathy; recognition of one's own and others' moods; mood management or control over emotions; response with adaptive emotions and behaviors in various life situations, especially under stress; possession of good social skills and communication skills (courtesy, consideration, and respect); good self-motivation and goal management (Poskey, 2001). In essence, an employee with high emotional intelligence can manage his or her own impulses, communicates with others effectively, manages change well, solves problems, and uses humor to relieve tension. As psychologists show, EQ is not determined by personality or by the Intelligence Quotient (IQ). Thus, personality refers to the emotion, thought, and behavior patterns unique to an individual, whereas EQ can identify the biases and clarity in one's thinking patterns that allow them to make the appropriate decisions. Consequently, EQ, rather than the individual's personality type, is the decisive factor in assigning a person for a certain job or position. For instance, the extrovert, sensor, thinker, and judger (ESTJ) from the Myers – Briggs Type Indicator is suitable for leadership roles, which does not guarantee that an individual with those personality characteristics will make sound judgments under stress. On the other hand, a sociable, energetic, and outgoing individual does not necessarily make a successful employee, whereas people with varying personality styles can successfully perform the same job.

In this sense, human resources specialist Mike Poskey outlines a set of five EQ competencies that, in his opinion, contribute more to workplace success than technical

skills, cognitive ability, and personality traits.

A. Social Competencies – determine the way in which we handle relationships: *Intuition and empathy* refer to our awareness of others' feelings, needs, and concerns - this competency is important in the workplace for understanding others, in customer services, people development and leveraging diversity; *Political acumen and social skills* - our capacity to induce positive responses in others; this competency is important in the workplace for persuasion, communication, leadership, initiating and managing change, conflict resolution, building bonds, collaboration and cooperation, and team work.

B. Personal Competencies – determine the way in which we manage ourselves: *Self awareness* means knowing one's internal states, preferences, resources, and intuitions; this competency is important in the workplace for emotional awareness, accurate self-assessment, self-confidence; *Self Regulation* means managing one's internal states, impulses, and resources; this competency is important in the workplace for self-control, trustworthiness, conscientiousness, and adaptability; *Self expectations and motivation* refer to emotional tendencies that guide or facilitate reaching goals. This competency is important in the workplace for achievement drive, commitment, initiative, optimism, and persistence in pursuing goals despite obstacles and setbacks.

Given the importance of emotional intelligence in establishing a positive, productive work environment, companies should shift the emphasis from selection criteria based on the assessment of personality traits and training programs focused on hard skills to such competencies as stress management, assertiveness skills, empathy, and political/social acumen.

Another definition of Emotional Intelligence (EQ) is “the ability of an individual to deal successfully with other people, to manage one's self, motivate others, understand one's own feelings and appropriately respond to the everyday environment” (Turner, 2003) places the issue into the larger picture of interpersonal skills, which, as communication experts point out, can be learned, trained and developed as any other human ability.

All this, corroborated with a statistics provided by the Center for Creative Leadership, according to which 27% of the individuals working in companies display poor emotional intelligence, determined many organizations to launch the so – called awareness - training programs meant to draw attention that no matter how professionally or technically skilled the employees might be, their ineffective workplace behavior has a negative impact on productivity. (Turner, 2003)

Recent studies indicate that emotional intelligence accounts for 15% - 45% of one's job success, whereas the IQ accounts for less than 6%. At the same time, according to research, professionals and managers with high emotional intelligence are 127% more productive. Under the circumstances, developing the employees' EQ by incorporating emotional intelligence into the training programs should be a top priority of any company.

These programs have to work against a myth according to which expressing emotions and professionalism exclude each other, and promote a workplace that leaves room for both positive and negative emotions, in order to have happier, more creative, productive and motivated employees. As business consultant Alexander Kjerulf shows,

no company can afford to ignore emotions in the workplace for the following reasons:

- **We make no decisions without emotions.** Neuroscientists have proved that the human brain predominantly relies on emotion over intellect in decision – making. Therefore, we should be aware that we cannot cease to be human beings when we are at work, and cannot avoid being biased in making business decisions.
- **Emotions guide workplace relationships,** underlying group work, teamwork, and any business interaction within a company. Positive emotions foster a sense of comfort and secure a productive work environment.
- **Emotions are at the source of employee engagement and motivation,** which are, ultimately, non – rational, emotional processes.
- **Emotions are crucial to creativity and innovation,** which largely rely on people’s state of mind. Studies, as well as everyday organizational experience, show that feelings powerfully affect people’s performance. Thus, when people feel at ease and are in a good mood, their cognitive processes are enhanced, which leads to more flexible, fluent, and original thinking, so that they are likely to be more creative.
- **Emotions are integral to learning at work.** Theories of learning show that emotions play a huge role in learning, as under stress, or any other negative emotion, concentration drops dramatically and people are less able to recall already acquired knowledge and to make mental connections.
- **We cannot leave our emotions at home** because they are part of our unique status as human beings and, therefore, situations in which we cannot express our feelings are stressful.
- **Stifled bad emotions grow stronger,** as negative energy accumulates and result either in apathic withdrawal, or neurotic aggressiveness.
- **Stifled good emotions grow weaker.** If we are not allowed to show our positive feelings they will. That is why communication experts are of the opinion that the most efficient workplaces are the ones that promote the celebration of victories, which keeps the good feelings alive for a longer period of time, and motivates people to make progress.
- **Emotions are a sign that people care about the workplace** and are personally involved in organizational success and failure. (Kjerulf, 2007)

That is why companies should deal constructively with their employees’ emotions, whether positive or negative, as basic components of interpersonal relations that have a decisive impact on business success factors like learning, creativity and teamwork.

To sum up, workplace trainer Ricky Lien outlines four sets of skills pertaining to EQ:

1. Self – awareness is “our ability to accurately perceive our own emotions in the moment and to understand our tendencies across different situations.” A high degree of self – awareness can be attained by discerning the source and reasons of our emotions (love, joy, fear, anger, and grief), and by dealing with them in terms of their effects on ourselves, our interpersonal relations and our efficiency as employees.

2. Self – management refers to our self-control, our ability to manage ourselves with discipline and focus and includes such factors as personal initiative,

adaptability, a high achievement drive, conscientiousness to complete tasks, and reliability.

3. Social awareness has to do with being empathic in relation with others, that is the ability to understand their feelings and emotions and adjust our own responses in accordance with the interlocutor's state of mind and reactions.

4. Relationship management refers to such interpersonal skills as the ability to build strong bonds with others, to help others develop, to have influence, to be change agents and good communicators, to manage conflict and exhibit leadership characteristics. Workplace trainers point out that the people who are able to connect technical skills with a high EQ are those who make a difference in today's workplace. (Lien, 2004)

3. WORKPLACE CONFLICT AND ITS IMPACT ON PRODUCTIVITY

A negative atmosphere in the workplace is hardly compatible with productivity, job satisfaction or trust building. In his book *How One Turn in Attitude Can Lead to Success*, expert in workplace communication Dr. Alan Zimmerman quotes the results of a survey conducted by a UNC research team, in which 53% of the respondents said they lost work time worrying about a past or future confrontation with a co – worker, 37% said a hostile confrontation caused them to reduce their commitment to the organization, 28% said they lost work time because they avoided a confrontational co – worker, and 22% said they put less effort into their work because of confrontations. (Zimmerman, 2006)

Starting from these facts that illustrate the negative impact of tense work relations on productivity, Zimmerman suggests a number of ways to reduce conflict and improve workplace climate: 1. *Self analysis* in order to realize if something in our own attitude is the source of conflict. Specialists in organizational behavior point out that a major mistake in dealing with workplace conflict is to automatically assume that we are totally innocent, and everyone else is to blame for it; 2. *Empathy* - Zimmerman shows that an efficient way to approach difficult co – workers is based on the awareness that their annoying behaviors typically come from some frustrations and repressed suffering. Therefore, if we are free to judge people's behaviors, we should be more careful about judging the motives behind them; 3. *Learning a lesson from each difficult person and each workplace conflict* instead of wasting energy on getting annoyed, aggravated or defensive. Dealing with difficult working relations as opportunities to train our patience and to practice our interpersonal skills allows us to respond to the workplace conflict in a positive manner; 4. *Taking time before responding to a difficult person during* because impulsive reactions fuel conflict and enhance workplace tension (Zimmerman, 2006).

Starting from Zimmerman's premise that we are often the sources of others' negative behavior, we can admit that one of the most efficient ways to prevent conflict lies in our own ability to express our needs confidently and comfortably, without causing offence or being offended. This crucial interpersonal skill is generically called *assertive communication* and involves the necessary dose of maturity, self - confidence and patience that enables us to meet the challenges of the workplace, where our

comfort and productivity depend on other people. Business communication expert Mimi Donaldson deals with assertive communication by equating it with a type of behaviour for which she coins the term *self-ful* and which she defines as “a person confident enough of their rights to be assertive: to ask for what they need and want without hurting other people.” (Donaldson, 2005) This represents a balance between two extreme behaviours, equally harmful for work relations, namely: the selfish, aggressive attitude which involves total disregard of others’ needs and interests, and the selfless behaviour specific to non – assertive persons, who avoid conflict at all costs and become victims for pushy co – workers.

According to Donaldson, the self – full person takes the following three steps in dealing with invasive co – workers: *acknowledges* their problem by sympathizing with them in order to save time and energy and to prevent further discussions; *advises* them about his/her own priorities; *accepts* the interruption with time limits or suggest an alternative if the intruder does not give up after the first two steps.

Another way to avoid workplace tension is to learn how to complain constructively and to deal with complainers. Communication experts agree that if complaining in the workplace is either banned, or overlooked, the negative energy pertaining to is temporarily repressed and becomes toxic for the work environment. On the other hand, when done the right way and at the right time, complaining becomes legitimate and constructive, being an efficient tool for initiating change. (Kjerulf, 2007)

Constructive complaining involves the following: complaining about the problem itself, not just the symptoms; complaining at the right time; complaining to someone who can do something about it; analyzing ourselves before complaining about others, in order to see if we contribute to either the problem or to the solution in any way; seeking solutions instead of people to blame (Kjerulf, 2007).

Basically, the difference between constructive and unconstructive complaining is that the former actually leads to change, whereas the latter paradoxically obstructs it by reinforcing a bad situation which has already turned into routine. Thus, the amount of safety and comfort in the relatively comfortable state of negativity traps people in the space of perpetual, and often petty dissatisfaction, from which people no longer have the energy and optimism to seek a way out.

Dealing with complainers is a challenge for interpersonal skills, especially in the case of chronic negativity that is contagious and likely to undermine the workplace climate. As Alexander Kjerulf explains, most of our classic responses to complainers are inefficient and actually stimulate them in their negative attitude. Some of the useless attempts to stop chronic complainers are the following: *cheering them up*, which suggests the complainers they are not taken seriously and makes them complain harder; *suggesting solutions*, as the more we try, the harder they will work to convince us and themselves that these solutions could never work for them; *telling them to pull themselves together* will offend them and turn them against us; *complaining about the complainers* would turn ourselves into complainers; *ignoring/avoiding them* makes complainers clamour for attention even more; *complaining along with them* creates bonding but it’s not productive as the more people complain, the less they do about their problems; *confronting them* can drive the complaints underground, where negative energy will continue to accumulate (Kjerulf, 2007).

According to Kjerulf, the only efficient approach to chronic complainers is to show them empathy and admiration for the way in which they cope with what they consider to be a terrible situation or a huge problem. Although this does not always put an end to complaining, it saves us from the vicious cycle of responses that just makes the complainers complain more and more.

4. CONCLUSION

Emotional intelligence is the source of such competencies as influence, initiative and achievement drive, which we generically refer to as job performance. Ultimately, these social and emotional competencies are the conditions that define a productive and psychologically comfortable place of work.

REFERENCES:

- [1]. **Bachman, W.** (1988) *Nice guys finish first: A SYMLOG analysis of U.S. Naval commands*, in R. B. Polley (Ed.), *The SYMLOG practitioner: Applications of small group research*, Praeger, New York
- [2]. **Donaldson, M.** (2005) *Becoming Self-ful: Assertive Communication At Work*, <http://www.mimidonaldson.com/>
- [3]. **Gardner, H.** (1983) *Frames of mind*, Basic Books, New York
- [4]. **Goleman, D.** (1995) *Emotional intelligence*, Bantam, New York
- [5]. **Hunter, J.E.; Hunter, R.F.** (1984) *Validity and utility of alternative predictors of job Performance*, *Psychological Bulletin*, 76(1), pp. 72-93
- [6]. **Kjerulf, A.** (2007) *Happy Hour is 9 to 5*, Alexander Publishing
- [7]. **Lien, R.** (2004) *Emotional Intelligence (EQ) in the Office. How to bring out the best in yourself and others*, <http://www.hodu.com/eq-office.shtml>
- [8]. **Lusch, R.F.; Serpkenci, R.R.** (1990) *Personal differences, job tension, job outcomes, and store performance: A study of retail managers*, *Journal of Marketing*, 54(1), pp. 85-101
- [9]. **Poskey, M.** (2001) *The Importance of Emotional Intelligence in the Workplace. Why It Matters More than Personality*, <http://www.hodu.com/EQ.shtml>
- [10]. **Rosenthal, R.** (1977) *The PONS Test: Measuring sensitivity to nonverbal cues*, in P. McReynolds (Ed.), *Advances in psychological assessment*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco
- [11]. **Salovey, P.; Mayer, J.** (1990) *Emotional intelligence, Imagination, cognition, and personality*, 9(3), pp.185-211
- [12]. **Schulman, P.** (1995) *Explanatory style and achievement in school and work*, in G. Buchanan & M. E. P. Seligman (Eds.), *Explanatory style*, Lawrence Erlbaum, Hillsdale, NJ
- [13]. **Sternberg, R.** (1996) *Successful intelligence*, Simon & Schuster, New York
- [14]. **Thorndike, R.L.; Stein, S.** (1937) *An evaluation of the attempts to measure social Intelligence*, *Psychological Bulletin*, 34, pp. 275-284
- [15]. **Turner, F.** (2003) *Your Career and Emotional Intelligence*, <http://www.refresh.com/aemotionalintel.html>
- [16]. **Wechsler, D.** (1940) *Nonintellective factors in general intelligence*, *Psychological Bulletin*, 37, pp. 444-445
- [17]. **Zimmerman, A.** (2006) *Pivot: How One Turn in Attitude Can Lead to Success*. Peak Performance Publishers