

Emotional Intelligence: A Key Driver of Employability in Management Graduates

Gargi Gothe

Training and Placement Officer, PTVA's Institute of Management

Abstract:

Emotional Intelligence is the ability to manage one's emotions in a constructive way, so that it leverages one's work, life, and relationships to a better level. The term as coined by Daniel Goleman, has been widely used across disciplines to study the impact of people's emotional health on communication, work productivity, decision making, team building, and conflict management. Among the many soft skills that makes a person 'employable', high emotional quotient is one such trait that many employers find desirable in candidates. The objective of this paper is to understand the significance of Emotional Intelligence as one of the driving factors that impacts employability of Management graduates. The paper also aims to propose EQ as one of the key components organizations can consider when they devise strategies for workforce transformation.

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence, Employability Skills, Management Education

Introduction

Emotional Intelligence can be described as the appropriate handling and managing of one's emotions, and emotional state in one's professional and personal life and relationships. Emotional Intelligence has been a subject of study for decades, across disciplines for the way it impacts human interactions, decision-making, and conflict resolution. These traits, also necessary for employability are driven by an individual's healthy management of one's emotions. In an age where employers are looking for candidates best suited to work in a dynamic environment with a diverse group of people, it is important that one understands the importance of clear communication, use of empathy, and healthy stress management as top traits in job seekers.

Literature Review

The study of Emotional Intelligence has gained a lot of importance across domains, owing to the shift of focus from intelligence quotient to emotional aptitude. Peter Salovey and John

Mayer's publication "Emotional Intelligence" can be seen as the primary guide to understanding the part emotions play in shaping all human interactions, both personally and professionally. While Salovey and Mayer introduced the term, Daniel Goleman popularised it in his *Working with Emotional Intelligence* which highlighted the effect of EQ on work productivity, employability, and leadership. Howard Gardner's idea of 'Multiple Intelligences' challenges the exclusive stature given to an individual's cognitive faculties and states that a person is equipped with more than one kind of intelligence which need not be measured using a standard IQ test. This is where EQ can be discussed when he talks about interpersonal, and intrapersonal intelligence. These facets of intelligence are all-pervading in every type of human interaction in this age, which makes EQ as relevant as IQ now, more than ever.

Objectives

- To understand through secondary research, the relationship between an individual's emotional intelligence and employability
- To understand the important role of EQ in Management education with respect to students' employability

Relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Employability

The relationship between Emotional Quotient and individual's employability has gained special importance among employers, educators, trainers, and life coaches, for its direct impact on individual's work productivity, motivation, and stress-management. General aptitude and EQ have always played a crucial part in determining employment possibilities for an individual. With respect to mentoring management graduates to be 'employable', one can understand the significant role of emotional intelligence in shaping their overall interpersonal faculties. "Talked about loosely for decades under a variety of names, from "character" and "personality" to "soft skills" and "competence," there is at last a more precise understanding of these human talents, and a new name for them: emotional intelligence" (Goleman, 1998). Emotional aptitude then, is not only prized, but even expected in an employee. High emotional intelligence at work is believed to be one of the core employability skills recruiters look for in their candidates. With a shift in paradigm in work culture from being individualistic to working in a team, an individual with higher EI is likely to function better, even lead a team.

Adapting to an ever-changing environment has become one of the key factors for employee growth, and increased productivity. Flexibility and faster adaptability at work, taking autonomy of one's emotions, motivation, and having a goal-oriented outlook have always been among the many attributes that are affected owing to an individual's emotional quotient. For a management graduate preparing for employment, assimilation into new roles and company culture, understanding group dynamics, and effectively understanding different emotional registers is the way for continued growth and learning.

Peter Salovey and John Mayer first described Emotional Intelligence in *Imagination, Cognition, and Personality* 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” (189). EI then, is one of the key drivers of what can be described as highly regarded social competencies employers would expect in a candidate, along with strong communication, accountability for work, flexibility, and ethical decision-making capacity. For Management graduates about to explore employment opportunities, it is imperative that one thinks beyond technical skills and qualification while preparing for a job interview. For candidates with low EQ may experience feelings of anxiety, embarrassment, or even anger when faced with criticism, an individual with high EQ owing to his/her emotional autonomy is seen to be quite receptive of understanding and preparing for these triggers to dodge outbursts. These individuals are able to work under pressure without the work stressing them out, handle situations independently, and have a solution-oriented approach in the event of a crisis.

These markers which are examples of an individual's high EQ can be classified under what Goleman (1998) calls “self-awareness”. A ‘self-aware’ individual is well equipped to identify and work on inadequacies, weaknesses, and obstacles for a better outcome. For Management graduates seeking employment, this can be quite relevant as it allows them to compare their core competencies to that of industry expectations pertaining to general employability skill sets. Goleman, while discussing attributes of a good leader, points out that in careers like medicine, law, management, and technical studies, an individual's emotional intelligence plays a central role, ahead of one's cognitive abilities (19). While intellectual quotient serves an equally important place in work productivity, but social aspects related to work like effective intra and inter- company coordination, keeping oneself and others

motivated, sound decision making, and managing conflicts requires the use of more than technical/ academic faculties.

Studies also show a correlation between higher emotional intelligence and good leadership. An individual with good stress management, participative management, assertiveness, is more likely to lead a team better. Such a leader is also able to identify triggers, rationally convey criticism to his/her team, and take control of crisis by avoiding an emotional cascade at work. Goleman (1998) described this cascading as “amygdala hijack” where an individual’s extreme emotional responses like fear, anger, and anxiety are triggered, and the individual tends to react impulsively by either facing the situation or fleeing from it. The trigger often sets an individual to the path of impulsive, even inappropriate behaviour, which though temporary, can lead to disastrous effects at workplace, if let unattended.

This also brings one to discuss the role of “self-regulation/ management” that Goleman talks about- people with higher control over their emotional faculties are lesser prone to experience such ‘hijacks’, giving them a competitive edge over individuals who are prone to succumb to various triggers. In an age where employees are expected to possess competencies that make them employable, this form of self-management can be seen as the highest order of emotional discipline. Employees with higher levels of accountability and willingness to learn on the job are believed to exude higher confidence to handle positions and situations independently. Triggers which arise from a particular situation may also have a latent unpleasant emotion behind it. Self-awareness, then allows one to identify trigger emotions, giving an individual enough opportunity to work on their management.

Integration of emotional intelligence along with respective technical subjects plays an equally important part in making the graduates ‘employment-ready’. While studying the different case studies on leadership, negotiation, crisis management, organizational behaviour, or employee engagement, the role of EQ becomes primary, as it allows an individual to make sound decisions with a balance between personal, and company interests. Management education then, becomes a platform for graduates to test their emotional aptitude along with their academic discourse. The most sought-after competencies like good communication, collaboration, and analytical skills these days also have their foundation on a healthy emotional quotient (Marr). It is only imperative then that these skills be incorporated

into management education more practically through controlled exercises in areas like communication, business ethics, training and development, and change management.

Challenges to Developing Emotional Intelligence

The foremost challenge to developing emotional quotient is when one gives precedence to one's technical capabilities more than fostering emotional competencies. For an emotionally intelligent person it is imperative to be aware of one's emotions and manage them well-whether it is triggers, or an individual's reactions to situations that incite triggers. For individuals who lack emotional agility, adapting to dynamic situations and people can be quite challenging. Developing emotional resilience, then can be seen as a practice that comes with exposing oneself to different situations, people, and preparing to effectively engage with triggers without being a victim to emotional cascade.

One can also look at psycho-social barriers like different perceptions, lack of open-mindedness, or those having polarized opinions about the world can experience greater challenges to developing a sound emotional aptitude. For Management graduates launching their career into the Industry, it is necessary that they be adept in recognizing, managing and practicing the use of appropriate emotional responses at workplace. The challenge hence lies in imbibing the practice of developing EQ in everyday interactions and activities, given the importance set on conventional skills which are more technical and domain-based.

Conclusion

It can be thus inferred that employability is more than possessing technical knowledge- it is taking equal cognizance and control of one's emotional faculties. A management graduate with better understanding of group dynamics, critical thinking skills, and the use of appropriate register in workplace communication holds the key to also have better adaptability, resulting in greater gratification at work. While the knowledge of technical skills may certainly aid the candidate to sail through the interview processes, the bigger challenge lies in persisting with workplace undercurrents through the use of one's emotional resilience.

Emotional Intelligence then, merely being a subject of socio-psychological discourse, proves to be one of the key elements to all personal and professional human interactions. Given the fact that emotional intelligence has now come to be recognized as one of the drivers of sustained workforce, employee success, and good organizational behaviour, it is only

plausible then that an individual's capacity to become employable is in fact based on one's emotional aptitude.

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