

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE: AN ESSENTIAL PART OF LEADERSHIP EFFECTIVENESS

SHRADDHA KULKARNI

Assistant Professor, Indira School of Business Studies, Pune, Maharashtra, India

ABSTRACT

This paper proposes that emotions play an important role in the leadership process. More precisely, it is proposed that emotional intelligence, the ability to understand and manage moods and emotions in the self and others, contributes to effective leadership in organizations. Four major aspects of emotional intelligence: (i) the appraisal and expression of emotion, (ii) the use of emotion to enhance cognitive processes, (iii) decision making, knowledge about emotions, and (iv) management of emotions are reviewed. Researcher, subsequently, proposes how emotional intelligence contributes to effective leadership by focusing on five essential elements of leader effectiveness: (i) development of collective goals and objectives; (ii) instilling in others an appreciation of the importance of work activities; (iii) generating and maintaining enthusiasm, confidence, optimism, cooperation, and trust; (iv) encouraging flexibility in decision making & change; and (v) establishing and maintaining a meaningful identity for an organization.

KEYWORDS: Emotional Intelligence, Leadership Effectiveness

INTRODUCTION

Though extensive research has been carried out on Leadership related topics, there has been debate over the approaches to leadership in organizational sciences. A wide variety of approaches to leadership has been projected – researchers have analyzed the styles of leadership, their interpersonal skills and attitudes, how their styles interact with situational conditions, and how they can make major changes in their organizations (Bass, 1990; Fiedler & House, 1994; Yukl, 1998; Yukl & Van Fleet, 1992).

The importance of leadership is understood by researchers and organizations. Study of different leadership styles and theories help us analyze the need of leadership execution and influencing the work culture of an organization. Furthermore, the existing literature denotes the way of how leaders behave in a particular situation, however, the role of emotions in the leadership process, are often not explicitly considered in the leadership literature, with the notable exception of work on charisma (e.g. Conger & Kanungo, 1998; Lindholm, 1990).

This relative negligence is not astonishing as the organizational literature has been conquered by a cognitive orientation (Ilgen & Klein, 1989), with emotional state being ignored or being seen as something that gets in the way of wisdom and effective decision making (Albrow, 1992). Leadership theory and research have not sufficiently considered how leaders' moods and emotions influence their effectiveness as leaders. Two initial studies propose that leaders' feelings may play an important role in leadership. George and Bettenhausen (1990) found that the extent to which leaders of existing work groups experienced positive moods certainly related to levels of uninterestingly behavior performed by group members and negatively related to group turnover rates. George (1995) found that work groups led by sales managers who tended to experience positive moods at work provided higher quality customer service than groups led by managers who did not tend to experience positive moods at work. While these two studies help to fill a gap in the

leadership literature, in and of themselves, they do not illuminate the role of moods and emotions in the leadership process per-se but rather suggest that feelings may be an important factor to consider.

The growing body of literature exploring the role of moods and emotions in human and organizational affairs (e.g. Fineman, 1993; Forgas, 1995) suggests that, rather than being simply an additional factor to consider, feelings play a much more central role in the leadership process. The purpose of this paper is to present a framework describing what that role might be. First, however, it is useful to sample the literature and research findings attesting to the central role of emotions in human affairs.

EMOTIONS AND LEADERSHIP

The literature concisely defined above is demonstrative of a much wider body of knowledge which suggests that feelings serve multiple purposes in human affairs. As will be demonstrated below, it is likely that moods play an important role in leadership. While George and Bettenhausen (1990) and George (1995) investigated some of the prospective helpful significances of leader's positive mood, it is likely that a variety of feelings (both emotions and moods) influences leadership effectiveness. Negative moods, for example, substitute systematic and careful information processing (Sinclair, 1988; Sinclair & Mark, 1992) and may be beneficial when leaders are dealing with complex problems in which mistakes carry high risk. As another example, relatively intense negative emotions may correctly redirect a leader's attention to an issue in need of immediate attention (Frigda, 1988).

Through the discussion, it is apparent that it is not too difficult to construct scenarios in which leaders would be well served by the experience of a variety of types of moods and emotions. Moreover, one can also construct scenarios in which a leader's effectiveness may be hampered by the experience of certain moods and emotions. Leaders who experience anger frequently may have a difficult time building good relationships with followers and producing their trust (Jones & George, 1998). Likewise, a leader who frequently experiences positive moods on the job may fail to notice and attend to performance shortfalls that are less than apparent. Hence, this inquiry into the role of emotions in leadership is not bent on determining the 'right' or 'effective' moods and emotions that facilitate leadership effectiveness. Leaders are obviously human beings with the full range of moods and emotions potentially available to them. Both positive and negative moods and emotions serve numerous functions in people's lives. Likewise, both positive and negative moods and emotions can sometimes be the cause of human dysfunctions.

This paper does seek to explore, however, whether effective leaders possess certain emotional capabilities just as they may possess certain cognitive capabilities (Bass, 1990; Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1991; Yukl, 1998). Moods and emotions play an extensive role in thought processes and behavior (Bower, 1981; Bower & Cohen, 1982; Clark & Isen, 1982; Forgas, 1995; George & Brief, 1992; Isen & Baron, 1991; Isen & Shalcker, 1982; Isen et al., 1978; Leventhal & Tomarken, 1986; Rosenhan et al., 1981; Teasdale & Fogarty, 1979) and the same moods and emotions can result in both improved or impaired effectiveness depending upon multiple factors including the index of effectiveness (a quick, heuristic-based response vs. a careful consideration of alternatives, Salovey et al., 1993; Sinclair & Mark, 1992). Moreover, research proposes that people can and do take steps to manage their own and others' moods and emotions (Mayer et al., 1991; Salovey & Mayer, 1989-90). Might it be that some leaders have superior mood/emotion capabilities which allow them to use and benefit from the variety of feelings they experience on the job? Might it also be that these capabilities enable leaders to influence, and develop effective interpersonal relationships with, their followers? Interpersonal relationships are loaded with moods and emotions as is effective social influence. These mood/emotion capabilities have been addressed by emotional intelligence theory and research.

The following discusses the emotional intelligence and the theory and research which support its role in human affairs. It is demonstrated, how emotional intelligence may be a key contributor to leadership effectiveness and outline how different aspects of emotional intelligence facilitate the varied activities central to effective leadership. While emotional intelligence has been linked previously to specific leader behaviors (Megerian & Sosik, 1996), this paper adopts a broader approach and explores the multitude of ways in which emotional intelligence may contribute to leadership effectiveness. Furthermore, it is pointed out that earlier leadership approaches, and in particular the trait approach, also have described certain leadership skills or traits that may either be subsumed under or may partially overlap with emotional intelligence (for reviews, see Bass, 1990; Yukl, 1998).

Moreover, while the term ‘emotional intelligence’ has been coined relatively recently, it bears some resemblance and partially overlaps with earlier concepts such as social intelligence (Legree, 1995; Sternberg & Smith, 1985; Wong et al., 1995). However, as Mayer, Salovey and Caruso (in press) suggest, emotional intelligence is theoretically preferable to earlier constructs such as social intelligence because it is more focused the results.

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Emotional intelligence includes internal, private feelings that influence functioning which may not necessarily be linked to social skills and also focuses exclusively on emotional skills rather than confounding them with social or political knowledge (Mayer et al., in press). Hence, emotional intelligence captures capabilities and skills in the emotion domain to a greater extent than prior constructs.

Emotional intelligence is ‘the ability to perceive emotions, to access and generate emotions so as to assist thought, to understand emotions and emotional knowledge, and to reflectively regulate emotions so as to promote emotional and intellectual growth’ (Mayer & Salovey, 1997: 5). Prior to continuing, it should be pointed out that the term ‘emotional’ in emotional intelligence is used broadly to refer to moods as well as emotions. So as to be consistent with the emotional intelligence literature, in the remainder of this paper, ‘emotions’ will be used to refer to both emotions and moods.

Emotional intelligence essentially describes the ability to effectively join emotions and reasoning, using emotions to facilitate reasoning and reasoning intelligently about emotions (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). In other words, emotional intelligence taps into the extent to which people’s cognitive capabilities are informed by emotions and the extent to which emotions are cognitively managed. Additionally, it should be pointed out that emotional intelligence is distinct from predispositions to experience certain kinds of emotions captured by the personality traits of positive and negative affectivity (George, 1996; Tellegen, 1985).

There are at least four major aspects of emotional intelligence: The appraisal and expression of emotion, the use of emotion to enhance cognitive processes and decision making, knowledge about emotions, and management of emotions;

Appraisal and Expression of Emotion: The ability to perceive emotions in oneself and others as well as in objects, art, stories, music, and other stimuli; Use of emotion to enhance cognitive processes and decision making: The ability to generate, use, and feel emotion as necessary to communicate feelings or employ them in other cognitive processes;

Knowledge about Emotions: The ability to understand emotional information, to understand how emotions combine and progress through relationship transitions, and to appreciate such emotional meanings;

Management of Emotions: The ability to be open to feelings, and to modulate them in oneself and others so as to promote personal understanding and growth. This discussion drawn from the work of Mayer, Salovey, and their colleagues

(e.g. Mayer & Salovey, 1993, 1995, 1997; Mayer et al., 1990; Salovey & Mayer, 1989–90, 1994; Salovey et al., 1993, 1995).

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP

While emotional intelligence can lead to enhanced functioning in diverse aspects of life such as achievement and close relationships (Goleman, 1995; Salovey & Mayer, 1989–90), it has been proposed that it may play a particularly important role in leadership effectiveness. To clarify this role, the researcher proposes how the four aspects of emotional intelligence described above – appraisal and expression of emotion, use of emotion to enhance cognitive processing and decision making, knowledge about emotions, and management of emotions – contribute to effective leadership.

In order to explore the implications of emotional intelligence for effective leadership, it is necessary to identify the fundamental nature of effective leadership. This is no easy task given the plethora of leadership theories, approaches, and empirical findings. Fortunately, several recent syntheses of the leadership literature have been offered which are consistent in terms of their descriptions of effective leadership. Based on the syntheses of Yukl (1998), Locke (1991), and Conger and Kanungo (1998), as well as the larger leadership literature, specific elements of leadership effectiveness can be identified. Note that, while no specific theory of leadership is entailed in these elements, the elements themselves have roots in a variety of theoretical traditions. As described by these authors (i.e. Conger & Kanungo, 1998; Locke, 1991; Yukl, 1998), effective leadership contains the following essential features: Development of a collective sense of goals and objectives and how to go about achieving them; Instilling in others knowledge and appreciation of the importance of work activities and behaviors; Generating and maintaining excitement, enthusiasm, confidence, and optimism in an organization as well as cooperation and trust; Encouraging flexibility in decision making and change; Establishing and maintaining a meaningful identity for an organization.

The goals and objectives considered here are major, all-embracing goals that are commonly referred to as the leader's vision for the organization (e.g. Conger & Kanungo, 1998; Locke, 1991). Emotional intelligence may contribute to leaders developing a compelling vision for their groups or organizations in a number of ways. First, leaders may use their emotions to enhance their information processing of the challenges, threats, issues, and opportunities facing their organizations. Leaders are often faced with a large amount of information characterized by uncertainty and ambiguity; out of this information, they need to chart a course for their groups or organizations.

In terms of the AIM model (Forgas, 1995); leaders are likely to engage in substantive processing as they seek to determine the direction for their organizations. They are dealing with complex information with high uncertainty and the desire to be accurate. AIM model suggests that current affective state is likely to influence judgments resulting from substantive processing through the mechanism of affect priming.

Research linking positive moods to creativity suggests that when leaders are in positive moods they may be more creative (Isen et al., 1987) and, hence, more likely to come up with a compelling vision that contrasts with existing conditions. For example, people in positive moods have been found to be more integrative, use broader categories, and approach problems and categorization more flexibly (Isen & Baron, 1991; Isen & Daubman, 1984; Isen et al., 1985; Murray et al., 1990). Creating a compelling vision for an organization can be an exercise in creativity, positive thinking, and flexibility and such an exercise will be facilitated by positive moods (Isen et al., 1985; Murray et al., 1990). Leaders who are high on emotional intelligence will be better able to take advantage of and use their positive moods and emotions to envision major improvements in their organizations' functioning.

Leaders high on emotional intelligence also are likely to have knowledge about the fact that their positive moods

may cause them to be overly optimistic. Hence, in order to ensure that they are being realistic and appropriately critical, they may be more likely to revisit their judgments when in a more neutral or negative mood to ensure a careful consideration of all the issues involved. Such leaders also are likely to be better able to repair negative moods arising from any number of sources that may limit flexibility and creativity, and, more generally, use meta-mood processes to manage their moods and emotions in functional ways (Mayer et al., 1991).

Importantly, leaders need not only to come up with a compelling vision, but also to effectively communicate it throughout the organization in such a way that it does come to be shared and is 'collective'. By accurately appraising how their followers currently feel, relying on their knowledge of emotions to understand why they feel this way, and influencing followers' emotions so that they are receptive to and supportive of the leader's goals or objectives for the organization and proposed ways to achieve them, leaders may help to ensure that their vision is shared or collective. For example, a leader who is high on emotional intelligence may act on emotional knowledge which suggests that followers are more likely to experience positive emotions and be supportive of the leader's goals and objectives when the leader expresses confidence in followers and serves to elevate their levels of self-efficacy (Gardner & Avolio, 1998).

LIMITATION OF THE PRESENT STUDY

This study is a review of the established literature and the discussion can't be backed with empirical testing. Clearly, what is needed now is empirical research which tests the ideas proposed in this paper. Given the complexities of the issues involved, both qualitative and quantitative methodologies hold promise for exploring the ways in which emotional intelligence may contribute to leader effectiveness, as theorized in this paper. Meaningful quantitative investigations could take place in both field and laboratory settings as well as through the use of management simulations. Additionally, given the stage of development of theorizing and research on emotional intelligence, there are several measures of emotional intelligence that have been developed and could be used to measure the emotional intelligence levels of research participants (e.g. Mayer et al., 1997; Salovey et al., 1995).

CONCLUSIONS

The present analysis recommends that, at a minimum, emotions and emotional intelligence are well-intentioned of deliberation in the leadership domain. Emotional intelligence has the probable to contribute to effective leadership in manifold ways, some of which have been irradiated in this paper. The special relevance to leadership revolves around the fact that leadership is an emotion-laden process, both from a leader and a follower perspective. A caveat concerning the current analysis is that it has focused primarily on leaders and it has been argued that leadership theory and research would benefit from consideration of a more follower-centered approach (e.g. Meindl, 1990, 1993; Meindl et al., 1985).

In this regard, the study of emotional intelligence and leadership would benefit from the consideration of emotional intelligence in followers and its effects on the leadership process. Additionally, and from a symbolic interactionism perspective, it would be interesting to explore how interactions between leaders and followers result in the creation and management of emotions in a work setting. To conclude, investigating how leaders' capabilities in the emotion domain or their emotional intelligence contribute to their effectiveness certainly seems worthy of future empirical research and theorizing. Hopefully, the current analyses will provide researchers with some support in this regard, this paper eventually, tries to denote that the study of leadership effectiveness has a significance in organizational research and emotional aspect of a leader need to be given due prominence.

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