Social Competency and Relationship Management

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Some leaders are regarded as more successful than others. We often attribute that success to the possibility that they might be smarter, have had greater experiences or deeper knowledge, or may have been fortunate enough to acquire the best education. However, many brilliant and well-educated people struggle in their careers not because of their performance, skill or educational attainment but because of their inability to recognize and understand their own emotions and the feelings of others. This, in turn, prevents them from using critical social awareness skills to best manage workplace relationships. Practicing *emotional intelligence* is so important to success that it accounts for 58% of performance in the workplace and is the strongest driver for personal excellence[1].

Why it matters:

> *Everyone in the workplace benefits when a leader can skillfully navigate conflict, ease stress-filled situations, dismantle challenges, and instill trust into the workplace. This ability creates an optimal environment for employees to thrive productively and feel job satisfaction.*

Emotional Intelligence is the Best Predictor of Career Success

While our awareness of the significance of this success factor is relatively recent, the promising news is that it is a learnable ability for people willing to address it. There are four skills that together make up emotional intelligence: **self-awareness**, **self-management, social awareness,** and **relationship management**. These skills pair up under two primary leadership capabilities: personal competence and social competence.

Personal competence (self-awareness and self-management) focuses on us as individuals before delving into our interactions with others. Self-awareness means you can identify and perceive your own emotions as you experience them and have a deep understanding of what makes you "tick." Leaders highly skilled in self-awareness know what they do well, what motivates them, what pushes their buttons, and the types of people and situations to which they gravitate. Self-awareness is foundational to improving the other emotional intelligence skills. Reaching a certain level of self-awareness then allows you to practice self-management more consistently. It means you can take what you know about yourself, your triggers and your needs, and choose the best course of action in most situations. Knowing yourself (self-awareness) purposefully directs your behavior (self-management).

Social competence (social awareness and relationship management) transports personal aptitude to an interactive and social realm. It is the powerful ability to understand other people's moods, behaviors and motives so that you can improve the quality and connection of your relationships. Author Daniel Goleman puts it this way, *"Empathy is our social radar. It requires being able to read another's emotions; at a higher level, it entails sensing and responding to a person's unspoken concerns or feelings. At the highest levels, empathy is understanding the issues or concerns that lie <u>behind</u> another's feelings."* Because social competency is the key to building healthy workplace relationships, this article will dive deeper into the Social Competence components of the emotional intelligence skillsets.

Using Social Awareness to Create Healthy Work Relationships

Social awareness is the first component of social competency and lays the foundation for building solid work relationships. It involves listening and keen observations, often simultaneously. Leaders are constantly challenged to discern employees' emotions in the moment, while remaining actively engaged in the conversation or dialogue. Doing this successfully requires high levels of empathy and adept social skills. Let's explore these two areas more fully.

Empathy

Being able to sense or perceive what other people are feeling even though they might not be able to verbally express it themselves is the essence of empathy. Words only convey a portion of what we are feeling. However, many nonverbal clues deliver details beyond the spoken words. An employee's tone of voice, body

language, or facial expression provides indicators that something is "off." Unless leaders are intimately familiar with their own emotional landscape, it will be difficult to tune into other people's terrains. That is why personal competence is a pre-requisite to social competence.

In addition to understanding others, empathy enables leaders to develop or coach employees to their fullest potential. Empathic leaders acknowledge and reward employees' strengths and accomplishments, while looking for opportunities to provide useful feedback for further growth. These leaders have a natural inclination towards anticipating and meeting other's needs, which is especially helpful when working with customers, as well as employees.

Being an empathic leader means respecting and relating to people from varied backgrounds and perspectives. This will help create a workplace environment where diverse people can thrive, leading to organizational learning and consummate success. Combine that skill with the ability to accurately read power relationships, organizational and external realities and other forces that shape the views and actions of customers and stakeholders, and you have a vital behind-the-scenes expertise that influences others in powerful ways. It is often referred to as being "politically savvy." Empathic leaders are attuned to the climate and culture of not just the organization, but the larger forces in the world. This level of sensitivity enables a leader to be more in tune with the underlying issues at play and determine how to best address what really matters to "make things happen." This is the skill behind the art of influence and separates mediocre leaders from great ones.

People Skills

Empathic leaders with good people skills know intuitively how to build bridges to others so that relationship bonds are robust. They are adept at engaging others and getting desirable responses from them. They know how to win people over and appeal to different audiences to build consensus and support. This type of influence is essential in achieving goals and outcomes. Empathy is crucial for exerting influence, but the first step in persuasion is building rapport. Rapport is that ethereal component that draws someone towards you so that a relationship can begin to form, and trust takes root.

Powerful communicators are leaders who listen openly and send compelling messages. They create a workplace atmosphere that is open, transparent, and consistent. Listening well is the key to empathy, but also accounts for about a third of the high rankings that employees give their bosses as effective communicators.

Another essential component to good communication is being able to control our own moods. The editors at the University of Pennsylvania's online newsletter, Wharton@Work, highlight this point, *"Because employees pay great attention to their leaders' emotions, leaders can strongly influence the mood, and thus attitudes and performance, of their teams through emotional contagion."* The most effective leaders understand this very well. They use their emotional radar system to sense how others are reacting and skillfully maneuver the interactions in the most positive directions.

Leaders' adept in people skills have profound influence, are good communicators, and have a high capacity for mood management. But they are also great conflict managers–able to negotiate and resolve disagreements creatively. Nothing can destroy productivity, derail projects, or damage your organization faster than workplace conflicts. Socially aware leaders swiftly handle difficult people and tense situations with supreme tact and diplomacy. They are not afraid of open debate because they are masters at win-win solutions.

Below are ten concrete approaches that keep workplace relationships healthy and thriving[2].

1. Continuously build trust
    a. Be consistent in your words and actions
    b. Follow-through on your agreements
2. Explain your decisions, don't just make them
    a. Take time to explain the why behind decisions
    b. Engage others as often as possible in the process for decisions
3. Tackle tough conversations
    a. Look for agreement or common ground
    b. Make sure people feel "heard"
    c. Remain open and non-defensive
4. Take feedback well
    a. Really listen to what is being said without defensiveness
    b. Thank the person for sharing the feedback with you
5. Remember little things pack a big punch
    a. Don't forget to say "please" and "thank you"
    b. Don't be afraid to say "I'm sorry" or "that was my mistake"
6. Be open and curious
    a. Share information about yourself
    b. Show genuine interest and curiosity in others
7. Make your feedback direct and instructive
    a. Handle your own emotions first
    b. Offer solutions for change

8. Always work on your communication style
    a. Incorporate the feedback you receive from others into enhancing your style
    b. Pay attention to times where your style has created confusion or troubled reactions
9. Don't avoid the inevitable
    a. Face reality
    b. Use empathy and common purpose
10. Align your intention with your impact
    a. Think before you speak or act
    b. Make careful observations

All relationships take work: time, effort, and know-how. But the *know-how is emotional intelligence*. Leaders who master personal competence by building their skills in self-awareness and self-management are the ones who excel at social competence. Their social radar is soundly padded in empathy and people skills. Leveraging those, they build enduring relationships within the workplace environment and employ strategies to keep them strong and vitally connected.

References:

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