Beyond Emotional Intelligence: Emotional Competence in the Workplace

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Objectives

• Compare and contrast emotional intelligence and emotional competence

• Develop an understanding of emotional competence and its uses on the individual, relational, and organizational levels

• Start exploring how to use emotional competence to prevent burnout, improve relationships, and improve organizational functioning
New Ways to Look at Emotions
Eckhart’s Emotional Expressions

Anger  Fear  Disgust  Happiness

Sadness  Surprise  Contempt

From The Nature of Things Website at http://www.cbc.ca/natureofthings/features/the-seven-universal-emotions-we-wear-on-our-face
Culturally Determined

- Facial expressions are cultural, not universal
- What we think of as “basic” emotions do not have unique “fingerprints” and are subjective
- According to research, no emotion has been proven to be universal
Socially situated

• As socially situated in organizations: within person vs. between people
• Emotions can be influenced or elicited by cues in the environment
• Routines and social structures can have regulating effect on emotions
• “Emotional contagion” or “emotional pollution”
Integrated with the physical body

- Certain movements/gestures can produce positive or negative affect, help you learn better
- Your physical structure greatly influences how you see and interact with the world
- Preventing movement and gesturing makes it harder for you to express emotions and understand others’ emotions
- Physical cues, such as hunger or pain, are directly tied to emotion
Integrated throughout the brain

• Mounting evidence against the theory of “primal” vs. “evolved” brain, where emotions are in the “primal” part and cognition is in the “evolved” part

• No specific “emotion” area

• Every decision we make is infused with affect – no such thing as the “rational” part of the brain
We need our emotions to make decisions

• Our thinking is not divided into “rational” and “emotive”

• Damasio (1994) study on patients with frontal lobe damage

• The importance of the “gut feeling”

• Emotions help us decide what is relevant or not; what is worth thinking about or not

• Emotions facilitate decision-making
How We Make Emotions
Your body budget

- Your brain/body constantly keeps track of physiological changes – heart rate, temperature, blood pressure, etc.
- The overriding goal is maximum efficiency – to match your body’s physiological response to demands on your body – this is your “body budget”
  - When your body budget matches with requirements, you feel good
  - When your body budget is not matching up with what is required, you feel bad
What is the difference between affect and emotion?

• Affect is a combination of valence and arousal
  • **Valence**: pleasant/unpleasant spectrum
  • **Arousal**: calmness/agitation spectrum

• Emotion is the **cognitive interpretation** of affect and depends a lot on the situation – *it is the meaning and prescriptive action*
Affective circumplex

Unpleasant Valence, High Arousal
Upset, Distressed

Pleasant Valence, High Arousal
Elated, Thrilled

Unpleasant Valence, Mid Arousal
Miserable, Displeased

Pleasant Valence, Mid Arousal
Gratified, pleased

Unpleasant Valence, Low Arousal
Lethargic, Depressed

Pleasant Valence, Low Arousal
Calm, serene
How do we experience the world?

- Daydreaming
- Memory
- Imagination
- Predictions that match sensory input
- Learning
- Autism
- Meditative states

Prediction

Sensory Input
How are emotions made?

- Our brain/body is constantly budgeting
- World experience based on prediction and/or sensory input
- We receive physiological cues that help us determine what our affect is
  - Predictive state $\rightarrow$ interpret events based on past experiences
  - Sensory state $\rightarrow$ interpret events based on current events
- We assign an emotion to our affect and behave accordingly
How We Use Emotions
How we use emotions

• Making meaning of our sensations – categorizing how you feel physically in order to understand the cause
• Prescribing action – helps you know what to do
• Physical regulation – tells your body how to respond
• Emotion communication
• Social influence
Emotions in Professional Settings
Emotional Labor

• “showing interest, concern, and sympathy, while suppressing disgust, frustration, and anxiety” according to “display rules”
• Emotion is subject to rules of the organization
• Emotion as a commodity
Emotional dissonance – distance between display emotion and felt emotion

• Emotional labor is related to “competing selves”, or “competing identities”

• When we are asked to take on multiple roles with competing motives and purposes, it can contribute to burnout

• Environmental factors can contribute to this effect: “Display rules”, risks of non-compliance, others’ reactions, social support
Emotions and Moral Injury (“burnout”)

• Job burnout: “a state of exhaustion and emotional depletion”
  • Results from prolonged, suppressed physiological arousal
  • Compassion fatigue
  • Linked to turnover, increase in sick days, low job performance

• May be made worse by:
  • client emotions/negative behavior
  • need for emotional labor
Emotional Intelligence and Emotional Competence
Emotional Intelligence

• “the ability to monitor one’s own and others’ emotions, to discriminate among them, and to use this information to guide one’s thinking and actions” (Salovey & Mayer, 1990)

• Emotion perception → emotion understanding → emotion management

• Focused on changing the individual
Emotional Competence

• The ability to express, validate, and process emotion in context to make positive change across organizations, in relationships, and in individuals.

• Finding balance between environmental growth/change and individual growth/change
Emotional Competence: Individual Level
Maintaining a good, responsive body budget

• Eat well
• Exercise
• Sleep
• Human touch
• Yoga
• Reading a book or watching a good movie
• Crying
• Learning
Emotional granularity

- The more specific you can get with your emotion word choice, the better choice you will make with your actions
- If you don’t have the concept for an emotion, you cannot actually experience the emotion and you can’t convey the meaning to anybody else
- Can you create your own emotion word for a specific situation? Ex: “Conflicted longing”
Mastering your emotions in the moment

• Move your body
• Change location or situation
• Emotion acceptance
• Deconstruct emotion into physical sensations and recategorize
  • Is your high arousal anxiety or excitement?
  • Are you nervous or determined?
• Determine what is about you, and what is about somebody else
• Cultivate awe – experience something bigger than yourself (or your organization)
• Eat something or chew gum
Self-soothing

• Differentiating between current emotion and past emotion

• Finding a balance between:
  • changing your expectations/perceptions and
  • changing your environment
Emotional Competence: Relational Level
Validating emotions and listening skills

• Find out how they are feeling – do not assume
• Ask questions to determine source of emotion
• Validate the connection between the emotion and the source
• Express concern, compassion, and care
• Ask guiding questions to COACH yourself or the person to an answer
• Unless asked, **DO NOT GIVE ADVICE OR OFFER YOUR OPINION**
Receiving Social Support

• Maladaptive social support
  • Recounting events and describing negative emotions
  • Results in increased negative emotions and physiological reactivity

• Adaptive social support
  • Reconstruing events in a way that promotes thinking about incident in a broader context that promotes insight and closure
  • “making meaning” out of your negative experiences
  • Using the generic “you”
  • Results in improved emotional and physiological reactivity and feelings of closure
Emotional Competence: Organizational Level
Transparency and Communication

- Maximum uncertainty creates maximum unpleasant affect, anger, and unpredictable behavior
Climate of authenticity

• “the extent that coworkers value authentic expressions of emotion with each other”

• Creating a sense of psychological safety – employees will not be rejected for being their authentic selves

• Provides a “break” from emotional labor with clients (receiving and giving)
Creating positive workplace culture

• How to Change an Unhealthy Work Environment – Glenn D. Rolfsen TedxOslo

• Create policy around respect and positive workplace behavior
  • Applies to ALL stakeholders, including clients
Group tool: Talking Circle

• Everybody in the circle needs to be committed to the process
• Talking stick/sacred object
• Facilitator talks about the object and states ground rules; reminds people of ground rules if the rules are broken
• Only person with the object can speak
• Object is passed to the left
• Nobody can respond to a person or comment directly on what they said
• Circle is complete when everybody has spoken
References

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