IMPACT OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE OF SERVICE PROVIDERS ON CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

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Abstract

Emotional intelligence is one of the most important determinants of service quality. It has emerged as one of the most important disciplines in the modern business management. As the service providers are required to be adaptive towards the demands and behaviours of the customers, it is basically emotional intelligence that helps managers in responding effectively towards the customer need. By using Emotional intelligence, organizations can have increased knowledge about customers and greater ability for recognizing and regulating the quality of service according to the desires of customers. This article suggests ways and means to enhance higher emotional intelligence to be displayed by service providers which would lead to greater customer satisfaction.

Introduction

Emotional intelligence (EI) describes the ability, capacity, skill or, in the case of the trait, a self-perceived grand ability to identify, assess, manage and control the emotions of one's self, of others, and of groups.

The earliest roots of emotional intelligence can be traced to Darwin's work on the importance of emotional expression for survival and second adaptation. In the 1900s, even though traditional definitions of intelligence emphasized cognitive aspects such as memory and problem-solving, several influential researchers in the intelligence field of study had begun to recognize the importance of the non-cognitive aspects. E.L. Thorndike used the term social intelligence to describe the skill of understanding and managing other people.

We have all come to believe that intelligence, or IQ, is an important factor in our success. Amazingly, recent research suggests just the opposite – which intelligence, as measured by one's IQ, has little to do with success in business. Rather, it is the Emotional Intelligence, or EQ, that accounts for up to 85% of a businessperson's career success. Think about some of the most successful people you know – they may not have an Ivy League degree, but most likely, they are adept at understanding their own emotions and reading the moods of other people around them. The good news is that, unlike IQ, you can improve your EQ with conscious effort!

Daniel Goleman's Model

The model introduced by Daniel Goleman focuses on EI as a wide array of competencies and skills that drive leadership performance. Goleman's model outlines four main EQ constructs:

1. Self-awareness – the ability to read one's emotions and recognize their impact while using gut feelings to guide decisions.
2. Self-management – involves controlling one's emotions and impulses and adapting to changing circumstances.
3. Social awareness – the ability to sense, understand, and react to others' emotions while comprehending social networks.
4. Relationship management – the ability to inspire, influence, and develop others while managing conflict.

"Comparing these domains, I found that for jobs of all kinds, emotional competencies were twice as prevalent among distinguishing competencies as were technical skills and purely cognitive abilities combined. In general the higher a position in an organization, the more EI mattered: for individuals in leadership positions, 85 percent of their competencies were in the EI domain."

— Daniel Goleman

Literature Review

Like most of the concepts of the social sciences emotional intelligence has also been defined by many researchers in different words. Emotional Intelligence can be considered as conceptualized by Salovey & Mayer (1990) "the ability to monitor one's own and others feelings and emotions to discriminate among them and to use information to guide one's thinking and action" (p. 189). To clarify this construct further, Mayer and Salovey (1997) postulated that emotional intelligence involves the ability to perceive accurately, appraise and express emotion, the ability to access and /or generate emotional knowledge, and the ability to regulate emotion to promote emotional and intellectual growth. Among other claims, Goleman (1995) theorized that emotional intelligence is equal to, if not more important than Intelligence Quotient (IQ) as an important indicator of success in one's professional and personal life. Elaborating further on this construct, Goleman (1998) explained that an individual's emotional intelligence can affect one's work situation. He also applied his conceptual understanding to organization as a whole.

Studies conducted by Slaski and Bardzil (2000), Mulipola and others (2006), Susan and Pappas (2007), Schneider and others (1980), Seval Fer (2004), Julia A. Kiely (2005), Kernbach & Schutte (2005), Deadrick & MacAfee (2001), Cavelzanl and others (2005), Halsell (2006), Heng (2008), Beaujan and others (2006), Hafey (2003), Mccallin and Bamford (2007), Humpel & Caputi (2001) and Rao (2006) conclude the following:

- For creating and maintaining climate of high quality service in the organization, emotional intelligence is considered most important element as its skills can be learned and practiced by the employees.
- Emotional intelligence helps employees in learning service skills that ultimately results in job success.
- The delivery and performance of services can be enhanced by linking them with the emotional intelligence skills.
- Emotional intelligence leads to employee satisfaction, customer satisfaction and customer loyalty in the service sector, hence its presence is considered very important among the service providers.
- In the recruitment and training process, emotional intelligence plays important role as employees are selected and developed for better service quality on the basis of emotional intelligence skills.
- Emotional intelligence and service quality are positively related as they both are vital for increasing performance, efficiency and customer loyalty in the long run.
- Emotional intelligence is considered an important tool for increasing service performance and team effectiveness.

Hence, it can be stated that emotional intelligence skills are necessary for the success in today's dynamic business environment as it is being practiced successfully in the service industry such as hospitality, banking and patient care. It may be concluded that emotional intelligence can be associated with the service quality in the service industry and desired objectives can be achieved.

Emotional Intelligence and Customer Service

Emotional Intelligence of the staff directly affects the level of Customer Service your company provides. It's essential for the leaders of an organization not only to work on themselves, but also cultivate and foster the culture of EI company-wide.

Ancient Egyptians believed the heart was the centre of intelligence and emotion. They also thought so little of the brain that during mummification, they removed the brain entirely from bodies. Calm down, I'm not suggesting to take that route, but rather let emotions to compliment your work. In many cases the lack of control/awareness over the emotions holds back one's professional and personal growth.

EI is one of the most challenging areas in which one can excel. It is relatively easy to teach someone about a technology or fact based subject, but in order to provide great customer service one must learn how to perceive, use, understand and manage emotions. These skills might take a life-time to master.

Skills required by the staff

The managers need to point out some of the specific areas staff can focus on to get on the path of continual self-improvement. Ask the team to start with the basics:

- The ability to provide accurate information
- Have consistent etiquette (every customer, every time)
- manage time at work to be available to help customers first and foremost (customers always come first)
- Know ways to showcase to your customers that you are trying to save them money while still meeting company's needs/goals (we care about our customers)

All of the above elements are examples of traits that may differ between employees and even departments. If one educates one another on ways to perform better in these areas one can, in turn, have a more consistent level of customer service overall. Everyone should at least have the ability to educate themselves up to a certain level on these key points. Almost all of the points above can be improved simply by finding and reading information on the web or talking to each other about how someone else may handle certain situations.

Your team must understand and know more about your services and the technology/products you offer than your customers. Aim to provide more than a customer expects, including more knowledge, and then your customer experience, therefore your business, will flourish.

How to achieve a high EI team?

First and foremost thing that the organization should do is to create an excitement and interest in minds of employees by explaining the importance and benefits of emotional intelligence and its necessity in a service industry. Once received the acceptance from employee's side, we can go ahead with the EI assessment. Two commonly used assessment tools are the Bar-On Emotional Quotient Inventory (Bar-On EQ-I) and the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT). Through these tests strengths and weaknesses of the employees will be assessed. Depending on the size of the organization training may involve a series of one-on-one coaching sessions or a series of half- or full-day training programs with 10 to 12 participants at a time.

Effective EI training involves skill development that includes tools and techniques to assist employees understanding of their own emotional landscape as well as methods for identifying and managing the emotions of others. Identified weaknesses can yield longer-term goals for improvement, which may be incorporated into the employee performance review process.

The following competencies are the most critical to predicting sales success and retention in the industry

Intuition & Empathy: This is the salesperson's awareness of the prospect's feelings, needs and concerns This competency is important in a sales role for the following reasons.

- *Attitude toward others*: one's ability to look positively and objectively upon others
- *Understanding others:* an intuitive sense of a prospect's and/or customer's feelings and

perspectives and showing an active interest in their needs

- *Customer service orientation:* the ability to anticipate, recognize, and meet customers' needs Results Orientation & Decisiveness. This is the salesperson's adeptness at inducing desirable responses from the customer or prospect.
- *Communication*: sending clear and convincing messages that are understood by the customer or prospect
- *Influencing:* using effective tactics and techniques for persuasion and desired results
- *Gaining commitment:* one's ability to develop a motivation act Self View.

It is the salesperson's level of courage and self-esteem that provides thick enough skin to persevere through various obstacles they encounter throughout the sales cycle. This competency is important in a sales role for the following reasons

- *Handling rejection:* one's ability to handle a no sale and to not take it personally and be able to recover and restart quickly to try again
- *Self-esteem*: the higher the self-esteem the more passion and courage the salesperson will have in the social arena

Self Awareness: This is knowing one's internal states, preferences, resources, strengths, and limitations. This competency is important in a sales role for the following reasons.

- *Self-confidence:* one's ability to believe in their own abilities and strengths to personally take charge in achieving and exceeding their goals
- *Persuasiveness:* one's ability to stand their ground in negotiations and in handling sales objections to exude to the customer or prospect that their product or service meets their needs
- *Competitiveness:* one's desire to win and be perceived as competent in the eyes of others, as well as desire to be personally recognized for their accomplishments

Self Expectations: This is the salesperson's emotional tendencies that guide or facilitate reaching goals and their sense of personal commitment to responsibilities. This competency is important in a sales role for the following reasons.

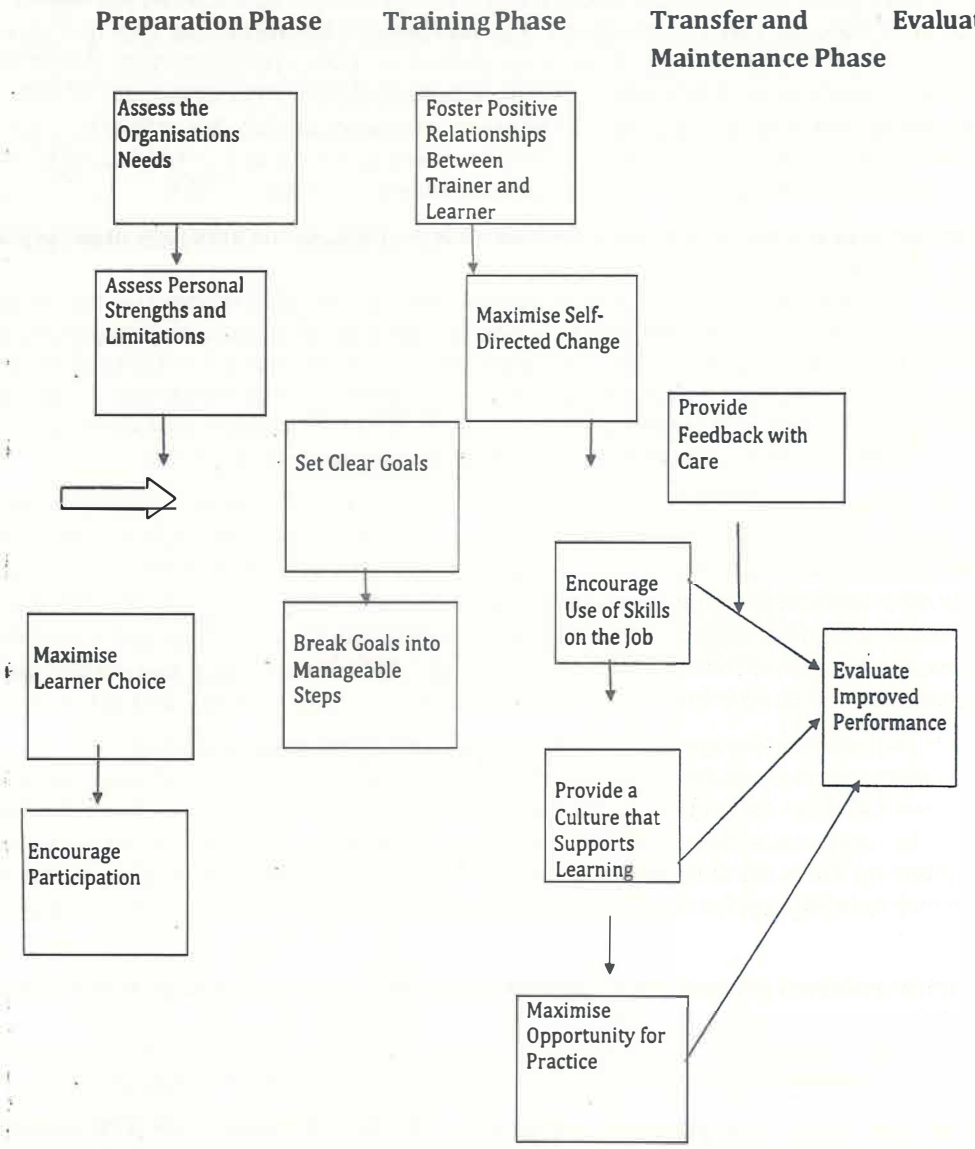
- *Achievement drive:* striving to improve or meet a standard of excellence we impose on ourselves
- *Initiative:* readiness to act on opportunities without having to be told
- *Optimism:* persistence in pursuing goals despite obstacles and setbacks

These are all essential competencies in selling in the service industry. The sales person who knows the product or service inside out will not succeed in the long term without possessing these essential competencies.

Enhancing Emotional Intelligence of Salespeople

By establishing a baseline, each individual salesperson will have an idea as to which aspects of EI he/she needs to improve the most.

A salesperson may be very strong in the intrapersonal dimensions of self-regulation and self-awareness, but may need to improve the interpersonal skill of perceiving others' emotions. By using an individual assessment, salespeople can tailor the program of exercises to most accurately fit their needs. Although no single EI testing tool has emerged as the dominant favourite for assessment purposes, there are several assessment scales. Each scale has benefits and drawbacks depending upon time factors, ease of use, parsimony, and scoring simplicity. Once salespeople have assessed their EI strengths and weaknesses, exercises to enhance their EI can be used. While there are a number of books available with ideas on how to improve emotional intelligence in business situations none speak specifically to the needs of the salesperson.



For practitioners, enhancing a salesperson's emotional intelligence could be viewed as a three-step process:

Assess the salesperson's current level of EI ↓
Improve the salesperson's EI via suggested exercises ↓
Evaluate sales performance for feedback purposes

Develop empathy through consideration of the customer's point of view.
Salespeople should think of an important sales call that they will be making next week, and consider that presentation from the customer's point of view. The salesperson should consider how that customer would react to the presentation, as well as the ramifications of the presentation for the customer. Additionally, the salesperson should think about the emotions that need to be communicated in the message, the language that should be used to convey these emotions, and how the customer might react to the emotions. The salesperson may even want to write out a "script" and practice it with another salesperson to verify that the desired emotions are being conveyed (Feldman 1999).

Improve ability to perceive others' emotions via improvement of the accuracy of perceptions of emotions displayed by others.
Salespeople first write down the names of four people considered to be crucial to their success. The people named by the salesperson can either be within the corporation (such as the shipping manager who has the capability to expedite parts when needed) or outside the corporation (such as the gatekeeper for a particularly important customer). After choosing these significant individuals, the salesperson should write two specific ways in which they let each person know that they consider that individual vital to their success. Would these significant individuals agree with the salesperson's answer?

There are two ways to resolve this exercise. It is ideal if the relationship with one or more of these significant individuals is such that the salesperson is comfortable asking if this individual feels valued. The salesperson might be surprised at the individual's answer and the individual will certainly appreciate the salesperson's concern. A second action is to ask the salesperson to use their empathy skills, put themselves in the shoes of the significant individual, and think about ways that can express how much the salesperson values the individual. If a salesperson has a difficult time developing a specific plan, this exercise can be turned into a group project to see how others have dealt with similar situations.

Improve self-awareness through identification of sources of emotional tension.
Salespeople identify a current challenge at work that creates emotional tension, and then write down the feelings or emotions that occur. The salespeople can then ask themselves, "Why am I having those feelings?" For the purposes of this exercise, the focus is not so much on the feeling itself, but on what is causing that feeling. Then, salespeople can analyze the effects of their emotions on their performance. Does it enhance or inhibit performance? Finally, salespeople can begin to develop new ways to think about the situation.

Enhance self-regulation through identification of alternative expressions of emotion most appropriate for a given situation.
Salespeople should write about a situation in which they expressed negative emotions. After recounting the negative incident, the salesperson should then "re-write" the script without negative emotions.

Develop self-motivation through critical examination of beliefs that may be limiting capabilities.
Salespeople think about significant individuals in their lives (such as parents, siblings, spouses, etc.) and what these individuals have told the salespeople about their limiting capabilities. Salespeople then select one characteristic that someone has assigned to them and note how this tendency may be limiting their performance. Next, salespeople consider the benefits of moving beyond this tendency. Finally, the salespeople identify two options for going beyond the identified tendency.

Value of increasing EQ

The value of increasing your EQ within your customer support centre is tremendous. The Connecting with Customers class addresses several major issues that plague customer support. These include poor

customer satisfaction, low employee morale and stress in the support centre. Connecting with Customers provides participants with skills to create lasting customer relationships, increase customer loyalty, and improve a company's profitability.

Providing customer service with emotional intelligence is the difference between ho-hum, routine service and superlative service. Customers who experience an emotionally intelligent interaction with a service provider are not only satisfied but are intensely loyal. This is because emotional intelligence skills create a connection or bond between the company and the customer.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is clear that for organisations to be successful in today's dynamic business world have to take a more proactive approach to develop a positive service climate. It follows that excellent service, with positive emotional content, is most likely to be facilitated by employees who are emotionally self-aware - and who understand others on a more emotional level. This ability has been described as emotional intelligence. In purposefully developing emotional intelligence, people have been able to acquire greater self-understanding, have demonstrated better health, morale and quality of work life, and have been able to foster and build closer working relationships. We argue that it is crucial for organisational leaders to recognise the importance of emotionally intelligent behaviour, and to actively reward it. Positive reinforcement of an emotionally intelligent environment will enable the development of a service-orientated climate which is authentic in nature, and therefore more effective. On this basis, it seems appropriate that the role of emotional intelligence is taken into consideration when devising organisational policies, processes and procedures - particularly around staff selection, training and development, and performance management.

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