

Emotional intelligence in small unit's leadership

Vladimir Statev

“Vasil Levski” National Military University, Veliko Tarnovo, Bulgaria
vladimir.statev@gmail.com

Abstract: Emotional Intelligence is a concept that dates back to the last decade of the 20th century when it started gaining momentum. Today its theories and practices are widely accepted and are applied by thousands of managers across the World. If we assume that business managers and military leaders and commanders often have similar problems in their field of work concerning subordinates then we need to look into the possibility of military leaders applying Emotional Intelligence as their civilian counterparts do.

Keywords: EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE, MANAGEMENT, SMALL UNIT, SELF-AWARENESS, SELF-REGULATION, EMPATHY, MOTIVATION, SOCIAL SKILLS

1. Introduction

Emotional Intelligence is not a new concept. It dates back to the last decade of the 20th century. Arguably the most iconic author on the subject is Daniel Goleman who claims that “...high IQ is no guarantee of success, happiness, or virtue, but until Emotional Intelligence, we could only guess why.” [1] Today theories and practices of Emotional Intelligence are widely accepted and are applied by thousands of managers across the World. That is a fact and it would not be so if they did not show sufficient results. But they do. So if we can agree that business managers and military leaders and commanders have similar responsibilities and duties when subordinate personnel is considered and as long as we stay within the boundaries of routine operations, we can assume that managers and military leaders and commanders will often have similar tasks and problems in their field of work. And if that is the case, then a logical question arises – Can Emotional Intelligence be applied by military leaders as successfully as their civilian counterparts? In the following pages, we will try to answer that particular question.

2. Problem discussion

A small military unit's leader such as a platoon leader or a company commander can be compared to a person hired in the middle management class in almost any business organization. That is the case if we take under consideration the number of personnel/employees the military leader/manager has direct responsibility for. By accepting that there are many similarities between managers and military commanders in the daily interactions with subordinates and that such a parallel is based on a reasonable amount of equivalency between the two professions, we reach the point where we need to see how the prominent features of a successful middle management personal and small military unit's leaders can be compared.

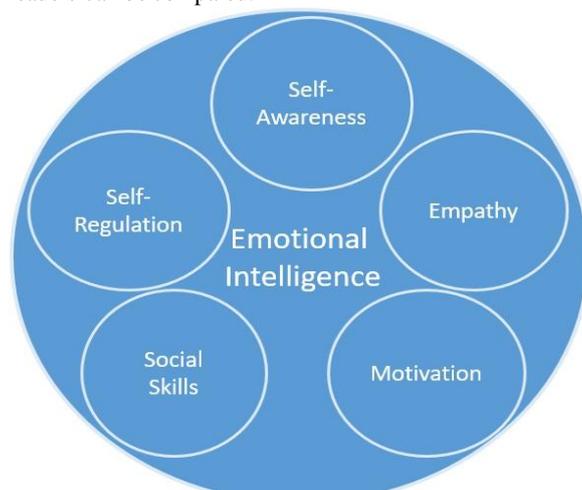


Fig. 1 Components of Emotional Intelligence.

2.1 Self-Awareness

People who possess the quality of Self-Awareness have a deep understanding and hold over their own emotions, their strong sides, weak points, needs, and emotions. These people are neither too critical of the actions of others nor are they too much of an optimist when it comes to people's behavior. The self-aware type of person is mostly a honest one – with themselves and with the people they interact with. People who are self-aware understand where they are headed and why. They would not make compromises with their values and go against their ideals. They know that this would create internal struggles ahead and cause problems later.

Most importantly, self-aware leaders know how their inner workings and feelings affect themselves and what effect they have on the individuals surrounding them. For example, if a person is self-aware, they would know that closing deadlines bring out their worst characteristics, put time in more detailed planning, and finish the task in advance rather than letting the deadline creep in. This method can be applied by business managers as well as military commanders as long as both categories of decision-makers know themselves and the way their minds function in difficult or unfamiliar situations.

It is proven that the mood of the leader is transmitted to their subordinates. [2] So if the leader military or not, permits the situation to negatively affect their feelings, this would affect the physiological climate of the team or unit they are in charge of. Which will then lead to loss of productivity. Loss of productivity may result in failure, which in business costs money and in warfare costs lives. This is why Self-Awareness is the first trait that we discuss when talking about Emotional Intelligence and its correlations with leadership.

2.2 Self-Regulation

Emotions are generated by our brains based on a number of internal and external factors. So they are a product of the biological process and viewed as such are inevitable. This however does not mean that we cannot control them. In the context of Emotional Intelligence, Self-Regulation is described as an internal dialog that a person has with themselves. A person who leads this kind of dialog is afflicted by a bad temper or emotional impulse as often as all people are. But an individual who possesses the skill to communicate with themselves in such a way controls their emotions and feelings, and even uses them in their favor. They are in control and make the conscious decision of what face they are showing to the outside world and do not let emotions force their hand.

Let us imagine a situation where a manager is a witness of how a team of their employees makes a poor presentation in front of the board of directors of the enterprise. If the managers do not possess the ability to self-regulate, they can and most certainly will start to shout and might even break a piece of furniture as soon as the directors walk out of the conference room. For comparison, a manager who can self-regulate will note the poor performance in a calm manner, then they would take time to consider their emotional status and the reasons for this failure. They would ask themselves questions such as “Is this a result of lack of efforts?”, “Are there external factors in play?” and “What is their part in this affair?” After finding the answers, a good manager would bring the team

together and they would discuss the consequences of the poor performance, analyze the problem and present a working solution.

We can easily imagine a similar situation where we have a platoon on the firing range, demonstrating their skills in front of the brigade commander and the position their platoon leader would find themselves if the troops perform lower than expected. But why is Self-Regulation so important for a good leader? People who self-regulate are reasonable and are capable of building a suitable working environment based on trust and equity. Such an environment reduces friction and increases productivity and performance. Self-regulation travels down the ladder and chain of command. If the leader is known for their calm demeanor, the subordinates are prone to act accordingly in any situation, which is important when it comes to business ventures and it is crucial in military operations.

2.3 Motivation

Motivation is a common trait among efficient leaders in all fields of work. A leader who possesses that characteristic can be distinguished from the rest. Such individuals aim at surpassing all expectations – those of others and their own. When talking about Motivation, we need to talk about the cornerstone on which it is built – achievements. Most people are motivated by external factors such as money, status, or impressive title or rank. On the other hand, those who have it in them to lead, are motivated by their desire for achievements for the sake of the achievements themselves.

How can we identify those who are motivated by their strive toward the achievement and not by the reward? The first thing we should note is their behavior and dedication to the work. Those people who seek challenges tend to seek self-improvement. They are proud of what they have achieved and try tirelessly to find ways to do things better. The second thing that marks an individual as achievement-driven is their tendency to ask questions regarding the ways things are done and the models that are followed. Critical thinking and the desire to implement new methods and apply new approaches in their work is what sets these people apart from the reward-motivated.

To better illustrate this point, we would review the actions taken by a manager in a cosmetics company. The manager was frustrated by the time it took for the numbers from the active sales personnel to be collected and processed. The manager created an automatic system that remained the sales personnel to send the data at the end of each business day. That decreased the time it took for the information to be gathered and analyzed from weeks to hours, which was a great improvement by any standard.

Today the military forces across the World implement all kinds of automatic systems, but that does not mean that perfection has been achieved. That inevitably applies when considering the lower echelons. The lower you are in the chain of command, the more concrete the regulations you have to follow are. The lack of freedom when managing a unit blocks the potential improvements that small unit leaders may bring to increase the effectiveness of the system.

Another trait that shows that a person aims at success is that they constantly try raising the bar and measure their progress. Everyone who is self-aware and motivated would be aware of their limits, but they would not be satisfied by achieving mediocre goals. It is only natural that such people track and note their own progress, but also that of their team or unit so that they can compare and measure it. Individuals who lack Motivation on the other hand, often have no idea how their work compares against that of their peers and people occupying similar positions.

An interesting fact is that a person with a high level of Motivation does not lose focus when facing hard times or meets with failure. When dealing with such negative outcomes, some managers would blame the circumstances or take it as their personal

fault. But motivated leaders take it as a challenge and a chance to prove themselves by turning the course of events in their favor.

The last thing that indicates the level of motivation a person possesses is their loyalty to the organization or unit. People who do the work only because they extract satisfaction from the results or what they have achieved, tend to stay in the same structure or organization even when offered a better paying position in another company.

We can claim with confidence that Motivation is typical for a strong leader because if a leader is constantly raising the bar and pushing themselves to perform better and achieve greater results, they would do the same with their subordinates and given the chance – with the organization itself. The desire to out-perform and to track progress is contagious. It spreads and by doing so raises the standards and the overall success of the organization.

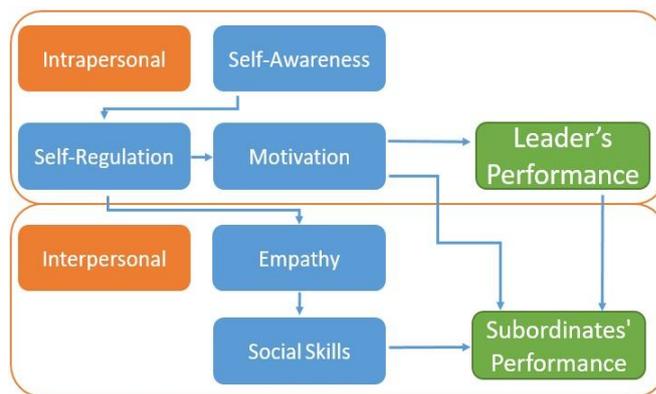


Fig. 2 Connections between the components of Emotional Intelligence and performance.

2.4 Empathy

Empathy is something we associate with the relations we have with family and friends. It is not commonly correlated with workplace relations. The general public would not consider empathy as an attribute of any leadership, it just does not belong in the business world.

But empathy should not be mistaken for sentiment. It does not mean that a leader should take the emotions and feelings of subordinates as their own or will try to please everyone. This would be a living nightmare and every action or decision would be next to impossible. Empathy means considering the feelings and emotions of subordinates as one of the factors in the decision-making process, which will lead to better and more intelligent decisions.

A real-life example of Empathy in action presented itself when two real-estate firms declared a merging. This led to the doubling of employees' positions. One section chief gathered their subordinates and held a melancholic speech highlighting the fact that many would soon be dismissed. The section chief of a similar structure in the other company openly declared their concerns and guaranteed their subordinates that they would do what they can to provide information as soon as possible and promised fair treatment during the merging.

The difference between the actions of the two sections chiefs was rooted in Empathy. The first one was preoccupied with their own feelings and doubts and failed to consider those of their subordinates. The second chief tapped in the emotions of their employees and responded in the best possible way. It is no surprise that the second chief managed to keep most of their section intact, while the other ceased to exist after the merging of the firms was completed. This happened not because a higher authority made such a decision, but because the employees felt the lack of support and clarity from the position of the direct supervisor made the employees choose to leave the firm before the merging even started.

Similar situations may occur in a military unit, for example, if the unit is regularly tasked with difficult and high-risk missions, while other units of the same battalion are not. This can cause tension which would most likely have a negative effect on the emotional status of the personnel. If the leader does not take into account the feeling and emotions that the troops are dealing with while planning the next operation, they might find themselves with a unit that is no longer a team, but people put together by a formality. Unlike firm employees, military personnel can't quit their job whenever they like, but if the climate in the unit is not suitable and they do not feel appreciated they can try to transfer to a different unit or leave the service at the earliest opportunity.

"When employees believe they are being treated fairly – when they feel heard when they understand how and why important decisions are made, and when they believe they are respected – their companies will benefit." [3] Leaders' Empathy is one of the things that hold groups together and what makes individuals feel an important part of something bigger. Taking time to listen to subordinates and understanding their emotional needs can yield long-term benefits such as developing a sense of belonging that is of extreme importance when facing difficult situations or the hardships of military service.

2.5 Social Skills

Understanding social skills might seem simple enough. Generally speaking, social skills are often viewed as acting in a friendly manner or being polite to people, but as a component of Emotional Intelligence, they are more than that. Not that individuals with developed Social Skills frequently have negative interactions with others, but the way they are communicating and the positive messages they send are pointed and with purpose. Considering this aspect as part of the behavior of managers and leaders, one can be sure that good working relations help in convincing the superiors, the peers, and the subordinates and making them more likely to agree with one's point of view or proposition.

People with good Social Skills tend to have a wide circle of contacts and the ability to find common ground with others thus creating relations. This way of thinking and acting is not just socializing, it aims at crafting a network that could be used when needed. Successful leaders understand that working alone is not only difficult but if one is pursuing a goal, achieving it without the support of the people involved in the work process is almost impossible.

Social Skills are a result of practicing and applying other components of Emotional Intelligence, so when giving examples of good Social Skills at action, they would seem familiar. When leaders use their Social Skills to better manage their teams – that is their Empathy working. The same thing applies when they use their Self-Awareness, Self-Regulation, and Empathy to persuade someone to accept their point of view. Relying on their Social Skills, managers know not only how to convince or affect someone, but the best time to do so in order to produce maximum result and create a well-performing team or unit.

In 1993, a chief of a planning department in a computer manufacturing company was convinced that the future of the company was the Internet. The chief used his contacts with employees in other departments and sections and created an informal virtual network that was not regulated by the company's top management. Then they proceeded with registering the company as a participant in the annual conference of the Internet industry. In less than a year, the head of the company created a new Internet department and the chief of the planning department was appointed to run it.

With the constant modernization of the Armed Forces and the new threats to national security, highly motivated small unit's leaders and commanders with good Social Skills would be the

perfect candidates for leading newly formed units tasked with testing new equipment or training for the execution of unconventional tasks or missions. Such commanders and leaders would aim at achieving results by increasing performance and pushing their subordinates hard towards success.

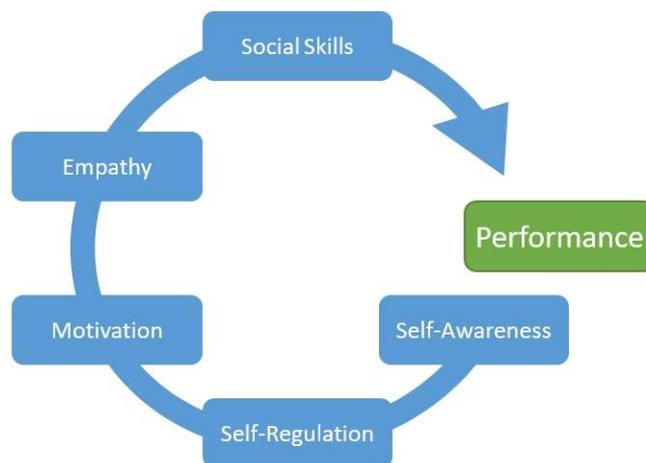


Fig. 3 Result of completing the cycle of Emotional Intelligence.

3. Conclusions

What Goleman says about the correlation between IQ and success may not be an axiom, but one can clearly see that there is reason in his theories on Emotional Intelligence. "We've known for years that Emotional Intelligence improves results – often by an order of magnitude." [4]

Based on the examples and suggestions given above, we can claim with a degree of confidence that a parallel between business managers working with people and military commanders and leaders serving in a tactical unit can be drawn. So if the civilian organizations can benefit from implementing the components of emotional intelligence in their affairs, so can the Armed Forces.

A small unit's commander who is self-aware and motivated, capable of self-regulation, exercises empathy and possesses social skills can achieve more than their peers and create a healthy working environment for their subordinates.

By including topics connected to the practical applications of Emotional Intelligence in officer's training, we can observe its effects on the unit's performance in the not-so-distant future.

4. References

1. D. Goleman, Harv. Bus. Rev., *What Makes a Leader?*, (2004)
2. T.Sy, S. Cote, J. Appl. Psychol., **Vol 90**, *The Contagious Leader: Impact of the Leader's Mood on the Mood of Group Members, Group Affective Tone, and Group Processes* (2005)
3. J. Brockner, Harv. Bus. Rev., *Why It's So Hard to Be Fair* (2006)
4. D. Goleman, R. Boyatzis, A. McKee, Harv. Bus. Rev., *Primal Leadership: The Hidden Driver of Great Performance* (2001)