

"A Different Way of Being Smart" -- Emotional Intelligence

One obligation of the educational experience in a community college is to graduate students who are prepared for the world of work. This preparation takes its direction, in part from the critical skills required of the workforce as articulated by prospective employers. These skills include academic knowledge and technical skills. It is reasonable to assume that college graduates possess, at least, the minimal entry level abilities of these skills in their particular field of study. Employers are also looking for individuals that have the ability to work in teams, have a strong customer orientation, and are flexible and innovative. What matters in the workforce today is this "different way of being smart," also known as emotional intelligence. This paper will suggest modifications to the community college learning environment which may impact the emotional intelligence of community college students.

What is emotional intelligence?

Emotional intelligence is "an array of noncognitive capabilities, competencies and skills that influence one's ability to succeed in coping with environmental demands and pressures." Emotional intelligence consists of five elements: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy and social skills. Skill in each of the competencies associated with these elements develops personal and social competence which can impact positively on career success.

Self-awareness includes the competencies of emotional awareness, accurate self-assessment and self-confidence. Skill in knowing about personal strengths and limits and self-worth are related to these competencies. Managing disruptive influences, flexibility in handling change, maintaining standards of honesty and integrity are skills associated with the competencies for self-regulation. These skills reflect competency in self-control, trustworthiness, conscientiousness, adaptability and innovation. The element of motivation includes the competencies of achievement drive, commitment, initiative and optimism. The abilities to persist despite obstacles and setbacks, to strive for improvement and align with organizational goals contribute to competence with motivation. Empathy includes understanding others, political awareness, leveraging diversity, and developing and serving others. Sensing others' feelings and perspectives, anticipating and meeting customers' needs and reading a group's emotional current and power relationships are the related skills. The competencies of influence, communication, leadership, change catalyst, conflict management, building bonds, collaboration, and corporation and team, are part of social skills. The skills related to these competencies are those of negotiation, persuasion, nurturing relationships, and creating group synergy.

No one is perfect where emotional intelligence is concerned. Strengths in at least six of the competencies spread across all five elements of emotional intelligence are required for outstanding job performance.

Unlike IQ(intelligence quotient), which remains relatively fixed for an individual's lifetime, EQ(emotional quotient), the measure of emotional intelligence, can increase with training. The potential to become emotionally intelligent varies from individual to individual. EQ reflects the learned capabilities based on emotional intelligence which result in outstanding performance at work.

Exemplars of Emotional Competence Programs

Research on emotional intelligence led to the development of programs for a multitude of business settings which enhance the emotional competence and career success for individuals in these settings. Two of these emotional competence programs will be highlighted to present the connections between development of the competencies of emotional intelligence and job skills for career success.

i/ Program for Sales Advisors

An emotional competence training program was developed for sales advisors for life insurance. Research into slumping sales of life insurance indicated that the problem was with the lack of trust between the sales advisor and client. The clients' lack of trust originated with the feelings that the sales advisors made them feel, "powerless, uninformed, inadequate and suspicious." The sales advisors interpreted these feelings not as a lack of trust but as anxiety and uneasiness about purchasing the product. The sales advisors, thinking that the clients were resistant to purchasing the product, responded with rational arguments why purchasing would be the right decision. These rational arguments only made the client feel more distrustful of the sales advisors. The result was--no sale. The training program for the advisors began with increasing their self-awareness about the true feelings of the customers and their own feelings toward the sales interaction. Additional components of the program dealt with self-awareness, empathy, motivation and social skills. Advisors who went through the program had sales gains of 8-20% over the previous year.

ii/Back-to-work Program

This program demonstrates one of the more innovative applications of emotional intelligence. This program assisted people who had recently lost their jobs to find another job. The emotional competencies which enhance job performance enable an individual to find a new job.

The main objective of this program was to, "enhance productive job seeking skills and self-confidence for the unemployed." Loss of self-confidence and worries about the future and finances are common to people who have lost their jobs. These feelings can impact negatively on the job search. The short term objective of the Back-to-work program was to maintain the job-seekers morale(self-confidence), while persisting in seeking employment. The long term objective of this program was to match the job-seeker with a job that would be personally fulfilling and financially rewarding. Job seekers in this program found employment sooner and in jobs that had a higher monthly income than those in the control group.

Implications for Practice

Emotionally intelligent people work productively in groups. Faculty who are aware of the value of being able to work in a group assign a group project as part of their course requirements. It is often assumed that students already know how to work productively in a group when this is not the case. Students blunder their way through the group assignment vowing at its termination, "I will never work in a group again." Part of the frustration students experience is due to lack of knowledge and skill in group work. Faculty need to create the conditions for students to develop

skills for working effectively in groups. Faculty need to teach students the theory of group dynamics and interaction, roles for group members, common problems of working in groups and strategies which will effectively address these problems. Then, students can apply what they have learned about group dynamics in analysis of case study exemplars. Carefully constructed feedback from faculty, too, will highlight the connections between theoretical knowledge and practical skill.

Therefore, students will be differently and better prepared to take on their own group assignment for course credit and hopefully be developing the related emotional intelligence competencies.

Learning the theory and process of group work is not sufficient. Multiple opportunities need to be provided for the students to practice the skills associated with effective group work. Collaboration across college programs for a team approach to program initiatives may be ideal. One example of such an initiative would be a fashion show displaying the garments made by fashion design students during their course. Marketing students would market the event. Graphic arts students would design the advertising brochures and the tickets. Accounting students would be involved in managing the finances. Perhaps culinary arts students could provide the refreshments at intermission. Each student would receive course credit for their involvement as well as carefully constructed feedback about their team capabilities. Involvement of faculty is essential not only to guide students to apply their academic and technical skills but also as role models of emotional intelligence.

The classroom environment needs to be transformed from information delivery by the “sage-on-the-stage” to one of collaboration and co-operation. Debating issues is important to develop skills in persuasion and negotiation. Real life necessitates decision-making based not on **one** right answer but often on a choice between alternatives, none of which are often ideal. This learning should be brought into the classroom. Comparative learning strategies may be useful here. Comparative learning strategies impact the development of competencies across all five emotional intelligence elements.

It is essential to raising the emotional intelligence of students that opportunities for development and practice of new competencies be ongoing throughout their program. Multiple opportunities provide continued practice of the newly acquired skills associated with emotional intelligence. This continued practice is essential in adopting these newly acquired skills as permanent behaviours. For example, students in three year programs would have multiple opportunities throughout the three years to work in teams to complete team projects.

The redesign of curriculum, as well as tools to confirm the developmental skills reflecting emotional intelligence will be necessary. The genesis of these activities is by careful examination of the key competencies for each career. These competencies need to be clearly articulated in curricular activities and evaluation tools which focus on behavioural change.

Summary

The academic skills and technical abilities which are exit competencies for community

college students are not sufficient to meet the challenges and opportunities in the changed and changing workplace of the future. These exit competencies need to be enhanced with emotional intelligence to prepare students for a workplace where teamwork, innovation, collaboration, and a strong customer focus are essential for success.

Exemplary programs were discussed in this paper which clearly indicate that emotional intelligence can be learned and can enhance career success. Modifications to the community college learning environment which could enhance emotional intelligence were presented. It is important to note that these suggested modifications must be pervasive throughout the students' educational experience. The active involvement of faculty in modelling emotional intelligence and providing feedback is crucial to enhancing and maintaining emotional competence.

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