

***EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND SCHOOL LEADERS ' ABILITY WITH
RESPECT TO THE SAUDI ARABIAN EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT.***

AHMED ALGHAMDI

Abstract

This study aims to examine and investigate the influence of Emotional Intelligence on the school leaders' ability to make good decisions and investigate how this could assist these leaders improve their communication within their school environment (i.e. with middle managers, teachers, students, and parents). Following this, the paper draws an account of the critical factors that exist in Saudi school environments and propose a number of suggestions for overcoming these.

Key Words: Emotional intelligence, Leadership, Educational system, School environment.

1. Introduction:

In recent years, educational development has been a growth area in the kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). For example, in 2010 the Saudi government increased its educational spending by 32% over the previous years (MoHE, 2010 Education in Saudi Arabia). Part of the reason for this has been the realization of the importance of education in the construction of an effective teaching and learning environment for the community at large. However, beside many other critical factors that reduced educational outcomes, the importance of developing and training school leaders to

make effective decisions is still debated. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine and investigate the influence of EI on the school leaders' ability to make good decisions and how that will assist them to improve their communication within their school environment (middle managers, teachers, students, and parents). Then, critical factors which exist in Saudi school environments and suggestions for overcoming them will be discussed.

1.1 Defining Emotional Intelligence (EI)

A number of studies have shown that emotionally-intelligent leadership is the key in terms of creating a working environment and encouraging employees to provide their best (Yoder, 2005). As Goleman (1998) points out that managers who do not develop their emotional intelligence have difficulty in building good relationships with peers, subordinates, superiors and clients (p,45). Furnham and Goodstein (1997) also emphasized that there is a relationship between EI strengths in a leader's performance in an organization, and the organizational climate. Thus, the organizational climate is a perception of how things are in an organizational environment". Field and Abelson (1982) however, emphasized that organizational characteristics are perceived and interpreted by the organization's members, who then create the climate (p,67) On the other hand, Marian et al (2001) indicate that the concept of emotional intelligence was popularized by the psychologist Daniel Goleman in his books *Emotional Intelligence* and *Working with Emotional Intelligence*, among other writings. Goleman broadened the notion of emotional intelligence to include an array of non-cognitive abilities that help people adapt to all aspects of life (p.4). Goleman also focused on four basic competencies—self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, and social

skills—that influence the way people handle themselves and their relationships with others. He argued that these human competencies play a bigger role than cognitive intelligence in determining success in life and in the workplace.

Furthermore, Morand (2001) stated that emotional intelligence can be conceptualized relative to individuals' awareness of their own emotions and their ability to express those emotions, to individuals' perceptions of and awareness of emotions expressed by others. Alternatively, to emphasize the importance of emotional intelligence in various aspects of life and how that will influence people's relationships, Goleman (1995) for example says that “emotional intelligence... refers to how you handle your own feelings” (p.58).

These include how well a person understands and gets along with other people and this is just a key human skill. Moreover, according to Goleman (1995: 98) it also turns out those kids for instance who are better at managing their emotions, actually pay more attention, take in information better, and remember better. In other words, it helps human beings to learn better. In turn when leaders recognize and direct their emotions, they will be able to improve their ability to make effective decisions (George, 2000).

1.2. What do we mean by Leadership?

As Barbara et al (2006) pointed out defining leadership presents a challenge owing to the expanding amount of literature in the field from which to draw. The forms of leadership are extensive and classifications such as symbolic leadership, transformational leadership, learning-centered leadership, constructionist leadership, emotional leadership, ethical leadership, distributed leadership and sustainable

leadership are only a few of the definitions in current usage. Nevertheless, Bennis (1994) indicates that all leaders seem to share some common traits. The first is a guiding vision or purpose in the sense that a leader has a clear idea of what she or he wants to do professionally and personally, and will pursue the goal regardless of the setbacks. The second characteristic is passion or enthusiasm and the ability to communicate that passion to others. Third, is integrity, consisting of three ingredients: self-knowledge, candor, and maturity. Self-knowledge knows as identifying one's strengths and weaknesses. Candor is being honest with yourself and is the key to knowing yourself. Maturity is the result of the lessons learned through following, while observing others, learning to be dedicated, and working with others. It is being truthful and never servile. The last two traits go hand in hand: curiosity and daring. A leader wants to learn as much as possible and is willing to take risks (p, 58).

Alternatively, under the title of "How to be a leader at work" Goulet (2007), the founder of Fabjob.com, points out a number of significant points which characterized some leaders from others. For example, she says that effective leaders make others feel good about themselves as well as the work they are doing. The leader has a vision of what she or he wants to achieve and communicates that vision to others in the way that makes people want to be part of it.

1.3. Emotional Intelligence and Leadership

A number of studies have shown a significant relationship between emotional intelligence and leadership. Leaders with emotional intelligence tend to achieve their personal and organizational goal more effectively than those without emotional intelligence. According to Gerstner & Day (1997) Leaders who are high on

“emotional intelligence may encourage in their organizations a sense of enthusiasm, excitement, and optimism as well as an atmosphere of cooperation and trust through their being able to develop high quality interpersonal relationships with their followers.” (p,38).

On the other hand, high quality interpersonal relationships between leaders and their followers have been documented to produce numerous advantages for organizations, leaders, and followers (Gerstner & Day, 1997; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). However, as George (2000) put it: “In order to explore the implications of emotional intelligence for effective leadership, it is essential to identify the fundamental character of leadership.” As described by Conger & Kanungo, (1998), Locke, (1991) and Yukl, (1998), effective leadership includes the following essential components:

- Development of a collective sense of goals and objectives and how to go about achieving them.
- Instilling in others knowledge and appreciation of the importance of work activities and behaviors.
- Generating and maintaining excitement, enthusiasm, confidence, and optimism in an organization as well as cooperation and trust.
- Encouraging flexibility in decision making and change.
- Establishing and maintaining a meaningful identity for an organization.

1.4. The relationship between moods and emotions in the decision making process:

A wide diversity of research has been conducted regarding the impact of moods and emotions in the decision making process. In this regard, as cited in George (2000)

(following on the work of Easterbrook, 1959, Frigda, 1988, Mandler, 1975 and Simon, 1982): "When leaders know and manage their emotions, they may be able to use them to improve their decision making. They can use them as signals to direct their attention to pressing concerns in need of immediate attention, given the many demands they face." As a result, the more leaders employ and manage their emotions successfully, the more they will be able to make effective decisions.

On the other hand, emotions can serve leaders by providing information about problems and opportunities (Schwarz, 1990; Schwarz & Clore, 1998). By recognizing their emotions and their roots, leaders can successfully use emotional input in decision making (George, 2000).

Furthermore, George (2000) in his article "Emotion and Leadership" indicates that two preliminary studies recommend that leaders' feelings may play an important role in leadership. In these two studies, as George and Bettenhausen (1990) point out, "The extent to which leaders of existing work groups experienced positive moods was positively related to levels of pro-social behavior performed by group members and negatively related to group turnover rates." In addition, George (1995) found that work groups led by sales managers who tended to experience positive moods at work provided higher quality customer service than groups led by managers who did not tend to experience positive moods at work. While these two studies help to fill a gap in the leadership literature, in and of themselves, they do not illuminate the role of moods and emotions in the leadership process per se but rather suggest that feelings may be an important factor to consider (George, 2000: 87). However, neurological studies by Damasio and others have demonstrated that people who lack the potential of emotional response often make poor decisions that can critically limit their

functioning in society (Damasio, 1994). School leaders need to recognize the significant role that EI is playing in students' everyday behavior.

As Brackett et al (2004) state that some preliminary findings suggest that lower EI is related to involvement in self-destructive behaviors such as deviant behavior and cigarette smoking, whereas higher "EI is related to positive outcomes such as prosocial behavior, parental warmth, and positive peer and family relations." Alternatively, managing emotions on the other hand has a great impact regarding the decision making process. As Goleman (1998) suggested, it is important to realize what is behind feelings. Beliefs have a fundamental effect on the ability to act and on how things are done. Many people continually give themselves negative messages.

In addition, finding ways to deal with anger, fear, anxiety and sadness is essential: learning how to soothe someone when upset, for example, understanding what happens when emotions get the upper hand and how to gain time to judge if what is about to be said or done in the heat of the moment is really the best thing to do. Being able to channel emotions to a positive end is a key aptitude.

1.5. Decision making and emotional intelligence in Saudi schools:

Elias et al (1991) indicate that teaching emotional and social skills is very important at school. It can also affect academic achievement positively not only during the year they are taught, but during the years that follow as well. Teaching these skills has a long-term effect on achievement. Furthermore, Klug (1989) emphasizes that school leaders can influence levels of motivation by shaping the school's instructional

climate, which in turn shapes the attitudes of teachers, students, parents, and the community at large toward education. By effectively managing this aspect of a school's culture, principals can increase both student and teacher motivation and indirectly impact learning gains. In this regard significant efforts have been made to improve the quality of education in Saudi Arabia. For example, students have been sent to learn advanced knowledge in a range of European and US schools. Multinational professors have been hired to teach in Saudi universities. However, international and national newspaper writers show their dissatisfaction towards Saudi educational outcomes. For example, Sehab (2007) states that in order to improve the quality of educational movement in Saudi Arabia, immediate decisions need to be taken and one of these decisions that policy makers need to consider is designing and applying effective 'criteria' which will be used for evaluating school leaders' skills as well as teachers' responsibility and performance (p,12). It has also been observed that the average Saudi teachers have not been performing and practicing their job as professional teachers and, therefore, they are in need of a high standard of professional training immediately. On the other hand failing to solve this type of attitude directly has caused problems such as unmotivated students, low educational outcomes, suffering of parents and claims from members of the wide community (Salem, 2007:1). What Sehab has indicated clearly diagnoses the lack of Saudi school leaders' ability to make effective decisions in their schools. Therefore, the implementation of EI in Saudi schools needs to be considered as a key solution for most of the critical problems that have been faced in Saudi educational settings. However, identifying some of these critical factors which have prevented the implementation of EI in Saudi schools will help to suggest appropriate and effective recommendations. Some of these critical factors are as follows.

1. The absence of effective school leaders' development and training programs:

Despite the importance of providing development and training programs, compared to internationalized standards, the effort which has been put into these types of programs is still behind the average.

2. Centralization of the educational system:

This type of educational system has prevented some forward thinking school leaders from applying their significant ideas and leading their schools effectively. In addition it has caused unmotivated irresponsible leadership.

3. The absence of effective school leaders' selection criteria:

The process of selecting school leaders has never been based on an effective selection criterion. This type of process, which mostly depends on a personal judgment, creates a lot of unmotivated attitudes among those who are more qualified and experienced teachers, preventing them from being effective school leaders. In other words there will not be a kind of commitment towards the educational as well as the schools' policy.

1.6. Developing the conception of emotionally intelligent leadership in the Saudi educational context:

Numerous studies have shown the importance of emotional intelligence in educational settings, particularly effective decision making processes, not just for school leaders, but for all school members. In this regard Cherniss & Goleman, (2003) point out that “The most forward-thinking educators will recognize the

importance of emotional intelligence in higher education, not just for the students, employers, but also for the vitality of an economy as a whole (p,15).”

Therefore, if Saudi educational policy makers wanted to succeed in most educational leadership strategies, they need to recognize, understand and employ the characteristics of emotional intelligence in all educational environments. Beside the positive role that effective decision making plays in schools, it is also necessary to recognize and adopt some vital suggestions to enhance the conception of EI in schools. Saudi school leaders should consider the following guidelines:

- Emotional literacy programs.
- Providing opportunities for teachers to practice EI in the classroom.
- Introducing cooperative learning skills in schools.
- Developing a School-Home Partnership within the society.

1.6.1. Emotional Literacy Programme:

School leaders need to recognize the significant role that EI is playing in students' everyday behavior. As Brackett et al (2004) point out: Some preliminary findings suggest that “lower EI is related to involvement in self-destructive behaviors such as deviant behavior and cigarette smoking, whereas higher EI is related to positive outcomes such as pro-social behavior, parental warmth, and positive peer and family relations”. Introducing an emotional literacy program into the existing school curricula can help increase emotional knowledge, prevent undesirable behavior occurring (Bruene-Butler et al 1997 & Elias et al 1991).

1.6.2. Providing Opportunities for Teachers to Practice EI in Classroom:

Teachers play a significant role in their classrooms and it has been observed that they have great influence on students' attitudes. As Glef Staff (2001) suggested, even if schools have not instituted a formal program of social and emotional learning, there are a plenty of activities that teachers can initiate right in their classroom. However, teachers need to recognize that an "emotionally intelligent" teacher is necessary for an emotionally intelligent classroom. Therefore, teachers must consider how their own communication with and management of students can be a model for emotional intelligence (Glef Staff, 2001).

Here are some student-centered activities and resources teachers can use in support of their classroom effort.

- Using literature to support social and emotional learning.
- Developing self-awareness among students.
- Emphasizing responsibilities.
- Encouraging creativity. (Glef Staff, 2001)

For further information please visit www.edutopia.org as well as The Responsive Classroom website.

1.6.3. Introducing Cooperative Learning Skills:

School leaders must understand the importance of providing cooperative learning skills in school. In this case they will be able to enhance students' social competence

and assist them to participate effectively in their school and society. Therefore, head teachers have to play an effective role by showing various types of cooperative learning skills among their staff so that every student has a chance to learn these skills too by observing them. Thus, enormous lessons are taught in much understated ways (Goleman, 1995).

1.6.4. Developing School-Home Partnership

As Comer and Haynes (1997) have stated: "Children learn best when the significant adults in their lives - parents, teachers, and other family and community members - work together to encourage and support them (p.56)." Therefore, creating opportunities for parents and educators to work together is one of the fundamental responsibilities of the head teachers. Parents can be involved in schools in some of the following roles. They can (a) encourage their children to complete their homework; (b) attend the parent-teacher conferences and (c) be active members of their school's parent-teacher organization (Comer and Haynes, 1997:67).

However, neurological studies by Damasio and others have demonstrated that people who lack the potential of emotional response often make poor decisions that can critically limit their functioning in society (Damasio, 1994). School leaders need to recognize the significant role that EI plays in students' everyday behavior.

In addition, finding ways to deal with anger, fear, anxiety and sadness is essential: learning how to soothe someone when upset, for example, understanding what

happens when emotions get the upper hand and how to gain time to judge if what is about to be said or done in the heat of the moment is really the best thing to do. Being able to channel emotions to a positive end is a key aptitude (Goulet, 2007:87).

1.7. Discussion

As many studies suggest that emotionally intelligent leadership is important in order to encourage employees to provide their best and achieve the outlined educational objectives. Therefore, the development of EI and social skills in schools is very essential, it can affect personal achievement positively not only for a short term effect but during the years that follow as well. In order to enhance decision making abilities school leaders need to understand and implement these skills carefully in their schools. In addition it makes the teaching and learning environment more effective and acceptable (Elias et al, 1991). However, good emotional knowledge involves taking into account how and what individuals and others are feeling, which is the fundamental conception of emotional intelligence. In other words emotional intelligence influences the way people handle themselves and their relationships with others. However, among other many significant points that school leaders need to be aware of during their implementation of emotionally intelligent leadership is that their positive moods may cause them to be overly optimistic. In this case, in order to ensure that they are being realistic and appropriately critical, they may be more likely to revisit their judgments when in a more neutral or negative mood to ensure a careful consideration of all the issues involved (Goleman, 1995).

School leaders on the other hand must encourage and create an appropriate climate for teachers to practice emotionally intelligent leadership within their classroom. Yet where their schools have not instituted an official program in support of social and emotional learning, there are many activities that teachers can commence right in their classroom. Teachers do need to recognize that an "emotionally intelligent" teacher is necessary to an emotionally intelligent classroom. So they must consider how their own communication with and management of students is a model (Glef Staff, 2001). Based on my experience during my work as a teacher and school leader for the past ten years, I have observed that most school leaders lacked the ability to make decisions and resolve conflicts which are the essential characteristics of emotional leadership. Therefore, Saudi school leaders need to be qualified to understand the mechanism of school work. Usually, people in arguments are generally locked into a self-perpetuating emotional spiral in which the declared subject they are arguing about is rarely the key issue. Much of the resolution of arguments calls for using the other emotional skills (self-awareness, self-management or self-regulation, motivation empathy, and social skills), therefore acquiring these skills for better educational outcomes needs to be of the utmost importance for school leaders (Goleman, 1995). Alternatively, school leaders must bear in mind what has been presented to their students in terms of learning skills and how that would enhance their students' social talents. In this case leaders will be able to repair some of the observations that have been noticed among Saudi pupils. Most Saudi students, for example, are incompetent in terms of being able to cooperate with others, being able to work things out, handle their temper, negotiate and explain their own ideas and opinion, listen well, and many other social competence skills. Therefore, head teachers have to play an effective role

by fostering various types of cooperative learning skills among their staff so that every student has a chance to learn these skills by observing them (Goleman, 1995).

However, the fact that each school leader needs to understand that emotional intelligence is not the only predictor of workplace success, career satisfaction or leadership effectiveness. It is one of many important elements. Being an effective user of emotional intelligence means realizing that it is not and should not be thought of as an alternate or substitute for ability, knowledge or job skills. Emotional intelligence and social skills enhance a leader's success; however, they do not guarantee it.

I do believe that school leaders need to take the following guidelines into account in order to accomplish their personal as well as educational goals. For example, in terms of management development, it has been noticed that EI improves leadership skills and it has been assisting school leaders in many ways. Among the most important qualities in the management development process are the following:

Flexible planning: school leaders who are emotionally intelligent use their emotions to adjust their educational strategies. An emotionally intelligent performance helps managers plan better in many ways, for example, by changing plans to meet the need of the moment; by adapting to different situations; by considering a variety of possible actions and by coming up with alternate plans.

Motivation: Emotionally intelligent school leaders are able to recognize their emotions and those of others; so they can motivate their staff and themselves. Emotionally intelligent school leaders for example, get people to keep going, even

when they want to give up; get people to try again after failing at something; motivate others and themselves and get things done.

Decision-making: Strong emotions help school leaders to make effective decisions.

When the emotions are not dealt with in a positive way it can lead to terrible decisions. Emotionally intelligent managers make better decisions by using emotions to improve thinking; seeing things clearly even when feelings are overpowering; making good, solid decisions even when angry; preventing reactions out of anger.

Creative thinking: Emotional intelligence helps school leaders to think creatively in many ways. For example, by viewing problems from different and multiple point of views; being creative and see new solutions, and generating unique ideas and explanations.

Social effectiveness: In educational settings like a school environment, social effectiveness becomes a vital factor to accomplish the desired goal. In this regard, there are a number of reasons why emotional intelligence assists in working with others (EJ Sarma, 2000). For further information see www.expressitpeople.com.

1.8. Conclusion

Emotional intelligence plays a significant role in many aspects of our lives. It is important to develop a relationship of quality which creates a very positive effect on all involved. Being able to express personal concerns without anger or passivity is a key asset. In addition strong emotions help school leaders to make effective decisions. When the emotions are not dealt with in a positive way it can lead to unfortunate

decisions. Emotionally intelligent managers make better decisions by using emotions to improve judgments and see things clearly even when feelings are overpowering. Leaders with emotional intelligence tend to achieve their personal and organizational goal more effectively than leaders without that quality.

The question that needs to be asked in settings like the Saudi Arabian educational context is, if emotional intelligence is considered nowadays vital for success, then why don't we start teaching its components to our students at school? For that reason I would say that teaching emotional and social skills is very important at school: it can affect academic achievement positively not only during the year they are taught, but during the years that follow as well. Teaching these skills has a long-term effect on achievement.

Alternatively, educational policy makers particularly in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia need to adopt and integrate emotional intelligence aspects into the school curriculums. Understanding the importance of emotional intelligence in the decision making process will help school leaders to meet the ultimate educational goals. Emotional intelligence needs to be practiced in a way that enables students to develop and practice social skills in their school and society. Also the characteristics of emotional intelligence need to be included into the school leaders' development and training programs. However, school leaders are required to balance their thoughts and their feelings. They have to make decisions based on their head and their heart without allowing strong emotions to blind them. School leaders need to understand that the more they employ and manage their emotions successfully, the more they will be able to make effective decisions. Emotions can serve leaders by providing information about problems and opportunities.

Developing individual capability and competence as well as creating conditions in the school that challenges every person to continually learn, including school leaders themselves, is considered as one of the effective leader's skills.

However, it is necessary to consider what makes other nations successful and advanced in various types of knowledge particularly in informational technology, medical science and industry. Therefore, the more forward thinking educators need to be encouraged to conduct further researches in an effort to discover the secret of success in various aspects of our life.

About the author:

Ahmed Alghamdi is a PhD student at the School of Education, Communication and Language Sciences. Prior to joining Newcastle, he used to work as a teaching assistant at King Abdulaziz University in Saudi Arabia. Ahmed's research interests include language programme evaluation, leadership and TESOL teacher training.

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