



Workers' Emotional and Social Intelligence in a Workplace: Issues and Challenges

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Abstract

Emotional and social intelligence have emerged as critical competencies for effective functioning in contemporary workplaces characterized by diversity, interpersonal interdependence, and constant organizational change. This paper examines the meaning, nature, and interrelationship of workers' emotional intelligence (EI) and social intelligence (SI), highlighting their relevance to individual wellbeing and organizational productivity. Emotional intelligence is conceptualized as the capacity to perceive, understand, reason with, and manage one's own emotions and those of others, while social intelligence refers to the ability to interact effectively, build relationships, and navigate social contexts using empathy, communication, and role awareness. The paper explores the nexus between EI and SI, emphasizing shared skills such as active listening, verbal and non-verbal communication, respect for social norms, emotional awareness, and impression management. Key workplace issues and challenge including personality differences, emotional instability, stress, conflict, and communication breakdown are discussed as areas where deficiencies in EI and SI often manifest. The paper concludes that strengthening emotional and social intelligence is not only beneficial but essential for sustainable workplace harmony, employee mental health, and the achievement of organizational goals.

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence (EI), Social Intelligence (SI), Workplace Relationships, Interpersonal Skills.

1. Introduction

As social organisms, it is almost impossible for human beings to live in isolation or independent of one another, therefore, they relate and react to peoples' feelings and actions mainly for survival, development and healthy living. Thus, human beings relate with each other at various levels as members of the same family, inhabitants of the same community, co-workers in a workplace, citizens of the same state / nation or as members of the larger human race. In the process of keeping any of these relationships, it is inevitable that individual's emotions are stirred up which may result in positive or negative reactions which makes it imperative that attention must be paid to prompt identifying, understanding and managing of human emotions.

Therefore, issues of emotional and social intelligence especially in workplaces cannot be overemphasized. First, workers differ in terms of families, educations, values, morals, religions, temperaments, attitudes, aptitudes and other personality traits all of which must be properly understood and managed in order to enhance cohesion and achieve organizational goals. Secondly, human emotion is often spontaneous, unstable and ephemeral such that individuals may find

it difficult to understand their own emotions not to talk of managing it properly and maintaining emotional stability for their own healthy living and for the good of others. Therefore, the need to explore emotional and social intelligences of workers in workplaces remains highly imperative.

2. Meaning and Nature of Emotional intelligence

Emotional intelligence has been defined as the ability to perceive, use, understand, manage and handle emotions (Colman, 2008). This suggests that emotion is important and it needs to be properly understood and positively managed. People who have high emotional intelligence can recognize their own emotion and the emotion of others, effectively use emotional information to guide thinking and behaviours, discern between different feelings and label them correctly, and adjust emotions to adapt to various environments. According to HelpGuide (2021) emotional intelligence (EI) denoted as emotional quotient (EQ) means the ability to understand, use and manage one's own emotions in positive ways to relieve stress, to communicate effectively, show empathy to others, overcome challenges and resolve conflicts.

Therefore in this discourse, emotional intelligence is perceived as a psychological construct often used to describe humans' ability to understand and manage their own emotions and the emotions of others. The word emotion refers to the state of the mind; the state of being happy or being sad; the condition of human

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feelings at a particular point in time. On the other hand, intelligence is a term used to describe human intellectual ability and mental functioning. It used to be seen as purely a cognitive construct denoted by "IQ" but the emerging developments in human advancement has led to the realization of the multiple-divergences of intelligence one of which is emotional intelligence. Therefore, emotional intelligence is here defined as the extent to which individuals are able to identify, understand and manage their own emotion and the emotion of others such that it enhances and or fosters mental health and good living for everyone.

2.1 Levels of Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence consists of four levels (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). These are;

- I. *Perceiving emotions*: This is the ability to perceive one's emotion and the emotion of others. Individuals must be able to realize and define when they are happy or sad, when they are angry or pleased, when they are stable or unstable and when they are satisfied or not satisfied. They must be able to perceive the same thing with others and respect their feelings.
- II. *Reasoning with emotions*: It is also necessary for individuals to be able to reason with emotion. Those who have the reasoning ability with emotion are often well restraint and they do not act purely under the influence of emotion. It is important to let reasoning prevail so that one does not take actions that may later be regretted or damaging.
- III. *Understanding emotions*: It is also necessary for individuals to understand personal and other people's emotions. The skill to discern emotions would help to know what to say, when to say it and how to say it.
- IV. *Managing emotions*: More importantly, individuals must be able to manage their own emotions and the emotions of others in a way that guarantees internal peace, good mental health and balanced interpersonal relationships. Managing human emotions is necessary to ensure harmony and promote productivity in every human organisations.

2.2 Components of Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence consists of the following attributes;

- I. *Self-management*: This implies the ability to understand oneself, recognize and manage one's emotion in positive ways. The individual must be able to perceive his / her positive and negative emotion and manage it in such a way that it is not detrimental or obstructive to his / her relationship with others nor harm them.
- II. *Self-awareness*: Knowing and understanding oneself especially what and what could trigger positive or negative emotions and how one feels, reacts and relate with others under

various emotional conditions. People who have self-awareness are often emotionally stable, tension and stress free and maintain good mental health most of the time.

- III. *Social awareness*: Ability to also recognize socio-cultural differences, respect and relate well with other peoples' values without necessarily compromising one's own values is also a major component of emotional intelligence. Individuals must be able to study various social contexts and discern appropriate reactions that would make life bearable, smooth and pleasant for him / her and other people involved in the social situation. The Yoruba people would say; awo ilu mate, iwon ara e lo mo (One who enters a town and receives honourable treatments from its people known his / her own onion meaning that he comports himself honourably).
- IV. *Relationship management*: Relationships are treasures that must be carefully established and deliberately protected. People who make friends quickly hardly suffer anywhere they go. Individuals must be able to foster human relations, treat people with honour, respect their feelings, be gentle on them, be open and friendly and show empathy in order to sustain and enjoy relationships.

3. Meaning and Nature of Social intelligence

Social intelligence is also one of the many intelligence-divergences. It is closely related to emotional intelligence but it has its own uniqueness. SI simply refers to individuals' ability to establish, communicate and sustain relationships using empathy and assertiveness skills. Garcia-Bulle (2019) describes social intelligence as the capacity to communicate and form relationships with empathy and assertiveness. It has to do with knowing oneself and exercising proper emotional management. SI comes into play when the individual starts interacting with others. And it covers tasks like expression, dialogue, listening, conciliation and learning through effective communication with others.

4. The Nexus between Emotional Intelligence and Social Intelligence

There is usually an inter-play between emotional intelligence and social intelligence. In fact, some experts believe that social intelligence is a sub-set of emotional intelligence because it has to do with social awareness. However, some others opined that social intelligence is a unique form of intelligence because it also encompasses several social issues and concerns that are equally germane to human survival and development. Consequently, this author while recognizing the unique features of each feels that attention must be paid to the nexus between the two. This is because both are interrelated and they often work together; while social intelligence garners the required abilities for effective communication based on

empathy, self-understanding and listening, emotional intelligence facilitates reading of emotions and directs the right course of action. The nexus between the two forms of intelligence can be seen and deployed through the use of the following skills;

- I. **Verbal and non-verbal communication skills:** Communication and clear expressive skills are essential emotional skills for individuals to be able to express what is in their mind. The individual has to possess sound verbal and non-verbal communication skills including the use of rich and meaningful expressions, the use of right phrases and tones, appropriate and meaningful gestures and clear intentions. The individual must be able to manifest effective conversational skills.
- II. **Adequate knowledge of social rules and personal roles:** Ability to observe, recognize and respect other peoples' social roles and culture and relate positively with the people is part of emotional intelligence. These skills will make the individual to be able to interact with people of other tribal, religious groups or countries.
- III. **Sound listening abilities:** Active listening is essential to be able to go along with people and it develops from sound emotional and social intelligences. It is a necessary skill to be able to connect with people, avoid and manage conflicts and gain lots of knowledge through the process and grow from strength to strength.
- IV. **Understanding and respecting other peoples' emotions:** Understanding one's emotion is necessary but understanding and respecting the emotion of others is much more imperative for one's personal health and development and promotion of social cohesion. Hence, EI and SI must co-exist and complement one another.
- V. **Playing efficient social roles:** Adaptation to varying social environments depends largely on one's ability to take up different social roles. For instance, sometimes the individual functions as a leader and at another for a as a follower; sometimes as a teacher and at another as a student and so on. EI and SI prepare one to be able to know what is expected of him/her at different social situations and this will definitely help to reduce stress and interpersonal infractions.
- VI. **Self-image and impression management:** The way and manner individuals present themselves and relate with others matters a lot in relationships whether at work, at home or in the community. EI and SI intermingle to help one to present self to others in a way that though not deceitful but humbles one to be able to relate well with them. An emotionally and socially intelligent person will be able to

empathize and relate well with all kinds of people including those that are below or above him in social status.

5. The need for Emotional and Social Intelligences in workplaces

Both EI and SI are very essential to the health of individuals and the overall wellbeing of workers as well as the maintenance of good work climate and productivity of the organization. Adequate possession and utilization of the two can help in building stronger relationships, achieving outstanding success in schools, promoting cohesion and productive relationships at workplaces and achieving personal and organizational goals and aspirations. In fact, Goleman (1995) posited that emotional intelligence in particular is as important as IQ for success in academic, work, professional, social, economic and interpersonal aspects of life. It is a skill that can be taught and cultivated by individuals. Furthermore, studies have shown that people with high EI and SI have greater mental health, job performance and leadership skills (Goleman, 1995).

Emotional and social intelligence are reported to have strong influences on how well workers interact and relate with one another in work places. Individuals who have high EQ and SQ would be able to respect one another's feelings and relate in a way that promotes healthy relationships and teamwork spirits. Hence, it is always necessary to sharpen one's emotional intelligence and social intelligence through constant trainings and re-training and by learning to understand and respect human emotions.

They also play significant roles on how workers manage stress and conflict in their organisations (Cherry, 2020). Stress at work often occurs as a result of the pressure of the work or other personal challenges and it is better managed where workers have high EQ and SQ. Similarly, conflicts are integral part of human interactions and anywhere there are a group of people conflicts may arise as a result of differences in human perceptions, role conflicts or conflicts of personal or organizational interests. All these could be properly managed and effectively controlled where people manifest and utilize high EQ and SQ.

It is also widely acknowledged that people with high EQ and SQ make better decisions and solve problems much easier than their counterparts who lack such qualities. They also keep cool under pressure and tend to be more productive at work. They have greater empathy and show more understanding and respect for other peoples' feelings. They are more attentive, have active listening skills and respond positively to constructive criticisms (Cherry, 2020).

6. How to Promote Emotional and Social Intelligence in a Workplace

Of course, some people are naturally endowed with both emotional intelligence and social intelligence

while some are not. However, it is possible to deliberately work and take actions to improve the two. Individuals can work on their own to improve their EQ and SQ while organisations too can take some bold steps to improve their employees' EQ and SQ. The following are some practical ways that are helpful at enhancing EQ and SQ.

- I. **Practice self-regulation:** Individuals should practice self-regulation by monitoring their own emotions and social relationship skills. One can do this by weighing words and actions before carrying them out and reflect on the possible outcomes of such actions.
- II. **Think before making decisions:** Every decision has its own influences which may be positive or negative. Therefore it is always necessary to consider such consequences before making the decisions. Use critical thinking skills to determine which decisions are necessary and logical before making such decisions.
- III. **Improve social skills:** it is imperative to always sharpen one's social skills. Learn how to interact and relate with people. Know what to say and what not to say, what to do and what not to do. Relationships at work are very important because they determine to what extent individuals can work with others. Always try to improve your teamwork spirit and interpersonal relationship skills. Listen to what others have to say before giving responses. Be an active listener and not a passive or poor listener.
- IV. **Pay attention to communication skills:** Human beings are social organisms and they rely heavily on communication to sustain their relationships. Try and improve your communication skills. Know the power of words and expressions. One can earn accolades through beautiful expressions and earn agony through poor expressions. It is also necessary to sharpen your non-verbal communication skills by trying to understand gestures, gesticulations and other human kinetic communications.
- V. **Sharpen your persuasion skills:** There is power in persuasion and every worker needs some abilities in this regard. Managers or super-ordinates can achieve more through the use of persuasion than coercion. So, always try to improve your persuasion skills.
- VI. **Become more empathetic:** empathy is the ability to share the feelings of others and live in their world. People who are empathetic can really feel what others are feeling and are more practical in their responses to the plight of others. Empathetic leaders are more likely to achieve more than non-empathetic ones.

Conclusively, emotional and social intelligences are essential traits which individuals need and must develop in order to maximize their potentials at work and in other aspects of their lives. Ability to perceive, identify, manage and control one's emotion and the emotions of others has great influences on the wellbeing of the individual, his / her productivity at work as well as the overall social climate and development of the workplace. Therefore, all possible efforts must be made by the individual and the organization to promote the development and effective use of emotional and social intelligences by all and sundry.

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