

Ego versus EQ

First published in the May 2000 issue of *Management Today*

Ego plays a central role in management but emotional intelligence, or EQ as its better known, is the core skill required for healthy leadership. South African managers tend to be well read but a quick word with their staff proves that few truly walk their talk. Yet, merely being well versed in the latest terminology is unlikely to develop the trust necessary for leaders to gain real co-operation. Only a healthy level of EQ will inspire collaboration, and managers can become leaders if they are prepared to work hard on themselves.

Autocratic management tends to lean heavily towards ego that drives the desire for power over others. This is counter-productive because at best it only results in reluctant compliance - hardly an attitude likely to motivate the all-important competitive edge.

Even though most organisations have shifted towards more participative, flattened management structures, many managers still behave in a highly autocratic manner. So although businesses may be committed to transformation, old-school behaviours in senior teams are tethering development to the redundant hierarchies of the past.

This is largely due to the failure of management training. Senior teams are taught that people are their most important asset, but so much of the development literature still refers to staff as units of production. It gives the impression that we can pull and push these resources around. But people's reactions are fairly predictable and all staff members have buttons one can press to get the best out of them. However, treating them as an impersonal means to an end is unlikely to obtain the desired response.

Although many regard the phrase 'emotional intelligence' as somewhat of an oxymoron, EQ holds much hope for real transformation. EQ's main tenet is the ability to manage oneself in order to get the best out of other people. However, in its crudest form, a healthy level of EQ helps people get their own way. This is, of course, essential for success. But there is an important rider; how you go about it that makes all the difference.

Few managers respect the fact that people are essentially fragile beings. So if managers can't control their own grouchy temperament, they would be better off staying in bed for the day! There they'll do a lot less harm than inflicting their crabby moods on staff who are very likely to take their outbursts personally. Developing the necessary self-control requires a firm commitment from managers to overcome their own insecurities.

John Micklethwait and Adrian Wooldridge's book that takes a fairly sceptical view of business trends - *The Witch Doctors* - shows that 19 out of 20 manager's greatest fear is that their staff will learn how inadequate they feel in their jobs. These insecurities are the sentiments that drive the ego's inappropriate need for power. Yet for effective leadership to become a reality, managers must learn to internalise their power. This takes a commitment to personal growth. But it will not happen by passively reading a few of the latest management books – personal growth means doing.

On a more practical note it means regulating one's mood by understanding the function of emotions. Emotions provide a stream of valuable information about the choices we make and the life we are leading. As a powerful feedback mechanism, they have a language of their own. To help decode these messages, an emotional dictionary is provided in *EQ: Emotional Intelligence for Everyone*.

Hearing one's feelings allows leaders to better understand their own choices as well as more accurately read other's reactions. Sensitisation also means dealing with each individual's unique nature, strengths and potential. Sure it takes greater concentration than treating everyone the same way, but, in the longer-term a healthy level of EQ produces far more successful results.

The ability to listen to the intelligence inherent in emotions also assists leaders who grapple with some of the more participative concepts. For instance, many men were raised to be competitive; meaning for me to win someone else must lose. This directly contradicts management principles like the 'win-win' casually bandied about in corporate meetings. But, when men silence the ego's competitiveness and hear the wisdom of their feelings, they can engineer a far better victory for everyone - and experience real power themselves.

Additionally with the world of work shifting to greater self-reliance, the leadership role will change accordingly. Working people have become far more sophisticated and are no longer willing to be pushed around. Also with outsourcing and contracting becoming the norm, project management will soon dominate leadership. More than anything, good project management relies on highly developed people skills. But these can only be acquired by working on oneself.

When it comes to local application, EQ is more appropriate for South Africa than any of its fashionable predecessors. Boiled down, EQ closely follows the African doctrine of '*Ubuntu*'. Business today is often experienced as harsh and cold - one where people play second fiddle to cash. This directly opposes African principles where community is valued over money and power.

The following example illustrates how this clash of values can cause conflict in business. A family member of a staff member died and his colleagues were raising donations for the funeral - a common practise in African culture. However, the company's intranet was used to speed up the process. Once management got wind of it, it was stopped immediately. Now outside of considering the rights and wrongs of the issue, the ruling delivered a deeply insulting blow. It showed that local customs and practises are not acceptable in westernised business. And it is the detrimental emotional consequences of actions such as this that are long lasting.

However, with EQ putting the heart back into business, many of the cultural problems currently being experienced will be easier to iron out. No matter what cultural background an individual comes from, we all have feelings that work the same way. Relying on the intelligence inherent in these emotions assists people to make more informed decisions. After all, many respected leaders worldwide profess to the power of gut-feel - a critical EQ element. Certainly we know it produces healthier results than the often inappropriate power-hungry demands of an out-of-control ego.

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