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Nexus between Leadership Skills and Emotional Intelligence Through Professional Communication: The Case of Engineering Students

Julia Devardhi

Assistant Professors in English

&

Hepsiba George

Assistant Professors in English,

Vidya Jyothi Institute of Technology,

Aziznagar, Moinabad,

Hyderabad.

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Abstract:

This paper is an attempt to study the “something” that is “intangible” and is hidden within each individual, and that is our ‘emotional intelligence’, which needs to be developed through the teaching and learning of professional communication skills. The introduction of such a course for engineering students is crucial as it helps them their understanding power of the world and its needs. This is nothing but, Emotional intelligence or emotional quotient as commonly known. The article highlights the work of eminent researchers and concludes that Professional communication fosters leadership skills and thus paves the way for a more conflict-free environment. It enhances the ability to express one’s own ideas in a more empathetic manner, thus fulfilling the most pertinent need of the 21st century workplace skills.

Keywords: professional communication, leadership skills, emotional intelligence or Quotient, social skills.

Introduction

“Emotional intelligence is the “something” in each of us that is a bit intangible. It affects how we manage behavior, navigate social complexities, and make personal decisions that achieve positive results.”

Travis Bradberry & Jean Greaves, 2009

Neither education, experience. expertise nor brainpower are appropriate indicators of success or failure. There is something more going on in society that is inexplicable. We notice many smart, educated people struggle, while those with less obvious skills shine, and this

compels us to think about the reason (s) behind. Well, the answer is quite clear. It definitely has something to do with Emotional Intelligence, (EQ) which is difficult to measure when compared to the Intelligence Quotient of an individual. Yet, the power of EQ is undeniable.

However, most often, EQ is misinterpreted as charisma or gregariousness. It's not that simple or ordinary. The ability to understand our own emotions and those of others and the way in which these emotions impact our behaviour and success or failure goes deeper. The need to understand it is imminent, and we have to know how to manage it in all spheres of our lives. If this is done, then all our knowledge, experience and education come together and add an unforeseen leverage to our professional skills.

To understand how EQ works, it's necessary to consider the fundamental structure of the human brain. Our senses receive signals that are transmitted to their final destination, the brain, through the numerous cells in our bodies. The port of entry is the base near the spinal cord, and they finally reach the frontal lobe, just behind our forehead. This is the area where all our logical and rational thinking takes place. But, in the course of this journey, they need to pass through the limbic system, the actual spot where emotions are produced. Now, emotions are felt, which however, cannot be controlled, yet, the brain and the limbic system influence and communicate with each other. This continuous communication is the source of our "Emotional Intelligence". In other words, the limbic system is the seat of emotions and the brain is the seat of logical thinking, and these have to work in tandem with each other to produce effective communication, wherever needed.

Thus, the relevance of introducing the course of Professional Communication in Engineering Colleges accentuates the imminent need of effective communication skills in the 21st century world that is in search of individuals with such abilities. This ability to perceive and comprehend our own emotions and those of others while managing our lives and relationships are all components of emotional intelligence. The rather elusive "something" in each of us is emotional intelligence. It influences how we control our behaviour, traverse social difficulties, and make independent decisions that have a positive impact on our lives.

Further, EQ moulds us into empathetic beings, which in turn, enhances our communication competency. Such effective communication skills are helpful in our workplaces, homes, businesses and builds up our confidence. However, this communication should be on a professional level so as to progress in our careers and occupy a leading role. This brings us back to the question, "How can we achieve this?" The answer lies in the attempt

to increase our Professional Communication Skills (PCS) in combination with our individual Emotional Intelligence/ Quotient (EI or (EQ).

This pertinent need is felt in the career of Engineering students, where most of the time, language and communication competency are often sacrificed for only knowledge based teaching, which creates a lacuna that needs to be bridged, and this paper is an attempt to comprehend the need of both, and suggest their inclusion into the education system and later on into the professional arena. Additionally, the article focuses on intelligences that are invariably related to the enhancement of Professional Communication based on Emotional Intelligence or Quotient, which is mandatory to create a niche for oneself in today's cut-throat competition that exists in the world of career opportunities.

Literature Review

The most prominent name that comes to mind when we use the word "Intelligences" is Howard Gardner. His theory of Multiple Intelligences, 1983 mentions 8 intelligences and a hint at the ninth one "existentialist intelligence". He theorized that along with the natural intellectual capacity of a human being, there are other areas of intelligence that deal with intrapersonal and interpersonal capacities. But, the dearth of empirical evidence for his theory called for heavy criticism from psychologists and educationists. Despite this, we have always found many teachers and educators weave his theories into their teaching strategies in order to motivate students in their classrooms. However, care should be taken not to confuse these different intelligences with the different learning styles of students. Rather, they should be applied in such a way so as to expose the strengths and preferences of individual learners. Gardner, (2000) defines intelligence as the capacity to take in information which is related to a cultural setting and in turn, helps develop problem solving skills and finally allows us to produce products of immeasurable value that embellish the culture we are born into.

In 1990, Salovey and Meyer first defined the familiar "Emotional Quotient" (EQ) as Emotional Intelligence (EI), and went on to state that EQ is more important than IQ (intelligence quotient). This work was expanded by Goleman who identified five areas of Emotional Intelligence, which are: self-awareness and regulation, motivation, empathy and social skills. Understanding our own emotions (self-awareness) and being able to control them (self-regulation) so that we may utilise them to further our goals are the first two components of emotional intelligence. When we can manage and understand ourselves (self-motivation)

then, we begin to manage and comprehend the emotions and feelings of others (empathy), and eventually, we are able to influence others (social skills).

These can be easily included into our educational system and provide career oriented individuals to excel in their workplaces. According to him, "*Emotional Intelligence refers to the abilities 'to recognize and regulate emotions' in ourselves and other people around us.*" He goes on to tell us that Emotional intelligence is the single most crucial aspect in work performance and career progress, and anybody can learn a set of skills called emotional intelligence.

According to Codier, et al., (2003), EI plays a crucial role in organizational communication, customer satisfaction, quality, employee turnover, etc. as it improves one's ability to effectively communicate. Tuter and Yilmaz, (2003) reveal that communication involves the blending of thoughts, ideas knowledge and culture. It is an expression and sharing of emotions, attitudes and behaviours in both the oral and written form. This feature is essential in the development of leadership skills, which in turn, are established on emotional intelligence. Building relationships, lowering team tension, resolving conflicts, and increasing job satisfaction are all made easier with a high EQ. Having a high EI ultimately means having the capacity to raise team productivity and employee retention.

A, 2011 study carried out by Cetinkaya and Alparslan's on the relationship between college students' emotional intelligence and their communication skills endorsed the impact of the emotional intelligence sub-dimension of empathic sensitivity on these skills was statistically relevant.

Studying the interactions between emotional intelligence, communication skills, and academic achievement among university students, Taşlyan et al. (2015) found statistically significant associations between emotional intelligence, communication skills on one hand, and academic achievement on the other. These relationships included emotional management, empathic sensitivity, and positive use of emotions, which are all aspects of emotional intelligence.

In a research involving 1,404 college students, Walker (2006) found that emotional intelligence was a significant predictor of students' grade point averages. An individual's emotional intelligence could vary, claim Mayer et al. (2002). This could manifest as an increase or decrease in emotional intelligence. According to Vesely, et al. (2013), emotional intelligence can boost student and teacher effectiveness via education. The results of the study cited above

indicate favourable relationships between emotional intelligence and a number of other factors, including academic success, work performance, and self-efficacy.

Higher degrees of social adaptation, interpersonal engagement, and social acceptance may be achieved by people who can use their emotional intelligence skilfully. In other words, these people are more authentic in their interactions, very persuasive, able to influence others, better speakers, better listeners who can make others listen to them, better at empathising, and better at cooperating in social situations (Goleman, 1995; 1998, cited in Saricam et al. 2017, p. 464).

The transfer of emotions, thoughts, and aspirations within the context of society and culture involves communication, and language is the primary means of communication, according to Mete & Akpınar (2013, p. 82). Hence, language teaching should be used actively to increase emotional intelligence and it may be argued that understanding the nexus between academics and emotional intelligence is crucial for an all round academic development.

Thus, it goes beyond doubt that there exists a significant connection between EI/ EQ and Academic prowess and emotional intelligence offers a plausible explanation to this. In connection with this, we need to consider the teaching of Professional Communication in higher education institutions, especially to engineering students as this language competency is a prerequisite for the workplaces they enter.

The majority of companies, if not all of them, place a strong emphasis on communication, and many of the duties that employees normally complete on a daily basis are somehow connected to it. The importance of communication in professional settings is particularly clear because tasks are completed in and via conversation with clients, co-workers, and other professionals. The main means of accomplishing work in these professions, which include, for instance, those in the healthcare, service, and social work industries, as well as many white collar ones, is communication, which includes meetings, faxes, emails, conference calls, PowerPoint presentations, memos, and other forms of correspondence. But, even in environments where manual labour is predominant, like the factory floor and many pink-collar jobs, communication is crucial to getting things done and, perhaps more importantly, to maintaining positive working relationships with co-workers and customers.

Koester (2010: 7) claims that "workplace discourse" can be used to refer to institutional, professional, and business discourse and is almost like an umbrella phrase for all of these terms. Workplace discourse, as defined in the author's book *Workplace Discourse*, is "spoken and

written interaction taking place in a workplace setting" (Koester 2010: 3). The word "occupational context" is quite broad and encompasses a wide range of work settings, including corporate and non-profit organisations, hospitals, courtrooms, workplaces for both white-collar and blue-collar workers, and many more. Under this sense, the phrase "workplace discourse" can refer to both professional and non-professional communication.

Recently, many changes have taken place in the teaching of Professional Communication. Organizations have undergone significant structural changes that have an effect on professional communication. According to Gunnarsson (2009), these changes can be seen in the "intent, substance, and language, as well as... linguistic form and patterns" of professional communication, thereby leading to a "new work order".

First, an increase in the number of multicultural and multilingual workplaces is being attributed to economic globalisation and internationalisation on a global scale. The workforce is becoming more mobile, and an increasing number of businesses are creating offices throughout the world and conducting business in numerous nations. These social and economic shifts have a range of effects on professional communication. Second, the development of technology over the past few decades has significantly altered the perception of professional communication in every kind of workplace communication. Third, there is a change in professional ideology that impacts the structure of organisational reality, which in turn, is in favour of fewer levels of management and these changes are influencing the type of language being used. Fairclough, (1992) refers to this as "democratisation of discourse" (tendency to use informal language).

Hence, cooperation and collaboration with co-workers from different teams and departments are becoming more and more crucial, and key organisational behaviours, including problem solving and standardising processes, are reconceived as teamwork and are no longer the responsibility of individuals (Iedema and Scheeres, 2003: 318).

Only recently have organisational studies taken a "discursive turn," recognising the value of conceptualising "issues of power, hegemony, and ideology" as dynamically and continuously created, reflected, reinforced, and challenged in "social and linguistic practises" rather than as purely historical or psychological issues as mentioned by Iedema and Wodak (1999).

Based on the literature reviewed, we begin to perceive that the growing demand for professional training (including workshops and conferences) has to aim at enhancing

professional communication, both internally and externally. It is an example of how practitioners have realised the critical role played by communication in the workplace. Questions such as how to improve internal communication (especially top-down communication), how to communicate changes (like restructuring plans), how to facilitate company mergers, how to improve external communication (for example, by involving shareholders more systematically), and how to improve or change a company's public image are all topics of particular interest to practitioners. This unending list highlights the broad application of professional communication challenges in the "real world".

Nexus between EI and Professional Communication

This brings us back to the pertinent question of how can professional communication be developed and what is its connection with Emotional Intelligence.

In lectures, seminars, and tutorials, typical examples of how to improve communication skills include discussions, individual and group presentations, and group projects. But, it's unlikely that every student will participate in class discussions. According to Heron (2019), very few are able to use their oral talents when they enrol in university courses. Most of the Indian students are accustomed to a teacher-centered culture and find it difficult to adapt to the interactive learning used in the Western culture.

The effect of EI on students' academic performance in India is dynamic and has several EI components. As a result, this is a recent topic that has been examined in EI empirical publications and the literature already in existence found a strong link between EI and academic success. This is in line with the five components put forward by Goleman, (2001), which are: self-analysis, self-control, self-motivation, empathy, and social skills. The teaching and learning of these involves Emotional Intelligence that has to be considered the base for the development of Professional communication and the need to introduce this course in all professional colleges, especially, the engineering colleges, where, such communication skills are not being given their due importance.

For engineering graduates to remain relevant in the global environment of the new millennium, they must possess an ever-growing breadth of abilities. This requires strong communication abilities, which are valued by both academia and industry. Communication skills that are inadequate and ineffective are detrimental to the individual and the profession. The whole profile of the professional engineer is typically undermined by inadequate instruction in communication skills in engineering education. This has an impact on enrolment

and retention in engineering programmes (Yurtseven, H.O., 2001). Hence, at the tertiary level, it is mandatory to help students enhance their communication skills in its multifaceted dimension, that is, oral, written, listening, visual, intercultural and interdisciplinary and other relevant aspects. The number of multinational initiatives, as well as cross-cultural cooperation and communication, is growing in this era of globalisation, particularly among interns.

An engineering student's communication skills will improve after taking an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) course. Additionally, it will support the internationalisation of practise and globalisation of education. By directing the learner's attention onto the unique terminology and communication skills required in the professional field, the ESP idea achieves more in the teaching of engineering students.

Professional communication is now a brand-new field of study that focuses on the analysis of information and how it is produced, controlled, disseminated, and used. However, technology is developing at an unimaginable speed leading to a dearth of available and knowledgeable practitioners who are trained professionals in using the necessary communication in our contemporary culture. It includes all forms of workplace communication, such as, written, spoken, visual, and digital. It has to be customized to raise the quality of instruction and thus it has begun to combine software, technology, and rhetorical pedagogy. Technical writing, digital media design are additional courses that add to the multitude of contexts.

In the business world, effective communication fosters trust and respect while assisting in the better understanding of people and situations, and since Professional communication embraces a wide range of academic fields and settings, as well as different rhetorical contexts, it needs to be given importance. Exchanging information and comprehending the emotions are both essential components of effective communication. Through strengthening connections with others and fostering better cooperation, decision-making, caring, and problem-solving skills, effective communication can also enhance relationships at work, home, and in social settings. The capacity to interact successfully in a corporate setting can be learned and thus, we begin to comprehend the nexus between Emotional Intelligence and Professional Communication.

According to Cheng and Kong (Professional Communication: Collaboration Between Academics and Practitioners, 2009), Professional communication is a developing area of study in many disciplines, such as Engineering, Business Studies, applied linguistics, communication

studies, education, psychology, etc. They go on to say that the importance of introducing and teaching Professional Communication as a course can be enhanced by the professionals themselves, since they know the inside picture better (insiders).

Finally a word on the benefits of Professional Communication. It helps transfer information within and across companies and organizations, builds good relationships and helps us achieve what we aim for. Additionally, it enhances our self-esteem, compels us to think better and bigger to create more peaceful communities around us, for which, effective Leadership skills are essential.

Leadership Skills

Leaders must communicate effectively by involving followers' interests and persuading employees to follow their visions. Furthermore, proficient communicators need a variety of communicative resources such as language, gestures, and sounds (Stohl, 1984).

Good communication abilities help leaders give their teams the knowledge and guidance they need. To improve interpersonal understanding, morale, and professionalism, they may employ a wide variety of communication approaches and use many concrete measures that will advance the motivation and output of the team as a whole. This is where, professional communication reveals its dominant role as it advocates self-action, interaction, and transaction through effective and professional communication skills (message and meaning centered communication).

People with leadership skills have understood the importance of effective communication. One of the many leadership skills is Empathy (related to EI) is the base for the execution of several business functions. Successful leaders like Abraham Lincoln were strong communicators and this emphasizes the role of communication in enhancing a person's leadership skills. These skills open up the channels of efficiency and productivity, which in turn, produces effective and successful leaders. Consequently, we come back to the main point of this paper, the importance of Professional Communication courses which are the urgent need of the hour in the 21st century curriculum designed for today's Engineers. If this is implemented, then we can truly establish the nexus between leadership skills and emotional intelligence through Professional Communication. Subsequently, "charismatic leaders" are produced who impact those around them with their communicative competency proving that only leader achievement is not enough for absolute success (Conger, J. A., & Kanungo, R. N., 1988).

Conclusion

Pursuant to the above detailed discussion, we observe that all professionals desire to propel their businesses and organizations onto the international stage, and this requires professional communication skills to interact with other parties, obtain better outcomes, look for new markets, publicize products, compare costs, acquire information about new products, sponsor friendly relationships, prepare letters, investigate websites, and make wiser and better choices, increase team morale and productivity and develop effective leadership skills. To complete their tasks, professional communicators must rely on more complex, transdisciplinary frameworks. However, this type of discourse is relegated to professionals such as doctors, engineers and lawyers, but it needs to be extended to the contemporary professions, small or big. It is here that our knowledge about the role of Emotional Intelligence in our use of professional language skills become crucial in the education imparted to engineers.

Despite, the already overcrowded curriculum, the inclusion of language improvement courses fosters continuous learning and culminates in life-long learning too. Thus, the streamlining of fundamental communication courses is mandatory. Optimal communication and emotional intelligence (EQ) abilities for children should be introduced and taught at school level, but this is often neglected. However, even as adults these abilities can be learned and will aid in the process of lifelong learning, hence, it is important to promote them at the tertiary level if they are not included in the national school curriculum.

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