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The role of emotional intelligence in building interpersonal communication skills

Amalia Petrovici ^a*, Tatiana Dobrescu

"Vasile Alecsandri" University of Bacău, 157 Mărășești Street, Bacău, 600115, Romania

Abstract

The aim of our paper is to identify the role of emotional intelligence in developing communication and relational skills. Evaluating the level of emotional intelligence is essential for building efficient communication, intellectual and emotional development. Socrate's advice "Know thyself!" finds its application in this case by (self)controlling one's emotions and adjusting them to the context, aiming at the need to know others and interact positively, skills that bring satisfaction and accomplishments to the human being on an individual as well as social level. The paper attends to these imperatives.

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Introduction

The studies conducted on emotional intelligence have marked the occurrence of some major research directions and some different points of view, indicating a growing interest in this field in full process of development. The term "emotional intelligence" was adopted in 1990 by John Mayer and Peter Salovey from Yale University, who have subsequently developed the concept of personal intelligences. According to the two researchers, emotional intelligence designates the ability to perceive emotions, to access and generate emotions so that these support thought, to understand emotions and their meaning and to efficiently regulate emotions so as to improve emotional and intellectual evolution (Stein and Book, 2003). Starting from the concept of personal intelligences proposed by Gardner, John Mayer and Peter Salovey define emotional intelligence by extending these abilities to five main domains, such as (Salovey and Mayer, 1990):

* Corresponding Author name. Amalia Petrovici Tel.: 0721618764

E-mail address: petrovici.amalia@ub.ro

- *awareness of personal emotions*: the ability to permanently monitor (our) feelings constitutes the fundamental emotional skill that supports the building of all the other skills because not being able to recognize our true feelings makes us vulnerable and fall prey to them;
- *emotions management*: the ability to master our emotions, calm ourselves down, eliminate depression, irritability or other negative emotions represents one of the basic emotional qualities that are the object of emotional intelligence;
- *self-motivation*: emotional self-control, using emotions constructively bring about special performances in all domains, acting like an incentive in everyday life;
- *identifying the emotions of others*: empathy is the foundation for the ability to understand others, empathetic persons paying more attention to the feelings of others and being more capable of understanding and supporting them in any situation;
- *handling relationships*: the art of establishing interpersonal relationships, the positive interactions with others translates into a social and efficient competence in terms of the relationships with others.

Another definition formulated by Reuven Bar-On characterizes emotional intelligence as a series of non-cognitive abilities, competences and skills that influence a person's level of adaptability to the demands and pressures of the environment. According to him, emotional intelligence may be divided into five categories, respectively: intrapersonal (emotional self-awareness, assertiveness, self-esteem, self-actualization and independence), interpersonal (empathy, interpersonal relationships and social responsibility), adaptability (problem solving, reality testing, flexibility), stress management (stress tolerance, impulse control) and general mood (happiness and optimism) (Bar-On, 1997).

In Goleman's view, the constructs of emotional intelligence are related to self-awareness (knowing personal emotions), self-control (managing emotions), motivation (self-motivation), empathy (awareness and understanding of the emotions of others) and social skills (interpersonal relationships). The five dimensions are further divided into 25 different emotional competences, including self-confidence, thoroughness and desire for personal accomplishment (Goleman, 1998).

The three directions outlined in defining emotional intelligence highlight, on a first level, the relevance of the intrapersonal dimension, identification and awareness of one's emotions, respectively the interpersonal dimension, the positive and efficient interaction in relationships with others, as Howard Gardner himself argues: When I first wrote about personal intelligences, I was actually referring to emotions, particularly in terms of my idea of intrapersonal intelligence – one of the components being to be able to understand one's own emotions. The signals of visceral feelings are those that become essential for interpersonal intelligence. But as the theory of multiple intelligences has been put into practice, it has evolved, focusing more on meta-knowledge, namely, knowing somebody's mental process (Goleman, 2008).

Interpersonal intelligence involves verbal and non-verbal communication skills, relating and collaboration skills, conflict management skills, promoting team spirit, respecting others and being respected. On a complex level, this type of intelligence translates into the individual's ability to distinguish among the various interpersonal relationships and the ability to respond efficiently to the respective situations, as well as to guess and interpret the hidden reactions of others. According to the undertaken research, the elements of emotional intelligence are (Hatch and Gardner, 1993):

- *organizing groups*: an essential quality for an administrator or leader who initiates and coordinates the efforts of a network of people for their individual good and that of the team they are part of;
- *negotiating solutions*: it is the talent of the mediator that prevents and manages conflicts, negotiating solutions to defuse and annihilate them, eliminate tensions and disputes, potential hazards that may disturb the peace and endanger safety at a given moment;
- *personal relationships*: the ability to build and maintain interpersonal relationships with the help of empathetic communication;
- *social analysis*: the ability to sense or detect the feelings of others, to decode emotions and to knowingly act to the benefit of certain constructive and efficient relationships.

These interpersonal skills represent key elements contributing to the building of positive interaction also ensuring social cohesion. People who make a good impression in society are able to monitor their behavior and adjust it accordingly by constantly synchronizing it. What defines interpersonal efficiency is the deep connection between the participants, emotional behavior ensuring a balance adequate to interaction.

Nevertheless, we should consider how interpersonal skills, as well as adjustment to one's needs and feelings, are built. If these interpersonal skills are not correlated with the sense of reality and a socially responsible self-conscience, there occurs the risk of a defective social success achieved at the price of true personal satisfaction. This is the conclusion reached by Mark Snyder who has studied people whose social skills turn them into real chameleons, champions of the good impression they make. The defining characteristic for this category of people is the extraordinary impression that they produce upon others but, unfortunately, to the detriment of interpersonal stable or satisfying relationships (Snyder, 1974). For such persons, obtaining social acceptance represents a much more important aspect than the sometimes obvious gap discrepancy between public image and private reality. Therefore, adopting a behavior in agreement with our deepest feelings and values, irrespective of social consequences, characterized by honesty and equity, a constant balance between facts and words, the ability to be yourself, become reference points for every one of us. (Inter)personal awareness, in all its forms, constitutes the basis of emotional intelligence. These aspects shall be taken into consideration in the following sections of the paper.

2. "Intelligence profile": a case study

This study aims at identifying the role of emotional intelligence in developing interpersonal communication skills.

2.1. The research hypothesis

The assumption our research starts from is that evaluating the level of emotional intelligence is essential in building empathetic communication and in developing interpersonal skills.

2.2. Description of concepts and variables

The research direction concerns the intrapersonal dimension, identification and awareness of personal emotions, respectively the interpersonal dimension, positive interaction and efficient management of interpersonal relationships. To seize and render the particularities that shape an "intelligence profile", we have considered it necessary to evaluate the level of emotional intelligence at different categories of subjects belonging to various domains, so as to configure the relationships establishing between emotional intelligence and other personality traits.

2.3. Participants

The experimental group consists of 250 subjects, students at faculties with human, real, technical or economic profiles.

2.4. Methodology

During 2011-2012, we have applied the Emotional Intelligence Test (Roco, 2004) to students from five faculties, namely: the Faculty of Letters, the Faculty of Sciences, the Faculty of Engineering, the Faculty of Sciences of Movement, Sports and Health, the Faculty of Economic Sciences from "Vasile Alecsandri" University of Bacău, on a sample of 50 students from each faculty. The evaluation instrument comprises 10 items, respectively: the capacity of being aware of one's emotions, optimism, empathy, the ability to solve the problems, the identification of the causes that generate the state of distress and the elaboration of some adequate solutions to solve the situation, changing prejudices regarding ethnic/minority diversity, the adoption of a democratic behavior in relationships, the ability to develop harmonious relationships, self-controlling negative emotions.

3. Results

For the Faculty of Letters, the specialization Communication and Public Relations, the scores obtained indicate that about 56% of the subjects display an average level of the coefficient of emotional intelligence, 34% a below average level, whereas 10% an above average level. By relating to the maximum, the values recorded reveal the fact that most of the subjects are oriented towards knowing the other persons they interact with also in terms of

emotions. The items with the most significant scores (above 55%) are related to the capacity of being aware of one's emotions, optimism, empathy, whereas other items regarding the identification of the causes that generate the state of distress and the elaboration of some adequate solutions to solve the situation, changing prejudices regarding ethnic/minority diversity and the adoption of a democratic behavior in relationships have scored rather low (below 38%), which indicates the need for certain training on the level of emotional intelligence.

At the Faculty of Sciences of Movement, Sports and Health, the specializations of Kinetotherapy and Physical education, the final result shows that 46% of the subjects display an average level, whereas 54% present a below average level of the intelligence coefficient. The items with the best results are related to empathy, knowing the emotions of others and, in a smaller degree, to the ability to solve conflicts, build and maintain harmonious relationships or self-controlling negative emotions.

At the Faculty of Engineering, the specializations of Vehicle Construction Technology and Industrial Design, the final result indicates that 22% of the subjects display an average level, respectively 78% display a below average level. Here as well, the items with the best scores are related to empathy, knowing the feelings of others, unlike the other features of emotional intelligence such as optimism, self-control of negative emotions or elaborating alternative solutions to solve various situations that have recorded the lowest scores.

For the Faculty of Sciences, the specializations of Biology, Ecology and Environmental Protection, the final result shows that 36% of the subjects have an average level, and 64% a below average level. The items with the most outstanding results are related to empathy, respectively knowing the emotions of others and, to a smaller extent, to the identification of the causes of distress and the elaboration of some adequate solutions to solve the situation, where the results are unsatisfactory.

At the Faculty of Economic Sciences, the specializations of Marketing and Accounting and Management Informatics, the final result indicates that 52% of the subjects present an average level, whereas 48% of these a below average level of the emotional intelligence coefficient. The items recording the best results refer to the person's empathetic skills, optimism, unlike other items such as the ability to develop harmonious relationships or self-control of negative emotions that, unfortunately, scored lowest. On the overall, the average level of the coefficient of emotional intelligence for the experimental groups is as follows:

Table 1. The average level of the coefficient of emotional intelligence

Experimental Groups	Control Group	EI
Faculty of Letters	50	56
Faculty of Economic Sciences	50	52
Faculty of the Sciences of Movement, Sports and Health	50	46
Faculty of Sciences	50	36
Faculty of Engineering	50	22

At the level of the group of participants, women obtained the best results, displaying a higher level of emotional intelligence, as compared to men. The data obtained coincide with those provided by the literature which states that, in general, women are more expressive emotionally than men (Baron-Cohen, 2003). The results obtained suggest the need for some training in terms of emotional intelligence. The lines of action aim at developing interpersonal skills such as empathy, respectively empathetic precision, managing and solving conflicts, self-control of negative emotions, aspects that support personal development and enhance emotional intelligence. This means, on the one hand, the ability to control our own feelings as well as properly manage the emotions of others, respectively, the ability to build and maintain harmonious relationships with the others, abilities that give satisfaction to the human being and a sense of accomplishment on an individual, as well as social level.

4. Discussions

The evaluation of emotional intelligence determines us to take into consideration abilities that enrich this register, for example empathy, that is, perceiving the emotions of others. The literature presents a series of articles and works that point at possible correlations between emotional intelligence and its specific traits, social skills or academic

success (Mayer, Salovey & Caruso, 2004; Brackett, Lopes, Ivcevic, Mayer & Salovey, 2004). Generally, studies have shown that emotional intelligence relies more on empathy and positive interaction and less on conflict and antagonism in interpersonal relationships (Brackett, Mayer, Warner, 2004; Lopes, Salovey, Strauss, 2003). On an average, women outrun men in terms of empathy and emotional expressiveness as results from the conducted analysis. To this effect, we should mention that our society has subtle norms regarding the way emotions are expressed, being considered that expressing fear or sadness belongs particularly to women whereas expressing anger "belongs" to men, norms that tacitly approve a woman crying openly but not a man shedding tears in distress (Hess, Adams & Kleck, 2005). We may measure the level of emotional intelligence that a person has in terms of the impact that this exerts upon us and of our impact upon it. From our point of view, a best level may be reached by combining self-control with empathy, respectively the tacit understanding of what somebody else feels and thinks (empathetic precision), skills that emotional intelligence is built upon. Educating these traits becomes available through practice and constitutes new future challenges.

Future Directions of Research. This study is limitative because we have evaluated the level of emotional intelligence only on a group of students representative on the level of faculty, within a narrow frame, which thus delimitates our findings. Nevertheless, although the group is relatively small, the results obtained open new lines of action and set new challenges for future research. In this respect, it is demanded that research should be done on a larger and more heterogeneous group of students inside which analyses should be made in relation to potential associations or predictions between the level of emotional intelligence and other correlated factors such as aggressiveness, social deviance or success on a personal and/or professional level (for example, the literature mentions certain correlations between the level of emotional intelligence and social deviance in men, but not in women, Brackett et al, 2004).

5. Conclusions

Emotional intelligence focuses upon basic human skills inside our being, on the ability to control our feelings and inner potential to create a positive interaction. The ability to communicate efficiently for the benefit of a positive interaction may constitute an example of emotional intelligence in action.

In our view, emotional intelligence involves passing from a unipersonal to a bipersonal perspective, from inner abilities of knowing one's own person to interpersonal skills transposed in interaction. The ability to understand emotions and to act wisely in interpersonal relationships so as to contribute to developing communication skills and harmonious relationships constitutes, we believe, reference points. "Know thyself!" finds its applicability in this case by the (self)control of feelings and adjusting them to the context, with the final purpose of knowing others and interacting positively, to the benefit of an efficient communication. In light of these perspectives, we hope to reach, in our future research, a possible definition of what being *emotionally intelligent* in interpersonal relationships could mean.

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