

0.1 Chapter 2: work: Pleasures of Work

0.2 Pleasures of Work

1 The EQ Office

Offices exist to help people collaborate. But lots goes wrong in the attempt. Some of the hurdles are procedural: meetings go on too long, everyone talks at the same time, the agenda isn't right, there aren't enough whiteboards, or the windows or breakout spaces are meanly proportioned. But many more of the problems are psychological in nature. People aren't collaborating well because there's too much defensiveness, irrational rivalry, people-pleasing, negativity, bluster, over-controlling behaviour, secret manoeuvring, unfriendliness or not-listening.

Trying to overcome these hurdles is at one level a matter for every individual. But there are also office-wide solutions that companies can introduce to hugely improve the atmosphere among co-workers. We can address *personal* issues in a *political*, that is, collective and institutional, way. Issues that feel like they are intimate and purely personal like being too bossy or a poor listener can be usefully and constructively addressed at the level of an organisation's habits and practices. An ambitious organisation can help people to do nothing less than mature. It can put in place practices that help individuals to recognise and deal with their emotional flaws (which, of course, everyone has in some way or another). That is a great contribution to the development of each person, but it is also precisely focused on improving how efficiently and effectively people work together.



For a long time, the idea of IQ intelligence quotient had currency in evaluating people. It sought to assess the level of a persons logical and reasoning abilities. And to some degree this was correlated with employability. The idea was that people in the upper percentiles would do better at work. However, close up, we can now see that whatever a persons raw intellectual ability, their actual contribution at work is going to be hugely dependent on their degree of emotional maturity: their EQ.

IQ is understood as something that doesnt change all that much across a life. EQ, on the contrary, can change dramatically. Its built into the whole idea of maturity that were capable of acquiring it - though we tend to do so in unreliable and uneven ways. In the workplace, we can improve the level of emotional maturity that we all attain. An organisation committed to raising EQ sets out to help people develop emotionally, by examining and resolving areas of immaturity and failures of collaboration.

Here are a few steps to take on the path to a more mature and collaborative workspace:

1.0.1 Collaboration is hard; were all crazy



Flickr/John Benson

One of the great enemies of good collaboration is the sense that collaboration should essentially be easy, and that people are generally straightforward. A more helpful starting point is that collaborating is always hard and that all of us are a little crazy. There is no such thing as a wholly sane person and by the time you have 20 people in a room, the challenging psychodynamics are of mind-boggling complexity. Recognising this should lead to humility and a greater readiness to tread carefully, to apologise, to give way and where necessary to laugh warmly and generously at our foibles.

In a good collaborative office, there should be an attitude of honesty towards the challenges of working together. Getting frustrated with someone, starting to cry, falling into despair these aren't anomalies, they are what happens in any good life, when clever people get together and try to do difficult things.

There'd be a company-wide atmosphere of tolerance towards the quirks and eccentricities of human nature. The company would revere not just the strengths of great people; it would also honour and remember their weaknesses: Coco Chanel's secrecy, Eisenhower's inability to listen, Napoleon's dogmatism, Henry James's tardiness, Van Gogh's scattiness...



Time/Getty

The good collaborative office would know that the real problem isn't having problems it's the attitudes of denial and the failure to be able to feed back on, and work through, issues that causes trouble. We don't need people to be perfect: but we absolutely need them to want to recognise their flaws and to try to improve on them.

Campfire Meetings

Once the campfire is lit, the tension goes down; it's the end of the day, the pressure is off a little. It's the time to be honest and to share how things really are. In an EQ committed organisation, there are regular campfire meetings, usually on a Friday at 5pm. For an hour, everyone gathers, in groups of no more than twenty.

A central purpose of the meetings is to develop a culture where it's normal to confess to problems around working together and collaborating. There's no stigma around having these problems, since it's assumed from the start that everyone has difficulties of one kind or another. The issue isn't whether there are psychological flaws: it's a question of working out which ones and how they are interacting with those of others. The benign group pressure makes it much easier to admit to a failing.



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Stigma does, however, remain but in a different area. The topic for discussion is often: What unhealthy dynamics do I feel in myself and how might I improve? Its socially unacceptable not to have anything to say around this, not to try to do anything to improve or deal with issues. Its normal to be crazy and its normal and indispensable to be committed to maturity. Confession isnt an excuse. Its tied to development. The EQ office is a Continuously Maturing Office.

The meeting runs through points in the recent past where people lacked EQ. And theres discussion of where individuals might develop specific skills or make use of particular insights. The meetings enforce a feeling of normality around maturation.

An EQ Environment

Emotional development, and dealing reasonably with the difficult emotional circumstances that work inevitably throws up, isnt just about special occasions or one-off moments of revelation. Our minds are leaky: we are continually forgetting things that at our best moments we know are important. We require regular topping up, a little nudge here and there to keep us on track. Were not committed to bad habits, we just need reminders of the good ones.

So a good HR department sees it as its responsibility to foster a good EQ environment. It might send around emails about some of the main EQ difficulties which help us recognise them in ourselves and give encouragement in addressing them with others.

But it isnt enough just to write essays or give lectures. The way something is said the form the crucial

reminders are delivered in has to be sufficiently seductive to overcome resistance, compete for attention with a thousand emails and lodge themselves in our memories powerfully.

The good EQ office might send around this sort of email, among many others:

The Direct Chat

An EQ office has a culture of direct chats. It formalises these, so as to put them more forcibly on the agenda. It calls them *Direct Chats* or DCs.

A great deal of trouble within teams, the lions share, comes from people not speaking honestly about their hopes, disappointments and frustrations. Things are bottled up, and then explode or seep noxiously through an office.

There are good reasons why most of us are so indirect in our modes of communication. Politically, its only been a few generations since weve enjoyed freedom and the ability to speak as we like. Inside though, we retain an inner serfdom. Moreover, many of our childhoods didnt promote direct communication. We were small, vulnerable infants in the hands of large, powerful adults and we may not have dared, or known how, to speak up and clearly about our needs. Indirectness is a strategy in conditions of unequal power.



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Most offices are filled with power inequalities which work against any capacity to communicate directly: What if I speak and they fire me? What if I speak and they resign? What if I speak, and they don't buy? It can seem as if there are ample reasons always to lapse back into habits of indirectness.

But the EQ-committed office doesn't accept this, it knows perhaps from experience how expensive indirectness always ends up being, and how much wisdom and good practice come to the fore when people dare to be direct.

That's why it accords huge privilege to the practice of The Direct Chat. Any employee can at any point put in a request for A Direct Chat with any other, right across company hierarchies: the receptionist can request a DC with the boss, the middle manager in sales or the IT guy on the floor below.

There are strict rules around how a DC can go. Company videos show workers the format of a DC. There are three training sessions around this for every new employee. Crucially, there are responsibilities on both sides of the equation, the speaker and the listener. For example, the speaker can never directly

accuse the listener. They cannot say, *You never listen to me in meetings*. They have to say, *You make me feel as if you are not listening to me in meetings...*



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This avoids the suggestion that the speaker has deliberately meant to upset the listener. It leaves room for misunderstanding and for the idea that the speaker might be transferring an emotion from elsewhere. The tone cannot be accusatory. One can show upset, but no desire for vengeance; one can be sad but not furious. One cannot broaden the complaint exponentially (one cannot, as marriage counsellors say, throw the kitchen sink at the other).

All the while, the listener has responsibilities. They cannot humiliate, they cannot deny that there is an issue, they have to accept the courage and authenticity behind the complaint. They have to listen patiently and never laugh cruelly. The other is taking a risk, like taking off their clothes, and one has to admire the courage.

Within a DC, all kinds of slightly unusual behaviour are entirely permitted. You can cry, you can be intense, emotion is allowed. This doesn't get used against you. Most importantly, one moves on: one isn't allowed to hold grudges from past DCs.

Having DCs should be seen as a normal part of office life. If one doesn't have at least five a year, something is very wrong and it counts against one. The culture of DCs signals that the office has left behind

the age of feudalism and psychological humiliation; indirectness is not only emotionally unhelpful, it is far far too expensive.

EQ Reviews

Were all in possession of insights into the flaws of others, which are true and potentially very useful. Youve noticed time and again how a particular colleague tries to press too much work onto others; its struck you that one of the people you collaborate with on a major project is so eager to please that youre finding yourself discounting whatever they say. These people dont set out to create problems around collaboration and in an ideal world these insights could get passed along to the relevant people in an unthreatening and useful way.



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But we almost never do share these with the person concerned. Because at the moment, theres a real fear the person would take it the wrong way as a cruel attack, rather than as an attempt to help. It would seem to leave one open to a reciprocal attack which, again, feels too threatening.

Really, the only place where we buck this trend is in relationships; the rest of the time we are basically avoidant; we give up on people, suffer in silence or change jobs. This inefficiency costs everyone a lot. Its a situation where a great deal of important information is in the ether, but it cant be tapped into effectively because we lack the skill to do so. Not a technical skill. But the emotional skill of framing an issue in a way that doesnt humiliate someone and that doesnt make us come across as vindictive or mean.

The office can be the arena in which this omnipresent issue is addressed and solved by developing the EQ Review. Everyone in the company needs to see an EQ Coach at least once a year. Management gives the EQ Coach a number of guidelines on how a particular individual is falling short in the ten areas of

EQ immaturity. In more pressing cases (where someone is falling short in their work schedule or causing problems for other people) substantial EQ treatment can be delivered: each immaturity takes at least four one-hour sessions to treat.

Because there can be feedback from employee to employer in the course of the EQ Review the relationship between the coach and the company is potentially extremely valuable. It allows for the development of a deep understanding of what is going well or not too well in the relationship between management and employees. Its a field in which it is crucial but extremely difficult to get insight.



Getty/Paul J. Richards

Diplomacy arises when theres too much tension between two parties for them to engage openly themselves. They get too upset or intimidated. And yet, there is a huge amount they could constructively share. The coach is a kind of diplomat a go-between and is the skilful and professional ambassador of vitally important knowledge.

For too long, sorting out psychological issues has been seen as a luxury, as something beneficial only to personal life. But this is an illusion we can no longer afford. Emotional maturity is no add-on to an effective business, it has to be at its core, it is quite simply the most valuable skill for any team of people as they pursue the big collective tasks of modern business.

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