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A Review of Emotional Intelligence Initiatives from a Corporate Sustainability Perspective

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Abstract

For the last several years, United States firms have been fascinated with the study of emotional intelligence (EI). The rapid change agent to improve products and services has had an impact on the overall work environment. Studies have suggested that most organizational change initiatives are unsuccessful due to the lack of communication among management and subordinates. In most cases, organizations' goals and objectives are overbearing, which leads to managers promoting a false sense of urgency among subordinates. Other studies have suggested that emotional intelligent leaders are far more successful as compared to those who are not. At the end, this study will establish a connection between EI and corporate sustainability for improved work productivity.

Keywords: Public Administration, Public Service, Management, Leadership Organizational development, learning organizations, emotional intelligence, organizational learning, organizational development interventions, organizational change, workforce bullying, policies and procedures, evaluation of human resources, structure and design, training and development, human resources, communication, corporate sustainability and leadership.

Introduction

For several years, United States firms have had challenges to meet strategic goals and objectives. In some cases, organizations have not met expectations due to the lack of leadership. Although it is understood that the lack of communication is to blame for not meeting certain organizational goals and objectives, it is not the sole reason for organizational failure.

In recent times, Emotional Intelligence (EI) has become an important piece of reforming the landscape of organizational behavior practices to support corporate sustainability. In so doing, a comparison analysis will be conducted to determine the importance of having emotionally intelligent leaders at the helm to support corporate sustainability objectives from organizational internal and external environmental perspectives. At the end, recommendations will be afforded for improved organizational performance objectives.

Emotional Intelligence (EI)

Leaders should portray a good attitude among subordinates, which will eventually lead to trustworthiness in the workplace. By doing so, this practice will establish an open dialogue among management and staff (Rivero, 2013a). Moreover, it is equally important that leaders have good social skills initiatives to communicate effectively with subordinates. Within the same premise, highly effective EI leaders are most likely to have a good attitude toward their employees, which can eventually lead to trustworthiness in the workplace (Fehd, 2001; Goleman, 2004). In another similar research, it is suggested that leaders with a high level of EI are most often self-aware, self-managed, portray empathy and have good social skills (Goleman, 2011, p. 11). Goleman further states that "self-awareness means having a deep understanding of one's emotions, strengths, weaknesses, needs and drives" (2011, p. 28). On the other hand, self- managing is defined as being able to control one's feelings and impulses. As Goleman further points out "...people who are reasonable are able to create an environment of trust and fairness.

In such an environment, politics and infighting are sharply reduced and productivity is high" (2011, p. 31). Empathy is described as being able to understand employees' feelings while in the process of making business decisions that may have an impact on the employees' welfare in the workplace. Goleman further states, "Social Skill, rather, is friendliness with a purpose: moving people in the direction you desire, whether that's agreement on new marketing strategy or enthusiasm about a new product" (2011, p. 32).

Other studies have suggested that emotionally intelligent leaders were linked to superior job performance as compared to other leaders who did not portray emotional intelligence behavior traits (Cherniss, 2000; Goleman, 2004). Most importantly, EI is not a replacement of the Intelligence Quotient (IQ) test, measuring cognitive intelligence. Stein and Book (1999) suggest the added EI can only assist leaders make difficult decisions that could have an effect on others in the workplace.

It is common knowledge that individuals with a high IQ are best suited for occupations that require a high level of cognitive intelligence. According to Goleman, "the more your job revolves around cognitive tasks, the more strongly IQ will predict success. A computer programmer, accountant or academician will all need strong cognitive skills to do well" (2014, para. 4). Moreover, the same study also suggests that occupations that require good communication skills, "people skills," will require individuals with a high degree of EI.

As depicted in Figure 1, balancing EI/IQ predicament can be difficult in determining the most favorable candidate for a particular position. This will be dependent upon the job requirements, which may require high level cognitive skill sets (e.g. accountant, engineer, computer technician, etc) to meet job description requirements.

Figure: 1
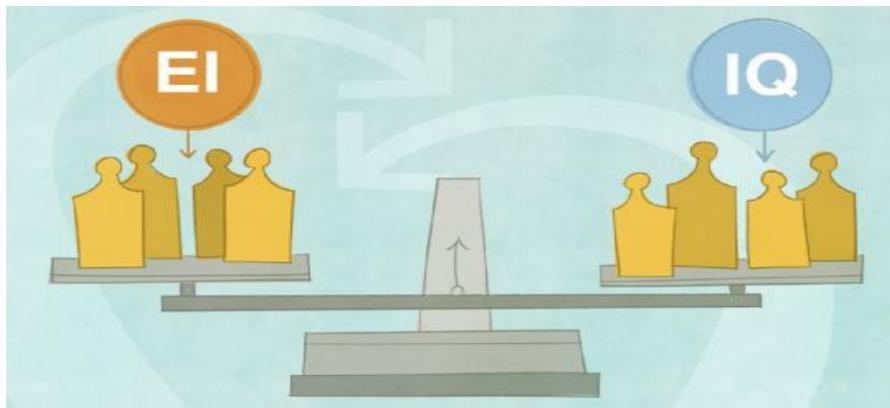
(Source: Goleman, 2014)

For instance, an engineer may have limited interaction and require independent decision making without having to be a part of a work team.   In some cases, that same individual may be placed on a team or having to meet with clients and may have difficulties adapting to the environment due to the lack of communication initiatives as a result of the lack of EI.

Stein and Book (1999) further suggest that added EI can only assist leaders make difficult decisions that could have an effect on others in the workplace, but from a humanistic approach to management. The Humanistic Approach to Management is similar to the humanism theory commonly used.   According to Melé (2003), "more specifically, humanism is usually conceived as an outlook to emphasizing common human needs and is concerned with human characteristics" (p. 79). As organizations attempt to strategize future endeavors, the humanistic approach to management is lost, leading to the promotion of deliverables that are unreachable (Rivero, 2013a, p.104). Modern organizational leaders are placed in difficult situations to act upon due circumstances that are beyond their control. At times, expectations are unreachable/unrealistic and employers/employees are expected to perform despite the unlikeness of reaching those expectations. As Graham (1994) reminds us, "we can never wholly separate the human from the mechanical side" (p. 25). Although Graham is not too far from the truth, it certainly helps to have highly emotionally intelligent leaders who are able to embrace the humanistic approach to management, which will lead to corporate sustainability.

Corporate Sustainability

Corporate sustainability continues to be embraced by most mid/large sized firms. Due to the complexity of the organizational change agent, corporate sustainability is needed in order to keep the organization on a steady course to meet expectations. In so doing, a corporation is defined as a legal entity separated by its owners and administrators (Heintz & Parry, 2014, p. 7). According to Rivero & Theodore (2014), there are distinctive parts concerned with corporate sustainability (p. 21). From an external environmental perspective, organizations are concerned with the ecological and sociological areas. For example, an organization would be concerned with government legislation, or the physical environment that may have an effect on overall operations. Rivero & Theodore (2014) further suggest, from a corporate sustainability perspective, that " . . . internal environment in which the organization is concerned with the equitable treatment of the human factor in every level of the organizational hierarch" (p. 2). This being said, it is important that an organization is also concerned with the internal environment that involves the equitable treatment of employees at every level. By doing so, this will support the corporate sustainability model that will enhance the organizational work environment.

Organizations, in attempting to redesign their organizational structure, should consider utilizing system thinking base initiatives that assist in the connection between policy formation, the economy, and the natural environment (Benn & Dunphy, 2007). Moreover, it is vital that organizations keep abreast of new government regulations or sudden changes to the environment. By doing so, the organization is better prepared to make sudden changes to the overall strategic plan. The adaptability to external factors is critical to an organization's survival. A seasoned leader will be able to understand the importance of embracing public relations initiatives that can have a positive impact on the overall organizational setting. Individuals who are driven by unrealistic expectations can derail an organizational setting. In some cases, leaders who keep abreast of external factors and are able to communicate/understand external agents (government officials, physical environment, etc.), are far more successful as compared to those who do not embrace this concept.

The effects of change continue to be a focal point for many organizations in America. Progressive ideas to re/develop a product design/improve customer service initiatives are critical. Unfortunately, organizations lose touch with the humanistic approach to management when promoting change in the workplace, which leads to a dysfunctional organizational setting (Rivero, 2013b, p. 169). Another research study suggests that "organizational leaders are faced with tremendous challenges with minimum operational resources and increased work responsibilities, which have led to dysfunctional organizations. Unfortunately, this is a common trend that continues to be embraced by most mid/large organizations" (Rivero, 2014, p. 1). Other studies have suggested that communication breakdown is to blame for dysfunctional organizational resistance (Ford, Ford, & D'Amelio, 2008). From an internal environment perspective, it is important that leaders are able to communicate with subordinates effectively. Most importantly, organizations are yearning for a highly qualified leader who is companionate, realistic with expectations, and able to communicate effectively with subordinates to promote modern management initiatives accordingly.

Recommendations

Highly competitive organizations continue to find methods to improve corporate sustainability in an effort to stay on course with the overall organizational strategic plan. In meeting this objective, the following recommendations are offered. They are as follows:

1. Organizations must understand the importance of hiring the right candidate for a particular position of interest. It is vital that the candidate undergo a psychological evaluation to determine IQ and EI intelligence levels to determine if he or she is mentally fit for the job of interest.
2. Consider establishing a corporate training program addressing the importance of embracing EI initiatives. Seasoned employees have an opportunity to understand and harness EI principles and practices for improved job performance.
3. Organizations should consider reevaluating job descriptions to determine the validity of objectives, particularly jobs that require constant human contact/work team interaction.

Summary

Organizations continue to strive to improve business processes in order to stay competitive.   Although it is vital to understand the importance of hiring applicants with cognitive skills, it is equally important to consider EI as a variable in hiring job applicants. In doing so, special attention should be considered when a job applicant will have direct contact with employees/clients, for these applicants will require a high degree of emotional intelligence. Studies have suggested that leaders (occupations in direct association with employees/clients) who have a high degree of EI are far more successful as opposed to those who do not exhibit this behavior.

Although most progressive organizations have revamped their hiring practices, there is still room for improvement when adapting to EI theories and practices.   Most importantly, research has suggested that the lack of leadership initiatives is the root of cause for organizational failure due to the lack of organizational communication. This means that a seasoned leader with a high EI can make a difference in streamlining organizational setting initiatives.

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