

Emotional Intelligence: An Essential Leadership Trait for Educators

Robert Tench

Leadership literature indicates a distinctive link between emotional intelligence and effective leadership. Multiple researchers have reported that educational organizations benefit greatly from the strengths of emotionally intelligent leaders. Those strengths include being adept at establishing effective relationships, developing productive teams, motivating employees, and transforming work environments. The impact of emotional intelligence in educational practice has far-ranging implications because individuals with high levels of emotional intelligence generally emerge as leaders in their organizations. Evolving research indicates that educational leaders with high levels of emotional intelligence are better suited at leading followers through difficult challenges, improving academic achievement, and transforming contemporary education.

Overview

Scholarly research on emotional intelligence has gained traction in the last three decades. Webb (2009) found that “research on emotional intelligence began as early as the 1930s with work by Thorndike, Stein, and Wechsler but was

largely ignored until 1983 when Howard Gardner began writing about multiple intelligence” (p. 32). In 1990, “Salovey and Mayer coined the term emotional intelligence as a label for skills that included awareness of self and others and the ability to handle emotions and relationships” (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 176). Daniel Goleman (1995) popularized the concept with his best-selling work *Emotional Intelligence*, defining it as “the capacity for recognizing our own feelings and those of others, for motivating ourselves, and for managing emotions in ourselves and others” (p. 33). According to Batool (2013), researchers currently work from three basic emotional intelligence research models:

- The Salovey-Mayer model defines emotional intelligence as the ability to perceive, understand, manage, and use emotions to facilitate thinking.
- The Goleman model views emotional intelligence as a wide array of competencies and skills that drive managerial performance.
- The Bar-On model describes a cross-section of interrelated emotional and social competencies, skills, and facilitators that impact intelligent behavior (p. 87).

Although the models have different testing apparatuses and assessments, their core emphasis is similar—identifying one’s ability to develop emotional self-understanding and social awareness of others.

Strengths

The strengths related to emotional intelligence are many and varied but well suited for academic environments. Emotionally intelligent leaders have strong self-awareness,

manage their emotions adroitly, and handle relationships with others extremely well (Anand, 2010). They are outstanding at team work, collaboration, and motivation. They welcome diversity and have a knack for bringing different personalities together. According to Walter, Cole, and Humphrey (2011), “existing evidence has provided a rather consistent picture that supports the notion that emotionally intelligent individuals are more likely to emerge as leaders” (p. 48). This is not surprising given the strengths of an emotionally intelligent leader.

Implications

The impact of emotional intelligence in educational leadership practice is exceptional. First, having high emotional intelligence is a predictor of leadership potential and growth. In a study of school leaders across three southeastern states, Maulding, Peters, Roberts, Leonard, and Sparkman (2012) found that “emotional intelligence and resilience are significant predictors of leadership from the perspective of self-analysis of administrators whether subjected to quantitative or qualitative analysis; as a leader’s emotional and resilience increase, leadership capacity increases” (p. 26). The researchers found “that the relationship between leadership characteristics and emotional intelligence and resilience is substantial” (Maulding et al., 2012, p. 26). These kinds of findings may have a profound effect on future educational identification and development programs. To this end, many researchers strongly suggest that professional development models for school leaders include emotional competency measurements with greater emphasis on identifying and cultivating

the transformative traits of high emotional intelligence (Hackett & Hortman, 2008).

Second, educational leaders with emotional intelligence have been linked to academic success. Leithwood and Jantzi (2000) and Parker, Duffy, Wood, Bond, and Hogan (2005) confirmed that the leadership style of emotionally intelligent leaders leads to improved student engagement, teacher support, and school improvement. Labby, Lunenburg, and Slate (2012) studied the impact of emotional intelligence on academic success and concluded a correlation exists between emotional intelligence and academic achievement. They learned that leaders with high levels of emotional intelligence create learning environments that inspire teachers and students to higher performance (Labby et al., 2012). In short, emotional leaders in education create cultures that allow followers to maximize their potential. They care deeply about and take an active interest in their students and teachers. As a result, followers trust them as leaders and aspire to perform their best.

Third, leaders with high emotional intelligence are transformational. Brinia, Zimianit, and Panagiotopoulos (2014) studied 3,011 educators and 36 principals in Greek primary schools and found that an emotionally intelligent leader is able to inspire and facilitate a self-conscious organizational culture by adopting the values of understanding, trust, achievement, and effectiveness; moreover, these leaders combine emotions, beliefs, visions, and values in a flexible manner that is well received by their followers. Likewise, Hackett and Hortman (2008) discovered that

transformational leadership models were linked with positive student outcomes in their study of 46 principals in an urban school system in southern Georgia. Berkovich and Eyal (2015) reviewed empirical evidence from 49 studies on educational leaders and the impact their emotions had on others and found that the transformational nature of those with high emotional intelligence had a much higher positive impact in their schools than leaders with low emotional intelligence. Stated simply, emotionally intelligent leaders are crucial to transforming and maintaining long-term, organizational sustainability in a variety of academic settings.

Conclusion

Scholars and applied researchers are recognizing that emotional intelligence empowers educational leaders. They acknowledge that emotional intelligence is as essential as vision, commitment, passion, and integrity for modern leaders. They agree that educational leaders with emotional intelligence are superb collaborators, enablers, mentors, and motivators. Because leaders with emotional intelligence have a high degree of social and self-awareness, they are talented at handling relationships and transforming organizations and people. They have the ability to inspire, guide, and articulate a vision. Unquestionably, educational leaders with high levels of emotional intelligence are extremely well equipped to address the challenges and nuances of modern day administration and management.

About the Author

Rob Tench is a third year student and 2016 Cohort member of the Virginia Commonwealth University's Ed.D. in Leadership program. He is currently the Acquisitions & Preservation Services Librarian at Old Dominion University.

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