

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE IN BUREAUCRACIES and ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR EMOTIONAL LABOR AND GENDER

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"IQ gets you hired, but EQ gets you promoted." (Personnel executive, Time Magazine)

"Do you listen attentively and think about how others feel? Are you sensitive to others' needs? Do you understand what motivates other people, even those from different backgrounds? Are you attuned to others' moods?" (Goleman and Boyatzis, 2008, p.78).

These questions, taken from a behavioral assessment tool called the Emotional and Social Competency Inventory, reflect a small excerpt of emotional qualities that have become highly desired in our today's working environment. Empathy, compassion, sensitivity, social and self-awareness, all encapsulated under the umbrella term "emotional intelligence" have been endorsed by private businesses and organizations in regard to questions of leadership, teamwork and customer service for almost two decades. However, with the dawn of the New Public Management (NPM) approach in Public Administration, emphasizing key terms such as "employee empowerment," "customer focused," "networking and collaboration," emotional intelligence has also become an important and integral part of the administrative processes, refuting the notion that bureaucracy and emotionality are two mutually exclusive concepts.

How did the notion of emotional intelligence evolve?

Historically, bureaucracy has been mostly characterized by qualities that stand in stark contrast to the notions of emotional intelligence. For instance, Max Weber (1864–1920) lauded impersonality and dehumanization as the 'special virtues' of bureaucracy because they would remove the danger of 'irrational' behavior by "individual bureaucrats and the organization as a whole" (Rosenblum, Kravchuk, and Clerkin, 2009,

p. 144). Similarly, Frederick Winslow Taylor's (1856–1915) scientific management approach was primarily concerned with maximizing output and efficiency. Worker's emotional issues, such as boredom, disaffection, or frustration, were dismissed as negligible concerns (Rosenblum et. al., 2009). Weber's and Taylor's work was substantial to bureaucratic management for most of the last century, and their opinions continue to influence the public perception of government as many Americans still regard bureaucracy as an impersonal administrative machinery where humans (customers *and* workers) are treated as sheer numbers.

However, in the second half of the past century the notion that managerial processes might be improved by looking at the emotional content in relational work rather than focusing solely on rationality and science came more and more to the forefront. Several scientists touched on and worked with the concept of emotional intelligence (although they might have called it differently¹); yet with the publication of Daniel Goleman's book *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can More Than IQ* in 1995 the term became widely popularized. As mainstream media picked up the catchy expression of "emotional intelligence" it became also known to the masses. For example, *Time Magazine* ran a cover story in October 1995 asking on its front page "WHAT'S YOUR EQ?" in big capital letters. Luring its readers to check out the story, they hinted that "It's not your IQ. It's not even a number. But emotional intelligence may be the best predictor of success in life, redefining what it means to be smart" (Gibbs, 1995, p. 1). This way people became aware that not the level of cognitive intelligence alone paves the way to success.

¹ See McGregor's "The Human Side of the Enterprise" (1957) in *Classics of Public Administration*

But what is emotional intelligence and how is it defined?

Mostly, emotional intelligence is described as the capability to recognize one's own emotions and to perceive those of others, applying this knowledge to direct one's decision making and action in a skillful and intelligent manner. The four cornerstones of emotional intelligence are the concepts of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management (Berman and West, 2008, pp. 742-743). The levels of emotional intelligence differ within individuals; however, overall, they tend to become higher with age. In contrast to cognitive intelligence, which stays relatively stable throughout an individual's lifetime, emotional intelligence can be improved as a result of learning and engaging in new skills (Posten, 2009).

The importance of emotional intelligence in bureaucracies

a) Leadership and teamwork improvement

At the center of successful leadership is the "ability to influence a group toward the achievement of goals" (Rosenbloom et. al., 2009, p. 150). Since emotions are intrinsic to the human condition, they doubtlessly arise whenever a group of people works together. Hence it is essential that leaders (e.g. public managers) know how to deal with circumstances that include emotions. For example, ensuring that co-workers feel appreciated and understood helps to enhance their devotion and enthusiasm for work, which positively affects their job performance. Similarly, good leaders should recognize when negative emotions arise (e.g. dissatisfaction and frustration) and should be able to address them adequately so that they do not endanger job performance and the success of a project. Overall, improving emotional intelligence should be a constant

process of reflecting and learning, which indicates that not only the selection of leaders with already good “people skills” (a popular synonym for high emotional intelligence) is favorable, but also the development and improvement of emotional skills over the course of time is essential (Berman and West, 2008).

For example, in their study “Managing Emotional Intelligence in U.S. Cities: A Study of Social Skills among Public Managers,” the authors Evan Berman and Jonathan West investigated the importance of managerial emotional intelligence in local governments and how already existing practices within their organizations influenced the development of their emotional intelligence skills. Their findings implicate that there are three key concepts to directly further managerial emotional intelligence: 1) Feedback – managers who provide co-workers with in-depth responses about their social skills sharpen their own awareness of emotional intelligence, too; 2) Modeling – expecting managers to display socially appropriate manners in front of their co-workers also increases self-awareness; 3) Mentoring – finding a mentor, preferably from outside the organization, for reflection and discussion of complicated “people’s issues” is also a beneficial tool for increasing emotional intelligence. Additional supportive measures are training, selection and promotion, and code of conduct (e.g. installing organizational social norms).

Albeit the ways to improve emotional intelligence might certainly vary throughout different administrative agencies, it is evident that technical proficiency alone is insufficient in assessing managerial competencies; success or failure often depends on the softer [emotional intelligence] - related skills’ (as cited in Berman and West, 2008, p.

754). Even public agencies that are not commonly associated with emotionality in regard to their line of work have discovered the importance of emotional intelligence within leadership. For example in 2006 the FBI issued a Law Enforcement Bulletin stressing the importance of leaders with high levels of emotional intelligence. The bulletin states that “leaders today must possess more than skills and technical expertise and more than a strategic vision. Law enforcement leaders require a high level of emotional intelligence” (Turner, 2006). Moreover, the bulletin criticizes the still common practice of hiring officers for leadership positions “based on a philosophy of being in the right place at the right time, rather than spending time and resources to recognize individuals with leadership potential” (Turner, 2006). This outdated philosophy of appointing leadership positions is certainly not limited to the FBI and can be found within other public agencies as human habit makes it difficult to change long-established ways of doing things, even if they have been proven to be detrimental to the overall cause.

b) Improvement of customer service

A great deal of public-service jobs are characterized by interpersonal contact, which can be face to face and/or voice to voice. In the ideal case the interaction between public servant and customer should produce a desired outcome for both sides: 1) from the customer’s point of view, his/her goal of the exchange has been fulfilled; 2) from the agency’s point of view, the customer was satisfactorily served, establishing the productivity and efficiency of the respective public-service agency. Thus to do their job well, employees must be able to manage interactions with their customers positively.

This work is described as emotional work and is often compared to the work of acting – “invoking and displaying emotions, just as actors do when playing roles” (Guy and Newman, 2004, p. 290).

However, to engage successfully in emotional labor adequate levels of emotional intelligence are an absolute prerequisite. Case workers, public health nurses, receptionists, counter clerks, public school teachers, etc. are required to sense emotions in others, while at the same time they need to manage their own feelings. Moreover, they must use this knowledge wisely to coordinate their further actions to reach the intended goal with their client. Each and every step of the interaction must display high levels of emotional intelligence on the part of the public servant. Otherwise customer satisfaction is likely to suffer and the perception of the government service is likely to be viewed as negative (Guy and Newman, 2004). Thus emotional intelligence can be seen as the tool for successfully ‘managing emotional labor so that it benefits the organization’ (as cited in Meier, Mastracci, and Wilson, 2006, p. 2). Consequently, measures that help employees at the customer-service level to better their emotional intelligence skills (e.g. through feedback, training, etc.) are certainly as important as at the leadership level.

What role does gender play in regard to emotional intelligence and emotional labor?

Women are on average more inclined than men to instantly sense other person’s emotions (Goleman and Boyatzis, 2008), and women are most likely to be expected to engage in emotional labor in an organization (Meier et al., 2006). Still, this does not necessarily mean that women’s emotional intelligence is naturally higher than that of

men. What it means is that a social construct exists that views certain behaviors, such as caring and nurturing, as inherent to women. Consequently, emotional labor that requires *caritas* is seen as 'natural labor' for women (Guy and Newman, 2004, p. 290). However, engaging on a regular basis in emotional labor most likely enhances emotional intelligence since it is a skill that prospers on experience.

Studies have confirmed that female employees in public organizations are "expected and required to engage in emotional work to a greater deal than men" (Meier et. al., 2006, p. 1). At the same time, their input is commonly taken for granted, often overlooked and undercompensated, despite its crucial role for the organization. Investigating the link between gender, emotional labor and performance, it was found that organizations with more female public servants at the street level are characterized by superior organizational performance, including overall productivity, employee turnover, and customer satisfaction (Meier et. al., 2006). However, women's positive contribution to organizational performance is certainly not reflected in monetary compensation. As Mary Guy and Meredith Newman (2004) observed so aptly in their study about job segregation, "there is a penalty not only for being female, but also for holding a job that involves caring and nurturing" (p. 292).

In regard to leadership the question if gender influences emotional intelligence takes on a somewhat different notion since at the top level of leadership the great majority of workers are male. Studies, investigating successful leaders in the private sector (e.g. banking executives, CEO's of international companies) showed that "gender differences that are prominent in the general population are all but absent among the most

successful leaders” (Goleman and Boyatzis, 2008, p. 76). Conveying these findings to the public sector makes certainly sense. Here too, almost two-thirds of the top-level workers are male, while most public workers at the lowest ranks are female. However, women who made it to the upper echelons of bureaucracy are still expected to provide emotional labor in addition to their primary work tasks - something that is not expected by men (Guy and Newman, 2004).

All in all emotional intelligence is commonly valued and appreciated, if it is associated with jobs perceived as masculine, such as management, and if it takes place in the higher ranks of hierarchy. Emotional intelligence that is required for jobs that include *caritas* goes often unnoticed since emotional labor is perceived as natural for women. It is only recognized and valued if it is performed by a man (perceived as something extraordinary, e.g. a warm and caring male nurse); and, at the same time, it is also recognized when women lack certain emotional intelligence skills but are still working in jobs requiring *caritas* (e.g. a cold and uncaring female nurse). Thus, “all emotional labor is not created equal,” which is also reflected in the disparate wages that men and women earn (Guy and Newman, 2004, p. 292). Only if women participate in “men’s jobs” (e.g. policy makers, upper-level managers) they come close to earn the same as men; however, they are still expected to provide additional “free” emotional labor (Guy and Newman, 2004).

Critiques of emotional intelligence

A critique of emotional intelligence is that it is not an exact science and therefore hard to measure. Commonly used self-reports and peer-evaluations are often

characterized by severe limitations, such as bias, prejudice, and manipulation. But also the use of ability tests is not without flaws since they might not mirror precisely what people would do if they encounter the abstract emotional settings in real-life situations. Consequently, if emotional intelligence will prevail as an important measurement of job qualification, future research, investigating how to enhance the assessment of emotional intelligence, is certainly necessary (Cote and Miners, 2006).

Critics also argue that the assessment and development of emotional intelligence skills is a time and cost intensive endeavor, wasting money that could be used otherwise. Detailed job analyses and thorough performance appraisal criteria, emphasizing the emotional content of certain work tasks, and training centers, offering exercises such as role-play, simulations, and scenario writing (Berman and West, 2008), require extra effort and money without guarantee of success. Moreover, the scenario of public servants engaging in role-plays while the economy is in recession is certainly a challenging task to sell to a public already critical of governmental expenses.

Finally, critics feel uncomfortable “assigning a numerical yardstick to a person’s character as well as his intellect,” fearing that this will invite misuse (Gibbs, 1995, p. 3). It does not make sense to take an average of emotional skills, as, for example, some people can deal with anger but not with fear, and others might be unable to enjoy pleasure; hence every emotion has to be seen in its own right (Gibbs, 1995). Moreover, critics contend that emotional intelligence, as cognitive intelligence, is a morally neutral concept - both can be used to accomplish good or evil deeds. Someone with a great understanding of his/her co-worker’s feelings could use it to inspire them or to take

advantage of them. Thus, without a “moral compass” for guidance, emotional intelligence skills are essentially useless (Gibbs, 1995, p. 9).

The future of emotional intelligence in bureaucracies

Despite certain shortcomings in assessing and developing emotional intelligence, it is a concept that is very likely to stay or become even more important in the future governmental workplace. As Berman and West (2008) stated “expecting good people skills from all managers has been proven difficult, even though this is being increasingly emphasized “(p. 753). They argue that in times when fewer and fewer people cultivate close friendships, spending more and more time in front of the TV or computer, the existence of adequate emotional intelligence skills cannot be assumed.

Similarly, lack of emotional intelligence skills might be even more pronounced within the younger workforce to come. For example, Generation Y, for which the use of informational technology has become a way of life, often regards face-to-face communication as obsolete or undesirable. However, e-mailing and texting cannot convey emotions in the same way as face-to-face interaction since tone of voice and body language cannot be conveyed. This might lead to misinterpretations and misunderstandings, which in turn can hurt job performance and customer service relations (Tonn, 2008).

Since governmental processes very much depend on the approval of the public, and citizen satisfaction has become a desired goal of NPM, emotional intelligence skills should be seen as an essential tool to support this endeavor. Guy and Newman (2004) state “positive exchanges have become a benchmark for performance,” particularly in

times when “understaffed public services must meet the same customer expectations as business establishments” (p. 295).

Conclusion

As bureaucratic processes moved more and more away from the historical concepts of dehumanization and impersonality, the notion that emotional skills are essential to job performance and customer service has gained foothold in the public administration sector. Based on the concepts of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management, emotional intelligence has become key to the internal organization of public agencies (e.g. leadership, co-worker collaboration) and for the external exchange with citizen customers (e.g. as a basis for relational work/emotional labor). Despite some deficiencies (e.g. difficulties in assessment and costs) emotional intelligence skills will continue to be important for bureaucratic processes since social skills in general are expected to decline due to the increased dependency on technological forms of communication.

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