



CIPRIANI COLLEGE
OF LABOUR AND CO-OPERATIVE STUDIES

WORK MATTERS COLUMN

May 2024

The Secret Ingredient in Managing Organisational Change: Emotional Intelligence

In a period of economic uncertainty, social pressures, unpredictable supply chains, geopolitical wars, tighter shareholder compliance and climatic change amidst navigating the lingering effects of Covid-19, leaders and managers in all sectors are applying change management approaches in their organisations to achieve more with the meagre resources available. If ever change management principles were shelved in the past, the process of getting people to unlock their entrenched practices and habitually embrace new ways of best practice working is now at the forefront in meeting organisational outcomes. The dust of this touted academic theme must now be wiped off as the ambiguous operating space known as the 21st century threatens organisational resilience, survival and our employment.

Change management is not a structured process but an iterative one of contextualizing change reasons, implementing and expecting people to change to new norms and ideologies at the workplace. The very core of change management involves changing people, soft system entities with contrasting needs, philosophies and attitudes, which will require recalibrating their senses toward the change. Whether the change is centered on results based working, digital models, greater accountability or customer service outcomes, managing the contrary perspectives, upsetting the individual and collective inertia and managing the resistance and the inevitable disruption will require an underrated and taken for granted skill leaders and managers are expected to have, emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence involves the iterative and deeply rooted behavioural modification of controlling one's emotions in engaging others, providing and receiving feedback from others, in this case followers and staff. Without a doubt, the contrary attitudes and diverse perspectives of staff will slow desired outcomes and will mandate staff and leaders to recalibrate their individual and collective emotions in understanding the change and then being able to connect to it.

So how exactly does emotional intelligence works? In

getting staff to subscribe to new change outcomes such as being punctual or completing a compliance report on time or simply being respectful to one another in brainstorming exercises require leaders at all levels to self-regulate their tantrums of dissatisfaction. Easier said than done. This self-regulation can only be fueled by an acute self-awareness of one's strengths and weaknesses and using the former to curb one's impulses and outbursts despite staff missteps. Again, easier said than done. No one said that emotional intelligence was easy or a one session training event. It requires deep seated self-reflection, behavioural modification and a relentless effort to model the behaviours and walk the talk with staff.

Perhaps the most crucial skill in getting staff to even reconsider that what they are doing toward organisational outcomes is harnessing effective social relationships with staff. By developing trusting relationships with staff, making every small win a big win for the team and connecting their personal goals toward organisational outcomes, staff senses can possibly awaken in the direction of the change. What if leaders can simultaneously shape the emotional intelligence capacity of their staff in the process of sustaining positive relations? Then the psychological safety of staff will be created where they can disagree with their leaders in offering an alternative opinion in problem solving and opportunity spotting. This results in a euphoria state of intentional disruption, where leaders can levy war on early staff consensus, entertain the blue sky ideas, embrace staff conflict in resolving problems and design the change with their followers. After all, it's the followers who own the change as leaders will eventually leave when the job is done. So where does the change management start? Obviously in the need for change. However, it also commences with the recognition that the emotional intelligence of oneself, group and the entire department, unit or organisation unlocking their self-awareness, self-control, social and relationship building skills can lead to an unfreezing of undesired behaviours. Whilst remuneration, job security training

and career development opportunities are always enablers of change, the desired change can be short lived if staff intrinsic senses do not connect with the need for change. Shaping emotional intelligence skills at the individual, group and intra-group levels steered by socially and emotionally intelligent leaders can ignite the connection between staff's values and the necessary change. This emotional connection to the change together with the continuing psychological safety of staff to have diverse views on how the change can be implemented are useful in implementing and embedding the change habitually. Only then the climate would be created for leaders to share their authority, empower staff to make key decisions and rely on staff autonomous working toward making the change succeed. As such, shaping emotional intelligence is the often overlooked ingredient in triggering organisational change. The next time you expect staff to deliver on a particular result or apply discretionary effort and achieve organisational outcomes, ask yourself "have I shaped the emotional intelligence capacity of myself and my team toward the change expectation?" Only then you will be ready to lead change.

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