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EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

What has happened to the “ship” of leadership?

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At a time of the greatest international tensions for more than a decade, Geetu Orme shares insights from her work with leaders to ask: Is it time to rethink the concept of leadership?

Modern-day society has a deep fascination with the nature of leadership, we want to understand what it is, and whether or not leaders are born or made. Our forebears had the same absorption.

Indeed, the origins of the word itself go back many centuries. The earliest school for leadership was set up by Plato (the Paidea, in early Greece). A concise overview of the history of leadership can be found in Hooper and Potter (2000).

The scientific study of leadership has evolved largely through North American writers and management thinkers. In 1974, Stodgill's *Handbook of leadership* listed some 4,725 studies of the subject and included 189 pages of references. His conclusion was that there was still no “integrated” understanding of leadership, despite this accumulation of empirical data.

A number of academic fields have also studied leadership and set up their own leadership academies, including political science, psychology, education, history, agriculture, public administration, management, anthropology, biology, military sciences, philosophy and sociology (Sorenson, 2000). In fact, a comparison of the training portfolios of major providers, including the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, the Institute of Directors and Management Centre Europe, shows that leadership development programmes are the fastest growing segment of professional development.

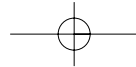
However, the nature of empirical studies is that they are often based on reductionism. A vast range of elements is narrowed down to specific definitions; and a theory is developed and then is tested

empirically. In the course of history, theories of leadership have moved broadly from studies of the leader themselves (the *person*) to the *process* of followership; from transactional approaches to transformational leadership. James Macgregor Burns has been credited as playing a major part in this shift in thinking that has reached the point where the latest theories are now the subject of numerous leadership programmes around the world.

Yet the enormous spend on leadership development has not necessarily produced a comparable impact on the performance of leaders – particularly in terms of the impact that leaders achieve on the groups they are leading. In other words, the link between leadership development and performance is not yet proven.

Management writers continue to ponder the essence of leadership. In a recent publication, renowned leadership gurus “speak to the next generation” (Bennis, Spreitzer and Cummings, 2001) yet, somehow, the book offers no clear pathway for the next generation. Conversely, a book by Nigel Nicholson focuses on our pull towards “dominance” to explain why incompetent people end up in leadership. He emphasises “drive, ability and constitution” as the three elements that distinguish leaders (Nicholson, 2000).

Recent issues of the *Harvard Business Review* (September 2002 to February 2003) have highlighted the importance of leadership, and its January 2003 number was dedicated to “motivating people – how to get the most from your organisation” (January 2003). Bennis and Thomas (2002) in their article “Crucibles of leadership” examine the ways in which people handle adversity; their research



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suggests that the ability to learn from negative experiences is what distinguishes exceptional leaders. In another interesting article, D'Aveni (2002) focuses on a paradox for leaders – that industry leaders do not seem to lead revolutions. They seem to prefer to lead counter-revolutions rather than embrace the “revolution” in their industry.

Yet despite the many noble attempts to provide counsel to leaders of organisations and indeed governments, there appears to be an emphasis that is missing. This leads me to the realities of what is happening in leadership roles.

THE REALITIES

In a previous article published in this journal, Dr Reuven Bar-On and myself highlighted what we saw happening among leaders of public and private sector organisations – a search for meaning, relationships, balance and self-expression (Orme and Bar-On, 2002).

In a subsequent article, Carolann Ashton and I discussed the links between emotional intelligence and ethics (Orme and Ashton, 2002). This current article is designed to explore specific data that may describe why our leaders are losing their way, why business faces tougher conditions and, most importantly, why the skills we need today are radically different from the ones we learned at the beginning of our careers.

Before going any further, I want to say a few words about the context in which I have gathered these insights. I lead an organisation that specialises in emotional intelligence. The nature of this work means that the people I am dealing with are already open to self-awareness and improving their lives. The people that I am not in conversations with may bring a different perspective on the points I raise. I will be referring to components of the Bar-On EQ-i¹ (see box 1).

The reality behind the management jargon is alarming. The four key points below explain why I have found this to be so.

1. There seems to be a major gap in leaders' self-awareness. There is a difference often between what someone is projecting on the outside, compared with what someone is feeling on the inside. Box 2 describes a particular combination of EQ components that seem to

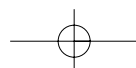
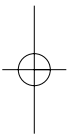
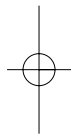
1. BAR-ON EQ-I¹ DESCRIPTIONS

Intrapersonal	To . . .
Self-regard	■ accurately perceive, understand and accept oneself.
Emotional self-awareness	■ be aware of and understand one's emotions.
Assertiveness	■ effectively and constructively express one's emotions and oneself.
Independence	■ be self-reliant and free of emotional dependency on others.
Self-actualization	■ strive to achieve personal goals and realise one's potential.
Interpersonal	
Empathy	■ be aware of and understand how others feel.
Social responsibility	■ identify with and be a responsible and cooperative group member.
Interpersonal relationship	■ establish meaningful and close relationships.
Adaptability	
Reality testing	■ objectively test one's feelings and thinking against external reality.
Flexibility	■ adapt and adjust one's feelings and thinking to new situations.
Problem-solving	■ effectively solve problems of a personal and interpersonal nature.
Stress management	
Stress tolerance	■ effectively and constructively manage stress and strong emotions.
Impulse control	■ effectively and constructively control impulses and strong emotions.
General mood	
Optimism	■ be positive and look at the brighter side of life.
Happiness	■ feel content with oneself, others and life in general.

¹ The Bar-On EQ-i is a trademark of Multi-Health Systems, Toronto (www.mhs.com).

be common among senior managers. This model indicates that there is likely to be a strong relationship between four components in particular. It shows that if someone is feeling good about themselves (self-regard), they are more likely to tolerate stress and feel optimistic and happy.

You may be interested to know that through EQ assessments we often see this combination among senior managers, but they appear as *low* scores. In other words, when someone has low self-confidence, this will, in turn, affect their ability to tolerate



stress and, consequently, they will feel pessimistic and unhappy. Is this inspiring for others? Hardly.

This gap in self-awareness raises the question of what is the best means of supporting leadership development. If it is all an “act” for some senior managers, where does the facilitator start? What implications does this have for authentic leadership?

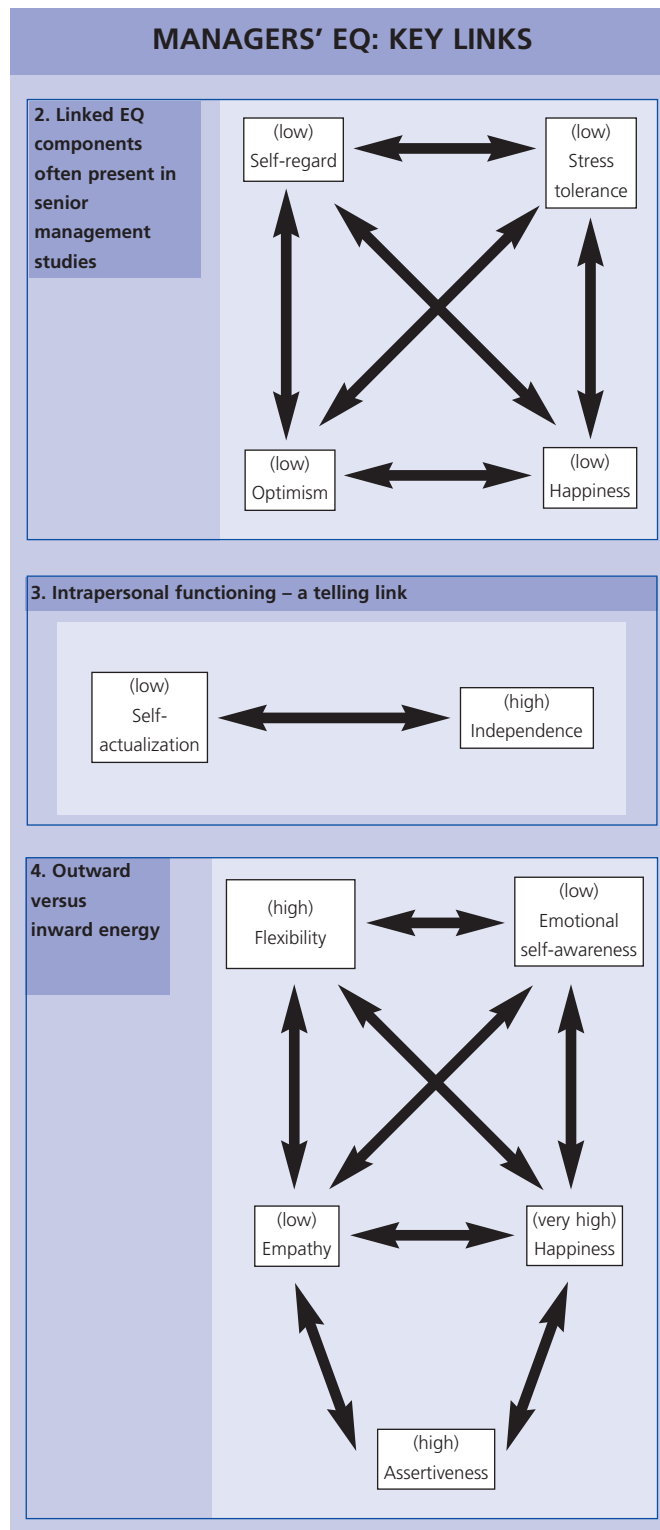
2. The contribution of *intrapersonal skills to leaders' effectiveness is undervalued*. However, the leaders who seem to be the most effective (as measured by tangible business data) are often the ones who have a strong centre; know themselves, are able to assert themselves and are able to set and achieve goals.

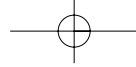
The model in box 3 describes another combination of EQ components that we often see among senior managers: high independence and low self-actualization. In other words, senior managers who are able to work alone, be alone and take decisions on their own seem also to be failing to achieve their full potential and do not fully enjoy the work they are doing. So, to be able to help senior managers, it may mean that we have to put them in touch with their goals in all areas of life and, from this, assist them in moving closer to these goals.

3. Time for self-reflection often provides the time and space to make changes, yet senior managers are not known for their patience. Herein lies a major problem. Often senior managers are known for their sense of urgency, their ability to be decisive and quite often, for their ability to get angry – all of which are measured by “impulse control”. We have found in our work that low impulse control is often a theme among senior managers. The following EQ components, for example, distinguish members of the Young Presidents' Organisation (YPO) (quoted in Stein and Book, 2001):

- high independence;
- high assertiveness; and
- low impulse control.

Some people would refer to this combination as “drive”, but it has some serious implications for the role of self-reflection. With low impulse control, how do senior managers force themselves to take





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stock of their lives, their relationships and their functioning? What implications does this have for finding the best pace for leadership development that would appeal to senior managers? Do some senior managers risk becoming impatient with long drawn out leadership development programmes? Probably.

4. The emotion of fear and its power in leadership needs to be better understood by individual leaders. The model in box 4 describes what we often see among senior managers who lead significant numbers of people. Leaders who are cheerful around others (happiness), and demonstrate high flexibility, are more able to adjust to what is happening and speak their minds to others in a non-destructive way (assertiveness). However, they are also often not empathetic, or tuned into their own emotions (emotional self-awareness).

I have highlighted the emotion of fear. When low emotional self-awareness and high flexibility are combined, as we often find they are, this is frequently associated in senior managers with the demonstration of avoidance strategies. They move away from whatever is causing them pain, instead of embracing it and, thus, coming to understand its cause. Does this hamper the ability of senior managers to make effective decisions? Probably.

THE IMPLICATIONS

I believe that these dimensions of leadership have some serious implications for “help-givers” who are called to assist leaders to be effective – those who coach senior managers and design and deliver executive development programmes. First of all, we need a clearer understanding of many aspects of leadership development: what distinguishes truly effective leaders from the also-rans; and of the internal workings of leaders’ minds and emotions as a contrast to their outward actions. Second, there must be a greater coherence between the skills that help-givers are seeking to develop and those they demonstrate themselves.

Data to support help-givers

We need data to support our work as help-givers – not just “any old data”, but data of three specific types.

■ **Self-awareness data:** Data that provides us with awareness of what is going on the *inside* to compare with what is happening on the *outside*. Over-reliance on 360-degree processes may not produce this level of understanding. Leaders need data to gain a comprehensive

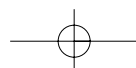
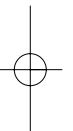
understanding of their “whole” selves – self-awareness is absolutely at the heart of their effectiveness. So, I question fundamentally whether practical skills development for leaders can actually work if it is not built on a strong foundation of self-awareness. My suspicion is that huge investments in skills development are wasted if there is no comparable investment in self-awareness.

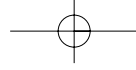
■ **“Star” performer/effectiveness data:** Research needs to focus on the specific context in which a senior manager is working if it is to distinguish the characteristics of highly effective leaders from those who are mediocre. Only in this way will we obtain the data that provides leaders with a clear pathway for understanding “success”. Such data is largely missing at present, except in a few organisations that have embarked on developing their own research (see, for example, the activities in the Whitbread group (Orme and Langhorn, 2003)). How else can an HR function be clear on what it takes for leaders to be effective in today’s uncertain times?

■ **Data on our own effectiveness:** Help-givers are only able to be as helpful as our own level of self-awareness allows. Therefore, alongside data on the leader and benchmarked data, we also need data on ourselves so that we can bring self-awareness to our work with our customers, be they internal or external. The help-giver with low “impulse control” would need to watch their pace in meetings. Someone with high “assertiveness” combined with high “happiness” may need to temper their mood when dealing with issues that are deep-rooted and require more than cheeriness. In my experience, few help-givers take the time and trouble to become aware of how they may be affecting the results for their customers through their own awareness or lack of it.

RUTHLESS ROLE-MODELLING

In my opinion, the terms “coaching” and “executive development” fail to capture the essence of what these disciplines are trying to achieve. I advocate a return to the basic language of “help-giver”. To be a help-giver we also need to know how to receive help. If we are giving help, we also have to be able to recognise when we ourselves need help. We cannot achieve this without making a faithful attempt to role model the competencies that we are helping others to develop. In this vein, I believe that the HR function has to take a long hard look at itself to identify the extent to which it is successful in role-modelling success (of course, there are a few pockets of excellence around – but most HR functions seem to be losing





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their way). As my roots are in the HR profession, I find this particularly alarming.

CONCLUSION

To what extent could our political leaders benefit from this counsel? Would self-awareness and data help Bush and Blair? If they were role-modelling a democratic society, would this help them in their leadership capacity? What are the implications for the people advising them?

Perhaps, we need to return to the origins of the English word leader – “leden” meaning to “travel” or “show the way”. Leaders can only show the way to travel if they are prepared to fully tune into themselves and what is happening around them. Self-awareness is crucial, and the capacity of those in “helping” roles requires more than just cognitive intelligence.

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Notes

¹ The measure of emotional intelligence referred to in this article is the Bar-On EQ-i (Emotional Quotient Inventory). The EQ-i is one of the most valid and reliable tests of

EI; its author is Dr Reuven Bar-On. The Bar-On EQ-i is a trademark of Multi-Health Systems, Toronto (www.mhs.com). In the UK, accreditation is provided by Ei (UK) (www.eiuk.com).

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