

Emotional Intelligence:

the Driving Force Behind Effective Communication

Interview with **Christophe HAAG**, assistant professor of applied psychology, EM Lyon Business School, France, December 2008.

Gaining the support of those around you requires an ability to communicate feelings and sincerity. Emotional expressiveness is in fact the key to successful communication. In difficult situations, transmitting positive emotions can help people cope with negative circumstances and help maintain team dynamics. What are the mechanisms of what Christophe Haag calls emotional communication?

BIOGRAPHY



Christophe HAAG holds a PhD in Management from the ESCP-EAP and Paris X University and did a post-doctoral research fellowship at INSEAD. In 2007, he joined EM Lyon as assistant professor of applied psychology in the HR department. His research focuses on the influence of CEO's (American and European) emotions on the dynamics and performance of boards of directors in crisis situations.

"There is a very close link between emotion and successful communication," says Haag, who has conducted a long-term study on the correlation between the emotional intelligence and communication effectiveness of 40 French CEOs of large corporations. In crisis situations, amongst others, the most effective communicators use a wide range of emotions (ranging from joy to anger) to gain their audience's support. "Their emotional intelligence¹ (EI) is actually a tool that they learn to use and develop," says Haag.

EI: not a fad, but a phenomenon

The first studies on emotional intelligence appeared at the beginning of the 1990s with the work of Salovey and Mayer. They defined EI as "the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to

discriminate among them, and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions". How does this apply to business leaders? "Emotionally intelligent CEOs are more sociable and more approachable than leaders who are emotionally distant. The latter see the same things as emotionally intelligent people, but they see them in black and white... Today's managers need to see things in "high definition color."

Haag believes this form of intelligence is a natural gift whose roots go back to childhood² but which also develops throughout a lifetime. Levels of EI, measured as an Emotional Intelligence Quotient (EQ), can be improved at any time through appropriate training. This may mean coaching, sponsorship programmes, or collaboration with an organizational psychologist. "Daniel Goleman was one of the first

researchers to recognize the importance of this form of intelligence and define an associated management model³ (the Goleman or mixed model). He paved the way for many researchers like me, though some people have focused on another model (Ability-Based Model⁴) to define the emotional quotient. Although these two approaches differ, they both deserve to be treated seriously and scientifically, and they can both contribute to identifying effective, modern managerial practices for the third millennium."

NB: EI is about adaptability, not simulation

Haag warns, "Expressing your emotions does not mean simulating them!" People will quickly detect a lack of sincerity, and this will discredit the spea- ...

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ker. Still, emotionally intelligent managers know (or have to know) how to increase or reduce the intensity of their emotions depending on the circumstances. During a crisis, positive emotions will ease the transmission of difficult messages and reassure teams. Instead of saying "This crisis is hopeless," an emotionally intelligent manager would talk about a previous success or another positive event before focusing on the difficulties at hand. Indeed, it is easier to talk about a problem when listeners are in a positive frame of mind.

Negative emotions, such as anger, fear, and stress, can actually be useful, provided managers sparingly. For example, a manager might exploit a fear-inspiring scenario during negotiations to obtain greater concessions. Similarly, anger can help a speaker emphasize the importance of a serious problem and mobilize a team.

The sceptics are wrong; EI is not a joke

"The studies I have conducted on French CEOs offer a response to sceptics who think that emotions have nothing to do with leadership. EQ is a powerful, valid notion. It is gradually gaining scientific clout, and it has a definite impact on leadership performance. Some people realize this and have even started talking openly about their EQ." Haag also claims that EI acts as a barrier against damaging workplace behavior. "I hope this type of study will contribute to significantly reducing the number of 'assholes' (as Robert Sutton refers to them in his book, *The No Asshole Rule*⁵) running our companies. The behavior of these odious but sometimes brilliant leaders is always harmful. They create a strained atmosphere and hinder team performance."

Haag concludes, "EQ is not the only measure of performance; IQ (intelligence quotient) is an even more powerful indicator of leadership success. However, these

two forms of intelligence need to act in unison. Finally while EI is definitely important, it must be used ethically." ■

1. Emotional intelligence is a concept that was developed by American writer and psychologist Daniel Goleman.
2. The children of parents who express their emotions are emotionally expressive.
3. Read *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ* by Daniel Goleman, Bantam, 1995.
4. Peter Salovey and John Mayer were the first to use the expression "emotional intelligence" (Salovey and Mayer, 1990) and place EI at the intersection of cognition and emotion. They have continued their research on the importance of this concept (Mayer, Salovey, Caruso, and Sitarenios, 2003) and since revised their initial definition of EI. Now, they say EI is "The ability to perceive emotion, integrate emotion to facilitate thought, understand emotions, and regulate emotions to promote personal growth."
5. See our dossier "No Bullying in the Workplace!", *Business Digest* no. 179, November 2007.

French leaders' IE: the study

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Hints for effective communication

CHOOSE YOUR WORDS WITH CARE Words have an emotional impact that must be taken into account. Moreover, a rich vocabulary, metaphors, and literary references are effective ways of forcefully communicating ideas when talking to well-educated people.

BE INTENSE People who are curt or dull cause boredom, lack of interest, and even withdrawal. On the other hand, emotional intensity strengthens the power of communication, even though intensity should be reduced in the presence of a small group, such as a board of directors.

DON'T FORGET THE SIMPLE RULES The simple rules of social etiquette, such as saying "hello" and maintaining direct eye contact, are easy and always effective. Managers who leave their office doors open show that they are approachable and concerned about their employees.

DON'T USE CHARTS/SLIDES/POWERPOINT DURING A CRISIS

Emotionally intelligent leaders avoid using them and create more direct contact with their board.

SPEAK QUICKLY Leaders with a high EQ speak very quickly (at an average rate over three words per second). Employees tend to pay more attention to what the person is saying, and in the majority of cases, they feel more positive about the message.