

## TEACHING EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE NONFORMALLY: AN EXPERIMENTAL STUDY IN AN IRANIAN PUBLIC BANK

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### ABSTRACT

This study tends to develop EI of employees of five branches of a Public Iranian bank. In each branch the training program was held for eight 120- minute nonformal friendly sessions. Using ECI test, participants' EI was measured before and after the program. Results show that employees' EI has improved.

### KEYWORDS

nonformal learning – emotional intelligence – public bank

### INTRODUCTION

The great pace of change in the world has given a strategic role to the training department of organizations. Organizations are looking for effective ways to gain competitive advantages over their competitors. One of the possible ways to keep up with the changes and gain competitive advantage is having empowered and up-to-date human resource who are agile enough to acquire the needed skills and competencies; and training departments are in charge of equipping the employees with these needed skills and competencies.

Research has shown that Emotional intelligence EI "refers to the capacity for recognizing our own feelings and those of others, for motivating ourselves, and for managing emotions well in ourselves and in our relationships" (Goleman, 1998). This was publicized by Goleman in 1995 in his bestseller "Emotional Intelligence" and suggests a set of competencies which are necessary for leaders (George 2000; Kerr et al. 2006; Palmer et al. 2001; Prati et al. 2003), groups and teams (Day and Carroll 2004; Jordan et al. 2002; Kelly and Barsade 2001; Welch 2003) and individuals' success at workplace (Abraham 2004; Higgs 2004; Kunnanatt 2004; Lopes et al. 2003; Sy et al. 2006; Tischler et al. 2002). In the recent decade many organizations have held EI training sessions for their managers and employees and the quest for it is still increasing. There is some debate over the possibility of developing EI competencies and also the effective ways for its development (Steiner 1997). This study has attempted to develop EI of 68 employees of five branches of a public Iranian bank. This is a credited bank with approximately 2000 branches all over the country. Bank branch employees are among service workers who have several interactions with their customers everyday and research has shown that EI competencies are especially

necessary for service workers (Bardzil and Slaski 2003; Rozell et al. 2004; Varca 2004).

One available challenge is finding effective ways to provide training programs that fulfil their intended objectives and lead to lifelong learning. Some special teaching methods are more suitable for teaching some skills (this is a truism) and using the right method is a key factor in determining the success of teaching process. This study attempts to remove some of the existing gaps regarding the proper way for promoting EI in service providing organizations.

### Formal, nonformal and informal education

The definition of non-formal education (NFE) is a debatable issue among educators. This debate has come about as a result of the relationship drawn between NFE and the formal school system. This term became popular in the mid-1960s to signal a need for creating out-of-school responses to new and differing demands for education. In some cases, however, the expressions non-formal and informal education are used interchangeably to denote any endeavour undertaken to learn and work outside a formal classroom or workplace (Bracken, 2008; Moshe Re'em, 2001).

Coombs and Ahmed (1974) define informal education "as the lifelong process by which every person acquires and accumulates knowledge, skills, attitudes, and insights from daily experiences and exposure to the environment", non-formal education "as any organized, systematic, educational activity carried on outside the framework of the formal schooling system to provide selected types of learning to particular sub-groups in the population", and formal education "as the institutionalized chronologically graded and hierarchically structured educational system, spanning lower primary school and the upper reaches of the university." (p. 8). Based on the classic definition of NFE, Mfum-Mensah (2003) referred to four specific characteristics of NFE as follows: "It consists of organized structure; it has a set target of clients; it provides specific learning; it is carried on outside the framework of the established education system, and is not

intended for learners who are officially enrolled in school” (p. 663).

UNICEF (1993) defined NFE as “an approach to education...leading to greater flexibility in the organization and management of educational programs with a decentralized structure and less authoritarian management style. It also promotes adaptation of programs to needs and circumstances of learners, a learner-centred pedagogy, creative ways of mobilizing and using educational resources, community participation in planning and management of programs, and learning content and methods related to the life and environment of learners...” (p. 1). Taylor (2006) described NFE as “more present-time focused, responsive to localized needs, learner centred, less structured, and an assumed non-hierarchical relationship between the learner and facilitator” (p.292). With a belief that NFE has a huge role to play in maximizing social capital and lifelong learning outcomes for its residents, Shrestha et al. (2008) formed collaborative partnerships with the local government and various service providers in forming and assisting a learning network. In their study they analysed the achievements, hopes, and challenges of improving NFE delivery through networking. In their study, they reported the results of an investigation into how NFE is embedded within the activities of local human-service providers and identified the potential that these activities offer for lifelong learning outcomes.

In another study conducted by Khloudneva (2002) NFE programs are used to teach peace alternatively to formal schooling. Khloudneva analysed the program of the European Peace University (EPU) founded in 1988 that seeks major educational objectives of “Promoting understanding and respect for all peoples, their cultures, values and ways of life; Raising awareness not only of the rights but also of duties and responsibilities incumbent upon individuals, social groups and nations toward each other; Training and improving individual capabilities in peace-making and conflict resolution by non-violent means” (p. 44). Khloudneva came up with the conclusion that NFE programs could significantly contribute to the promotion of a culture of peace. Furthermore, Jones (1997) conducted a research with over two hundred women in eight small island countries in the South Pacific and Caribbean participating in NFE programs aiming at women's personal and economic empowerment. The programs increased women's awareness of their situation, improved their self-confidence, provided new skills and finally promoted a desire and willingness for change among them.

The importance of training programs in organizations is growing as more change and flexibility within an organization matter. The key element in the development and administration of these programs is their contribution to an effective learning within an organization. A great number of organizations are engaged with technical and cognitive learning, as these skills are conceived to contribute significantly to their strategic success in today's competitive world characterized by globalization, rapid technological change, workplace diversity, and constant environmental turbulence. However, there is a general consensus among scholars that these training programs are not sufficient; EI related competencies should also be improved.

Numerous studies argue that personal qualities such as self-awareness, self-motivation, flexibility, and integrity, as well as interpersonal skills such as negotiation, listening, empathy, conflict management, and collaboration are critical ingredients for a high performance workplace (Kram and Cherniss, 2001, p. 254). In EI training programs, course development, trainers as well as learning environment are among the factors that need to be considered painstakingly. In course development a thorough understanding of the organizational relationships, needs, perceptions, missions and vision is of an undeniable necessity in order to develop a more meaningful and tangible course abundant with real-life organizational based stories and examples. The role the trainers and their personal characteristics are of great importance either. In Mike Bagshaw's (2000) terms, a trainer should be aware of “... any particular vulnerability in the group (such as a recent bereavement, redundancy, demotion etc.)” (p. 63). Finally, a positive, safe and encouraging learning environment, free from sense of apprehension, and full of sense of confidentiality could guarantee, to a large extent, the effectiveness of the program. If participants perceive of the learning environment as unsafe, they would lack enough motivation to proceed. In Mike Bagshaw's (2000) terms, “The trainer should not simply set exercises and stand back, but move around groups, and keep aware of any changes in the emotional atmosphere.” (p. 64) Effective trainers are those who could be able to monitor the emotional atmosphere during the training process by paying attention to their own feelings as well as those of the participants (Cherniss and Goleman, 2001, p. 223).

In this study, which is also an attempt to develop employees' emotional intelligence nonformally, and as Goleman's (2001) model consisting of four clusters has been used as the basis of the work the following hypotheses are put forward:

H1. providing nonformal EI training programs for employees will affect their EI level, H2. providing nonformal EI training programs for employees will affect their self-awareness level, H3. providing nonformal EI training programs for employees will affect their self-management level, H4. providing nonformal EI training programs for employees will affect their social awareness level, H5. providing nonformal EI training programs for employees will affect their relationship management level.

## METHODOLOGY

The study underwent the following steps:

### Step one: Getting to know the organization

The nature of this research required that the researchers be fully familiar with the organization as a training course was supposed to be held inside the selected branches of the bank and EI researchers believe that training programs tailored according to organizational context are more effective (Clarke 2006). It took the researchers nine months to get to know the organization and its culture and this process included the following stages:

*Direct observation of employees' daily activities in some branches:* For this purpose, the researchers launched two activities: opening two accounts in two branches of this bank and doing some banking activities such as paying bills in about 20 branches located in different parts of the capital city. The two branches in which the researchers had opened bank accounts were being observed once a week. The other 20 branches were observed at least once during the research period. Thus, the employees' interactions with the customers came under the observers' careful scrutiny.

*Studying the bank's rules and regulations:* The researchers had the permission of the bank authorities to have access to the organizational rules and devoted some time to read them and learn about the dos and don'ts of the organization.

*Studying the bank's website:* The researchers could have access to the bank website in the [www.bankmellat.ir](http://www.bankmellat.ir) address and this enabled her to follow the bank's news and also other information provided on the website.

*Interviewing the bank's managers:* The researchers interviewed nine managers of the bank including the CEO, the training department manager and his vice president and six of the operational managers. These were semi-structured interviews in which the researchers asked the managers about the bank's training

policies, the branch employees' emotional needs and problems and also the characteristics of the training programs that had been effective in the bank.

*Interviewing the bank's employees:* The sample bank's main training programs are held in the form of workshops during which employees are given time to discuss the lessons and relate them to their own organization. The researchers took part in the discussions of 15 behavioral workshops held in the training department. These discussions provided some useful information regarding employees' emotional needs and also the specific emotional situations they might encounter in their daily work on which the training program should emphasize.

*Interviewing the bank's customers:* As it has been fully explained in another article submitted at the ninth HRD conference in France, the researchers went to 300 customers to ask them to fill out the SERVEPERF service quality questionnaire and also kept a record of their suggestions for improving the bank's service quality. This gave the researchers a realistic attitude towards the bank's performance and also the emotional needs the employees must fulfill.

### Step two: Sample selection

*Selecting sample branches:* As this study was supposed to be done experimentally the research sample could not be a big one. The bank consisted of 2000 branches divided in to four. The researchers chose the first area as the research would take one and a half years and the researchers were living in Tehran which was a part of the first area. The first area had 10 regions and the researchers chose the 7<sup>th</sup> region as it included a variety of branches from different degrees (the bank branches have five different degrees based on their turnover, the area they were situated in and also the number of their employees). 5 branches (each belonging to one level) were chosen as the treatment group.

### Step three: Assessing the primary situation (pretest)

*Measuring the sample employees' EI:* The treatment group consisted of five branches that had a total of 68 employees. Before starting the training program, the employees' EI was measured using a 360 degree ECI test.

### Step four: Designing the EI training program

Going through the following steps an eight session training program was designed. Each session would be 2 hours and the classes were held in the branches where all the members of each branch, from the servant to the branch

manager were all participating in the class. Two sessions were to be devoted to each cluster of EI (including self awareness, self management, social awareness and relationship management) with the whole program taking eight weeks to complete.

*Reviewing the EI literature review and EI training programs:* As Goleman's work deals more with the organizational applications of EI, his books and articles were regarded as the main text out of which the materials of different sessions were extracted.

*Considering employees' and customers' emotional needs:* Using information gained from the bank's managers, employees and customers, for each of the competencies of Goleman's model of EI several related stories and examples were prepared. These stories and examples had an eye on the emotional needs and emotional problems which were observed during the period that the researchers was getting to know the organization and also the result of the researchers' discussions with the bank's employees, managers and customers.

*Considering the bank's culture:* During the program-designing period, some of the EI materials and applications were tailored to the bank's culture (and also Iranian culture). For example calling customers' first names is something that would be pleasing for the customers and would strengthen the relationship between the employee and the customer but this is not something common in the bank's culture and would not rhyme with the norms.

*Considering the limitations:* The literature shows that longer training programs would be more effective ones but the bank authorities gave us only two and a half months for the training period and we had to design the program based on the limited time we were given.

#### **Step five: Implementing the EI training program nonformally**

The implementation of the EI program took eight weeks. Each of the five working days was devoted to each of the experiment branches. The EI trainers would go through the view points of the customers of each branch before the session and prepare relevant stories and examples for the competencies supposed to be taught that session. The ambiance of the classes was nonformal; all the training they had gone under before had been through formal sessions held in the conference rooms of the bank and this made the classes much different. Holding the sessions inside their branches, setting the chairs in a U shape, the

absence of video projections, electronic whiteboards, microphones and so forth made the ambiance of the class cosy and less formal. The classes started with a provoking relevant example and then the class members would participate in the discussion and would take active part in promoting the discussion. As widely shown in the history, Iranians are interested in story telling and as the prepared examples were from their every day work contexts, they were so interesting for them. The trainers would use stories to teach the acceptable behavior indirectly and the friendly environment would inspire them to come to the conclusions the trainers expected. Even the employees who didn't seem to like taking part in the classes turned into active participants after the second or the third session as they started to like the different climate of the class and also would realize that the classes meant to provide them with competencies which were helpful in both their work and family life. At the end of the classes a present was prepared for each of the employees and both the trainers and the trainees had a nice memory of the time they had spent together.

#### **Step six: Assessing the program (posttest)**

*Measuring the sample employees' EI again:* After the end of the eighth session, the ECI test was given to the trained employees.

#### **DATA ANALYSIS**

The total number of trained employees was 68 but only the data of 52 of them (44 males and 8 females) were used in analysis as the rest couldn't take part in both pretest and posttest sessions. For each employee two EI records were gained; one from the EI questionnaire filled out by herself and one from the questionnaires filled out by her colleagues. In order to summarize the employees EI results, the mean of the self and the other ratings were used in analysis.

**Analyzing the first hypothesis:** Descriptive statistics show that total EI of employees holds a mean of 3.332 before the training program and after the training program it has turned into 3.934 which show an increase in employees' EI level. In order to analyze the EI pretest and posttest results, the Pearson test was used and the results show that with 99% level of certainty and correlation of 0.453 there is a meaningful relationship between the EI pretest and post test results where the changes in EI level could be attributed to the EI training program. A paired sample t test was also done to see if the mean difference between the EI pretest and post-test results is meaningful or not. The results of the paired sample t test shows that with 99% level confidence and significance level of 0.00, the difference between EI pretest and posttest means

are meaningful and the EI program has changed employees EI level.

**Analyzing the second hypothesis:** Descriptive analysis shows that the self-awareness mean before the program was 3.8522 changing to 3.9768 after holding the EI training program. Applying the paired sample t test for the self-awareness cluster shows that with a significance level of 0.002 and 99% level of confidence there is a meaningful difference between self awareness means before and after the training program indicating that the employee's self-awareness level has meaningfully increased due to the held training program.

**Analyzing the third hypothesis:** The second cluster of EI is self-management; according to descriptive analysis it held a mean of 3.7646 before holding the training program and a mean of 3.8486 after it. This indicates an increase in the level of this cluster but in order to see if this difference is meaningful or not, a paired sample t test was applied; the results of the test shows that with a significance level of 0.016 and 99% level of confidence, there is a meaningful increase in employees' self-management level.

**Analyzing the fourth hypothesis:** Social awareness, the third cluster of EI had a mean of 3.9484 in the EI pretest and after holding the EI program it has gained a mean level of 4.0531 also indicating an increase. A paired sample t test was applied to see if the difference between the social awareness pretest and post test mean was meaningful or not. Results of the test show that with a confidence level of 99% and significance level of 0.004 there is a meaningful increase in the employees' social awareness level after holding the training program.

**Analyzing the fifth hypothesis:** The fourth cluster of EI is relationship management. Based on descriptive analysis in the EI pretest this cluster's mean was 3.5785 changing to 3.7692 after holding the EI training program for the branches. The results of the paired sample t test conducted for this cluster indicates that with a significance level of 0.00 and confidence level of 99%, there is a meaningful increase in the relationship management level. Green house test was used to see if there is a meaningful difference between males and females as far as EI clusters and the significance level of 0.794 shows that the test is not meaningful and there is no difference between males and females as far as EI clusters' development. In other words, gender has not affected EI clusters development level.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

EI competencies are important for today's employees and studies have shown its special position in service providing companies. These competencies, once learned, could help individuals improve the quality of their work life and personal life. Literature shows that there are still some discussions between EI theorists and researchers regarding suitable and practical ways for EI development. This experimental study used nonformal education techniques to develop the EI of employees' of five branches of a public bank and the results are promising. Data analysis shows that the eight-week EI training program has been a successful one and the branch members have shown increases in their EI levels. The researchers believe that one of the main reasons for the program's success was the uniqueness of its design process and also the quality of delivering materials in the sessions. The researchers' familiarity with the managers, employees and customers view points, needs, expectations and problems gave them a clear idea of the requirements of the program and also the suitable way for conducting it. The nonformal environment of the classes, preparing relevant examples and stories from their daily life experiences and giving them a chance to share their ideas made the program interesting for them. In both EI pretest and post test sessions the highest mean has been for the social awareness cluster which might be due to the great number of daily interactions the bank employees' have. The most increase has been for relationship management cluster, which means that the program has had the most effect on developing this set of competencies. The employees' gender has had no effect in the results indicating that in this study, there is no meaningful difference between males and females with regard to EI development. Beside the data gained statistically, employees themselves told the trainers that their families and coworkers had noticed some changes in their behavior and it shows the effectiveness of the learning process. It could be concluded that nonformal training is a suitable method for developing EI. Future research could repeat the same method in other organizations and also other cultures and give the method more credibility.

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