

Emotional Intelligence – The Key to a Thriving Workplace

“The greatest ability in business is to get along with others and influence their actions.”

John Hancock, the wealthiest man in the American colonies and the Governor of



Massachusetts, USA, had no idea that he was inadvertently alluding to ‘Emotional Intelligence’ when he expressed these views on how to run a business way back in the 18th century! The term first appeared in 1964, gaining popularity in the 1995 bestselling book “Emotional Intelligence” by psychologist and science journalist Daniel Goleman.

After my 39 years of service in the Indian Army, I realised that more than the patriotism and the indefatigable zeal to serve the motherland, it’s the endearing esprit-de-corps fostered and nurtured through the finest practice of EI which remains the biggest ‘battle-winning’ factor.

The fast-paced corporate world of today, too, is becoming acutely aware of the vital influence of emotional intelligence (EI) in achieving success and growth in a diverse, inclusive, virtual and cross-functional working environment. The ability to navigate human emotions—both one’s own and those of others—has emerged as a key determinant of a productive and harmonious work environment. As exemplified by the ‘men in uniform’, EI is the bedrock of effective leadership, teamwork, and job satisfaction, ultimately fostering an atmosphere where employees contribute willingly and wholeheartedly to their company’s growth. There are then lessons for the corporate to learn from the Armed Forces.

We shall discuss ahead as to why EI matters, how to develop it and how to harness it.

Why EI Matters in the Workplace

“When dealing with people, remember you are not dealing with creatures of logic, but with creatures of emotion.” - Dale Carnegie (How to Win Friends and Influence People, 1936)

EI, aka emotional quotient (EQ), is the ability to perceive, use, understand, manage, and handle emotions. High emotional intelligence includes emotional recognition of emotions of the self and others, using emotional information to guide thinking and behaviour, discerning between and labelling different feelings, and adjusting emotions to adapt to environments. It allows individuals to manage stress, communicate effectively, and make thoughtful decisions, even in high-pressure situations. Leaders who prioritize EI rely on self-awareness, empathy and clear communication to cultivate trust, inspire collaboration, and create workplaces that are psychologically safe. Successful teams today don’t just rely on skills; they thrive on improved communication, better conflict resolution and stronger bonds afforded by EI.

When team members understand and manage their emotions, collaboration soars, and success becomes inevitable. In essence, EI is not just a soft skill, it is a business imperative that drives engagement, innovation, and sustainable growth.

Lessons from the Indian Army: EI in High-Stakes Environments

During my stint in the Indian Army, I witnessed firsthand the transformative power of emotional intelligence in shaping strong, resilient teams. In high-stakes environments, where split-second decisions can mean the difference between success and failure, life and death, EI plays a critical role in fostering teamwork, morale, and mission success. Many a time, in life-endangering operations, it's the calmness of the leader and the remarkable rapport that he has nurtured with his men that won the day against brazen odds. This ability to balance authority with compassion ensures operational efficiency and builds unwavering trust within the ranks. No wonder the soldiers of the Indian Army are willing to take every bullet fired in their leader's direction on their chest and lay down their lives for "Naam – Namak – Nishaan".

These principles are equally applicable in the corporate world. Organizations that integrate EI into their leadership models foster positive, progressive and growth-oriented workplaces. When employees feel understood and valued, they are more likely to align their personal goals with organizational objectives, driving collective success.

The Impact of EI on Workplace Culture

Corporate workplaces today have become very complex with virtual, cross-functional, diverse and inclusive teams working unceasingly and mindlessly towards achieving company targets. This has bred a lot of inter and intra-team competition, often unhealthy, resulting in a clash of opinions and interests, conflicts, low engagement, frustration, and high rates of burnout and attrition.

This is where EI steps in. Here's how it helps create an ideal workplace.

1. Enhanced Team Collaboration. Such a workplace promotes active listening, constructive feedback, and mutual respect, leading to seamless teamwork, reduced interpersonal friction, and a culture where diverse perspectives are valued. Just as soldiers rely on each other in critical missions, employees in such workplaces trust and support one another to achieve common goals.

2. Increased Employee Engagement. Employees who experience emotional support at work develop a sense of belonging and loyalty. This emotional connection motivates them to go beyond their assigned responsibilities, contributing wholeheartedly to the company's progress. In the military, this sense of camaraderie and shared purpose is what drives soldiers to persevere in the toughest conditions.

3. Better Conflict Resolution. Leaders with strong EI address disagreements with empathy and fairness. They transform potential disputes into opportunities for growth, fostering a culture of collaboration and innovation. In the Army, resolving conflicts

swiftly and effectively is essential to maintaining unit cohesion and operational readiness.

4. Improved Mental Well-being. A workplace that values EI reduces stress and burnout, leading to happier, more productive employees. Just as military leaders prioritize the mental health of their troops, corporate leaders must ensure their teams feel supported and valued.

A leader's emotional intelligence sets the tone for the entire organization. In the military, leaders are trained to balance authority with compassion, ensuring that their teams remain motivated and cohesive even in adversity. The same principles apply in corporate settings, where emotionally intelligent leaders foster loyalty and inspire confidence among their teams. They understand that success is not just about meeting targets but about nurturing an environment where employees feel empowered to innovate, take ownership, and excel. Leaders need to inculcate three qualities to be effective at their workplaces, viz. self-awareness and regulation of emotions under pressure, empathy and active listening to understand employee concerns, and constructive communication, which aims at giving feedback that motivates rather than demoralizes.

Cultivating EI in the Workplace

Companies can integrate emotional intelligence into their culture through:

1. **Training Programs** in terms of EI workshops for employees and leaders to enhance their emotional and social skills.
2. **Open Communication Channels** to encourage transparent and empathetic dialogue to build trust.
3. **Recognition and Support Systems** which acknowledge contributions and provide emotional support to employees.
4. **Mindfulness and Stress Management Initiatives** – Implementing wellness programs to ensure employees maintain mental well-being.

EI as a Catalyst for Growth

Emotional intelligence is not just a soft skill—it is a strategic asset that drives organizational success. A workplace infused with EI creates engaged employees, fosters innovation, and builds a resilient, future-ready workforce. By embracing EI, businesses can create a strong foundation of trust, collaboration, and success—just as the military does in its mission to create steadfast, dependable teams under the most challenging conditions.



In a world where technological advancements are constantly reshaping industries, human emotions remain a company's greatest asset. As leaders, it is our responsibility

to harness the power of emotional intelligence to inspire our teams, drive progress, and achieve collective excellence.