Do emotionally intelligent leaders have more engaged staff?

A Guest Article by Paul Rein and Sonya Bendriem
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A key indicator of success

Employee engagement is a critical driver of business success. Companies with high levels of engagement exhibit lower employee turnover (40% lower), higher productivity (18% higher), and twice the annual net profit. With leaders responsible for driving and maintaining engagement within an organisation, levels of engagement represent a key indicator of leadership success.

Leaders have a significant impact on employee engagement, which can be measured through the relationships employees have, the role they do, and the reward they receive. It’s important to consider a leader’s personality traits and how these impact the drivers of engagement.

So, do emotionally intelligent leaders really have more engaged staff?

Exploring the relationship

A research study conducted by Dr Mark Slaski looked at the emotional intelligence of ten general managers from a successful golf and leisure company and the workplace engagement of 534 of their staff to explore this relationship.

An important point to note is that each of these general managers is responsible for autonomous business units, and as such they oversee a number of other managers, departments and staff. In this way, the behaviours associated with emotional intelligence (EI) of the general managers set the tone and define the culture for the whole business unit.

So the impact of their EI extends beyond their relationship with their immediate employees, but permeates throughout the unit as a whole.

Results show that leaders with higher emotion perception (the capacity to perceive and understand their own and others’ emotions) lead teams with a greater sense of voice and togetherness at work.

This suggests that if leaders are able to recognise subtle emotional reactions and adjust their style accordingly in order to motivate their team, they are able to facilitate a greater sense of trust and cooperation, resulting in employees being more likely to express their ideas and opinions and feel appreciated.
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15 facets of emotional intelligence measured by the Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire, developed by K.V. Petrides PhD at his London Psychometric Laboratory, UCL

When leaders are able to regulate their emotional responses (emotion regulation), employees report a greater clarity around their objectives and purpose at work. This implies that leaders who are able to remain calm and composed are likely to communicate more clearly when delegating goals and tasks, and trust their staff with more autonomy.

Leaders who see the positive, even in negative situations, and who view the future positively (higher optimism), have staff with a higher sense...
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of growth, challenge and enjoyment in their work. If leaders are more adept at seeing opportunities in most situations, including during times of stress, this may allow them to better understand how their team can best contribute to successful outcomes, based on identifying their individual strengths and then allocating appropriately challenging work and development opportunities.

© Workplace Buzz
7 factors of workplace engagement, developed by Dr Mark Slaski for Engage

Leaders who can better understand and manage their emotions and those of others have more engaged staff. Leaders should consider the potential to develop their awareness of their emotional intelligence, which would help to:

- enhance their interactions with their employees
- build trust and minimise conflict
- identify the needs and talents of their people
- delegate challenging work that plays to individuals’ strengths
- inspire their people to grow and develop in their role.
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When taken into consideration, what becomes apparent is that organisations need emotionally intelligent leaders who can recognise the impact that they have on their employees and use this in a positive way to boost levels of engagement, which in turn will lead to improved organisational outcomes.

The correlation between emotional intelligence levels of leaders and employee engagement

Finally, our research has also demonstrated a relationship between certain broader personality traits that are associated with successful leadership (and leadership potential) and the facets of emotional intelligence described above.

For example, optimism, which is associated with an increased sense of challenge and growth of work among employees, is also associated with higher levels
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of **adjustment** – the capacity to remain calm under pressure and emotionally stable.

Additionally, emotion perception, which relates to a greater sense of voice and togetherness, is also related to higher levels of **curiosity** – openness to new ideas, methods and approaches. This reinforces the importance of recognising that specific personality characteristics are related to successful leadership outcomes, including employee engagement.

![Image: 6 traits of leadership potential](image)

**6 traits of leadership potential, developed by Professor Adrian Furnham and Ian MacRae for the High Potential Trait Indicator (HPTI)**

While changing your personality traits can be very difficult to do, it is possible to modify the behaviours associated with achieving desired outcomes. Through developing self-awareness, leaders are able to identify areas for behavioural change, resulting in enhanced levels of employee engagement.

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*Thomas International*

If you would like more information on any of the points covered in this Guest Article, please contact TCii on **020 7099 2621**.