



Do trainers need emotional intelligence?

by Darko Markovic

Learning to ride a bicycle, practising new guitar chords, writing your very first project application, getting feedback on your first training of trainers... It seems that all significant learning is followed by significant emotions. Perhaps Claxton (1999) is right in saying that "learning itself is an intrinsically emotional business". Following on this thought one could say that if the job of a trainer is to help their learners to learn, a trainer needs to be able to recognise the emotional dimension of learning and work with it. (adapted from Mortiboys 2005)



If you have ever been "on the other side" of a non-formal learning activity, you certainly remember moments of managing different perspectives in a team of trainers, dealing with multiple expectations from the institutions and participants involved, giving plenary presentations when the beamer was collapsing, handling conflict in a group, realising that the planned programme had to be totally changed on the spot, etc. These situations are numerous, and the emotional spectrum connected to them is large. Certainly, training is an intrinsically emotional business, too. In order to cope with these challenges and to facilitate learning, I believe trainers need emotional intelligence. But what is it exactly?

The term itself was popularised by Daniel Goleman in his groundbreaking bestseller book in the mid-1990s. The concept is often defined as follows:

Emotional intelligence is the capacity for recognizing our own feelings and feelings of others, for motivating ourselves and for managing emotions well in ourselves and in our relationships. (Goleman, 1998)

In the following years, Goleman and his colleague Richard Boyatzis, further developed the concept and today it is seen as a set of competences grouped in the four competence areas, as presented in a four-quadrant model (see image). The model is a combination of personal competences (how we see and manage ourselves) and more social competences (how we sense and interact with other people). But let's see what is behind the competence headings.



(Boyatzis, Goleman, McKee 2002)

Self-awareness is the ability to accurately perceive your own emotions as they happen, to be able to give a realistic assessment of your own abilities and to maintain a well-grounded sense of self-confidence. It includes competences such as emotional self-awareness, accurate self-assessment and self-confidence.

Self-management is the ability to use awareness of your emotions to stay flexible and positively direct your behaviour. This also means managing your emotional reactions to all situations and people and having the ability to motivate yourself, take initiative, strive to improve and persevere in the face of setbacks and frustration. The competences in this cluster are emotional self-control, transparency, adaptability, flexibility, achievement, initiative and optimism.

Social awareness covers the ability to accurately pick up on emotions of other people and to "read" situations. It is about sensing what other people are feeling and being able to take their perspective using your capacity for empathy. The competences in this cluster are empathy, organisational awareness and service orientation.

Relationship management concerns the ability to use the awareness of one's own emotions and the emotions of others to manage interactions successfully, help others grow and handle challenging situations. The competences here include helping others to develop, inspirational leadership, change catalyst, influence, conflict management, teamwork and collaboration.

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When deployed, these competences help trainers create resonance with their learners and create a learning climate that helps learners become more open to learning, with an increased likelihood of learners being engaged, motivated, ready to take risks, positive in their approach to learning, ready to collaborate, creative and resilient (Mortiboys 2005). So, no matter how experienced and skilled we are as trainers, and how many tools and methods we have in our toolbox, the main tools in training are ourselves with our personal and social competences. The good news is that these competences can be learnt. Indeed, it is one of the greatest areas of lifelong personal and professional growth for trainers.



An emotionally intelligent trainer is able to:

- 1 recognise and respond to his or her own and participants' feelings, as they occur;
- 2 support a positive learning environment;
- 3 read the group mood accurately;
- 4 express flexibility and readiness to respond to changing needs;
- 5 manage relationships successfully;
- 6 give an accurate self-assessment of one's strengths and weaknesses;
- 7 maintain a well-grounded sense of confidence;
- 8 create a resonance with groups and teams easily.

In case you are wondering how to implement this development process, you may consider using the model above to assess yourself and see where your strengths and development needs are. Inviting colleagues to give you feedback on how they see you in these competence areas could be a source of important information as well. In addition, if you are wondering from which competence area you should start, remember that self-awareness is the key, since this aspect of emotional intelligence is the basis for the other ones. This is one of the reasons why pure training interventions in the relationship management competence area don't work if the level of self-awareness is low!

When thinking about enhancing your self-awareness as a trainer, you may consider the following three levels:

- a. awareness of your feelings at any moment in relation to training;
- b. awareness of your values and attitudes as a trainer;
- c. awareness of your behaviour as a trainer and how others see it.



An interesting exercise to start working on developing self-awareness is found below:

What's on your T-shirt?

Imagine yourself standing in front of your participants wearing a t-shirt. The t-shirt carries a message which tells the group what you are going to do with them. For example: I am going to show you how much I care, I will convert you, I am going to take you out of your comfort zone, I will save you, I would like to challenge you, I am going to impress you with my knowledge, I will make you laugh, etc.

- 1 Take a moment and think what your message(s) would be.
- 2 How do you think that your message(s) will make your learners feel?
- 3 How will that feeling affect how they relate to you?
- 4 How far is their likely response helpful to their learning?

Finally, being an emotionally intelligent and resonant trainer is not a static state, reached once in life. Due to chronic stress and burn-out, trainers can slip into dissonance and need to renew these capacities. As said above, in training the trainers themselves are the main tools and these tools need proper care and polishing from time to time.

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