



APPLYING EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE TO PROJECT MANAGEMENT

Improved Decision Making

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The focus of this article is the application of emotional intelligence in the decision making process.

Emotional reasoning supports us in the decision making process as better decisions are made when we consider not only the hard data presented to us but also information contained in our own emotions and the emotions of others.

Ask yourself: Have you ever decided not to act or engage because 'something just didn't feel right'? Would you ask your manager for more project resources when he or she is having a 'bad day'?

Research shows that those who take their own and others peoples' feelings into account when planning and decision making typically make more informed, lateral and creative decisions. Further to this, research also shows that demonstrating emotional reasoning to others typically creates greater buy-in into decisions from team members and key stakeholders.

Emotions just like facts, figures and data (external input) are a form of information. It is worth noting the work of Neuroscientist Antonio Damasio who studied people who had received brain injuries that had had one specific effect: to damage that part of the brain where emotions are generated. In all other respects they seemed normal - they just lost the ability to feel emotions. The interesting thing he found was that their ability to make decisions was seriously impaired. They could logically describe what they should be doing, in practice they found it very difficult to make decisions about where to live, what to eat, etc. Many decisions have pros and cons on both sides. Shall I have the fish or the beef? With no rational way to decide, they were unable to make the decision.

Poor decisions can be made when you are experiencing strong negative emotions – anxiety, anger, frustration, fear etc. At the same time, we can also make poor decisions when in a strong positive mood as we may underestimate the risk of negative events. We may overlook data, key information, fail to consider contingency and even overlook what others may be feeling about the matter.

The key is to use emotions as another input to improved decision making. It is about becoming aware of what we are feeling at a moment in time. In becoming more self aware of our emotions we can look beyond what we are feeling to the underlying cause. This will allow us to assess the decision considering our emotions and other issues from a more objective viewpoint. Like a good detective, we have to keep asking questions to see the emotional components and get down to the real facts.

In addition to our own feelings, emotional reasoning considers also the feelings of others – not just what they are saying, but also what they are feeling – be it the team or key stakeholders. In addition to what are they feeling, what is their position and why. Here we need to bring in the art of active listening. Listen to the words but also the meaning behind the words. Understanding the level of enthusiasm and commitment is an essential aspect in understanding emotions.

In summary, to make better decisions, in addition to the numbers, pay attention to the emotions.

Acknowledged Sources: Mersino, A – Emotional Intelligence for Project Managers and Lynn, Adele B; The EQ Difference

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