

A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH TO EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE: A THEORY IN RELATION TO ONLINE LEARNING

MICHAEL A. ALTAMIRANO

Research Scholar, Monroe College, New York, USA

ABSTRACT

This study examines how online learning in higher education has become a popular alternative to traditional education. It first gained popularity with working adults, but younger students are now capitalizing on this educational alternative, particularly in poorer urban areas, where the path to higher education includes working to sustain one self. The challenge for institutions of higher learning is to collaborate with instructors who not only technically qualified, but can also emotionally connect with their students using a medium that can be impersonal due to the technical and autonomous nature of governing one's own work. This paper proposes six values-based characteristics of the emotionally intelligent professor, which would assist in personalizing teaching models and connecting with students on a personal level to better motivate online students. These characteristics are authentic leadership, servant leadership, transformational leadership, cultural/multicultural leadership, responsiveness, and patience.

KEYWORDS: Emotional Intelligence, Online Learning, Authentic Leadership, Servant Leadership, Transformational Leadership, Cultural/Multicultural Leadership, Responsiveness, Patience

INTRODUCTION

Effective leaders make emotional connections, which resonate with others as opposed to simply explaining leadership connections through ones intellect and work experience (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002). Emotional intelligence (EI) plays a large role in higher education in relation to student development. Studies confirm that emotional intelligence is an important factor in higher education leadership. For colleges, it begins with understanding the needs of its constituents (Parrish, 2015). Many in higher education suggest EI education should be encouraged in higher learning, especially with the freshman population (Gliebe, 2012).

In business, belief in the organization culture is one factor related to organizational success. Higher learning is a business and often those involved do not see it as a business. It is critical for the staff and faculty of colleges to believe in the mission and culture of the organization. This belief promotes structural stability when culture is communicated within the organization and to external stakeholders (Schein, 2010). All involved in the organization often reflect a genuine buy-in of organizational values in the quality of outcomes. The in-depth engagement by most employees of a college promotes an environment of empathy (Argabright, King, Cochran, & Chen, 2013). Through observation, the researcher has witnessed staff and faculty function beyond their normal responsibilities in order to better service the students within an online capacity. Doing so has resulted in online students to over-achieve and motivation by their commitment to success. The latter has also been observed where employees of a college display little or no emotional intelligence thus creating an environment of poor student motivation.

The idea of emotional intelligence does not come naturally for all people, let alone educators. One study conducted in 2014 found that schools that implemented an EI training module for their instructors saw an increase in emotional intelligence and empathetic concern for students from the beginning of the school year to the end (Hen & Sharabi-Nov, 2014). The same study suggests an increase in student performance because of more engagement by instructors. A dissertation presented to Regents, University supports this suggestion. The author concludes that emotional intelligence has an impact on organizational citizenship behavior (Solan, 2008). All studies on emotional intelligence support these ideas. EI is relevant to academic leadership in higher education because it affects student success. Emotional intelligence traits relate to empathy, inspiring, and guiding others. Effective academic leaders that responsibly manage their own education and professional development were most effective in applying EI traits. (Parrish, 2015)

An evolving aspect of higher education is online learning, creating a correlation between emotional intelligence and online learning. There is very little research on this connection. One study investigates "the relationship between students' emotional intelligence, social bond, and their interactions in an online learning environment" (Han & Johnson, 2012). The research for this study focused on online masters programs. The results showed an inability for students to measure empathy related to text and audio messages primarily because of an inability to perceive emotion through facial expression (2012). Additionally, other research suggests that many students experience an inability to perceive emotion, intelligence through an online forum because of the lack of peer bonding (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Visionary leadership must look to the future for the sake of the student involvement. Due to the rise in technology, academic institutions are looking at new ways of learning. For example, Abik, Ajhoun, and Ensias (2012) developed the idea of P-Learning or Pervasive Learning to address the all-around, social and independent, asynchronous and synchronous learning that comes with the technological age. The aim of these researchers was to address the idea that old pedagogy methods, based on constructivist and cognitive ideas may be outdated. They ask the following questions

"What alliance is there between pedagogy and technology? Are we in need of a new pedagogical approach in the new learning environment "P-Learning? What are the new pedagogical challenges to resolve?" (Abi"ok, Ajhoun, & Ensias, 2012)

The focus of such questions is to prescribe different pedagogical methods and implementations that fit with new forms of technology, such as E learning and P-learning. "The larger idea of P-learning is to bring in the social process that connects learners to communities of devices, people, and situations in a transparent and independent manner," thereby increasing the quality of learning (Abik, Ajhoun, & Ensias, 2012, p. 225).

AbuSeileek and Qatawneh's (2013, p. 181) study explored "the effects of synchronous and asynchronous computer-mediated communication (CMC)". Their research studied the strategies to master English as a Foreign Language while using the computer as the primary tool. Two randomly assigned groups (synchronous and asynchronous learners) were used. They found that the asynchronous group performed the best, regarding discourse functions related to the questions. However, the kinds of questions and strategies supported by the CMC mode rely on short answers that are rich and clear (AbuSeileek & Qatawneh, 2013).

Ahmad and Bokhari (2013) research highlighted "the combine effect of synchronous as well as asynchronous in E-learning environment" (p. 546). They argue that both types of learning are important, it simply depends on the scenario. Furthermore, they maintain that not one of them can fulfill the entire learning requirement of an individual. They defined the difference between the two as:

"Synchronous training is done in real-time with a live instructor facilitating the training. Everyone logs in at a set time and can communicate directly with the instructor and with each other. It lasts for a set amount of time - from a single session to several weeks, months or even years. Asynchronous is E learning in the most traditional sense of the word. It involves self-paced learning, CD-ROM-based, Network-based, Intranet-based or Internet-based. It may include access to instructors through online bulletin boards, on-line discussion groups, and e-mail." (Ahmad and Bokhari, 2013, p. 546)

Akarasriworn and Heng-Yu (2013) examined information retention and attitudes of 28 graduate students concerning online synchronous video conferencing in collaborative learning environments. They found that online video conferencing combined with small-group discussions had a significant effect on the development of student knowledge (Akarasriworn and Heng-Yu, 2013).

Eastern and Eisenmann's (2011) studied high school students and their experiences and preferences regarding two dissimilar discussion formats for deliberation in adjoined classroom settings: "face-to-face and synchronous, computer-mediated communication (CMC)". They analyzed 70 participants through questionnaires and interviews. They suggest an advantage computer-aided discussion format because of its reciprocal nature that involves students and instructors and the management of classroom interaction. It was noted that students that are usually silent in the classroom welcomed the introduction of CMC, whereas the more active students showed no preference.

To address the rapid pace of technology Bai &Smith (2010) explore and develop best teaching Praxis for E-learning. Their mission was to:

"Develop scalable, shareable, and sustainable e-learning modules as textbook chapters that can be distributed platform independently. The resulting e-learning, building blocks can automate the assessment processes, provide just in-time feedback, and adjust the teaching material dynamically based on each student's strengths and weaknesses." (Bai, Smith, p. 13)

In research conducted by Barbour, McLaren, and Zhang (2012), they look at virtual schooling for K-12 that is beneficial and challenging. The students responded well to both the synchronous and asynchronous learning platforms and even raised awareness on the absence of on-task behavior throughout the scheduled asynchronous classes (p. 235).

Barbour (2011) studied the learning process of a virtual school in Canada and the kind of support and assistance often used by students learning in a virtual online learning environment. He interviewed and observed students and teachers as they took part in virtual school courses. It was found that although students were allotted time to do their online studies, they did not. Instead, they would use the time for other tasks and when it came to help needed, they would simply ask the other classmates instead of turning on the computer; for this study, it was determined that the synchronous online learning was more productive.

Researchers continue to study online learning tools. Blackmon (2012) studied and investigated student reaction toward discussion board and chat sessions used in online learning. Chat boards and online discussion boards are the new normal of open forum sharing with online courses. It replaced the face-to-face method. He found that online discussion boards are particularly useful for connections and communication of online courses. Bender contributes:

"In a networked world that does not seem to be wary of Web 2.0's ubiquitous influence in our lives, new opportunities and options for students to pursue formal and informal learning experiences continue to emerge. Arising in tandem is a veritable cacophony of books, articles, practitioner blogs, web-based special interest group sites, instant message and RRS feeds, and even White papers from software companies trying to secure market shares—many with the intent to improve practice and ease the discomfort of practitioners, who are new to the field of online instruction." (Kraglund-Gauthier, 2014, p. 1)

The transition from face-to-face learning to E-learning can be challenging, especially with the adjustment to new pedagogies. Fasso (2013) accounts the case of a university transitioning to an online learning platform in the context of the first year, focusing on the pedagogy of the online virtual setting. Fasso points out that a design to facilitate online learning for first year students should be a consideration by staff and faculty.

Bouhnik and Carmi (2012) point out that although it has been two decades since some form of online learning was offered at the college level, many students take courses without sufficient computer training. They note:

"This kind of environment still poses meaningful challenges for students and teachers that take an active part in E-learning courses. Today it is quite clear that taking part in online courses requires new technological, behavioral, and thinking skills, to best handle and even successfully finish the course. Although technological skills are a must for taking part in an online course, a majority of students participating in these kinds of courses have arrived thus far without suitable prior computer experience or background, internetworking skills, and internet based study skills." (Bouhnik & Carmi, 2012, p. 201)

Their study examines the effects of teaching and pedagogy of online learning, and the change of intellectual and thinking disposition required to approach this form of learning. What they found was that online promotes a change in thinking patterns. Asynchronous and synchronous learning in the E-learning environment fosters the independence and social skills we want to see in the student's intellectual and behavioral development.

De Leon and Pena (2010) interviewed and observed sixty-six participant teachers in their use of using E-learning as a transformative learning tool. Although the initial experience was difficult for some teachers, their comfort levels improved after a few tutorials. The researchers maintain, "Transformational learning requires real experiences and reflection" (p. 141). These basic components can empower pre-service teachers involved in learning new technologies (De Leon & Pena, 2010). Massoud, Iqbal, and Stockley (2011) contribute:

"A new era of technology is bringing promising prospects, accompanied by numerous new challenges for educators. Traditional methods, such as face-to-face teaching, are experiencing substantial transformations by utilizing these innovative technologies, many of which are instructional tools. To understand the complimentary opportunities and challenges, it will be beneficial to understand the new tools primarily based on computers, multimedia, the internet and online interactive techniques. Leading contemporary solutions can be classified firstly as e-learning, an asynchronous technique using only innovative technologies without a real class for teaching, and secondly as blended learning, employing a mixture of

synchronous and asynchronous techniques by means of both face-to-face, online, and offline methods for instruction."(Massoud, Iqbal, & Stockley, 2011, p. 1)

Their paper reviews different stages of new technological tools in the online learning environment and its relationship to contemporary learning solutions. They find that synchronous and asynchronous learning methods both have strengths and limitations. However, used together they form the foundation of transformative online learning. They encourage students and teachers to brainstorm further with new technologies and take advantage of diverse ways to enhance the educational experience.

The central question of whether pedagogy, andragogy, or knowledge production can transform education is answered to the extent it can become more than just academic learning and can receive support from real life experience, i.e. made more socially relevant (Waghid, 2008). Transformation requires a reflexive Praxis that integrates a community. If e-learning incorporates synchronous and asynchronous learning components, transformation has a better chance of succeeding.

Another study recounts how determining optimal learning strategies and implementing best practices will often enhance the students' online learning experience. (Bouroumi& Fajr, 2014, p. 66). This is a challenge for not only instructive, but also learning intuitions and the students they serve. This is where training systems aid to enhance student performance. The Bouroumi and Fajr's study used an online version of a one-semester course, which was designed for two groups of master students at Mohammedia-Casablanca University. Although online learning was new for most of the students, many responded and performed better than they had done in traditional on-site courses.

Emotional Intelligence and Online Learning

It seems unrealistic to discuss a correlation between emotional intelligence and technology. We are not in a time where artificial intelligence exists, nor are we in a time when we can reason with a computer. Therefore, the challenge for instructors and students is the development and nurturing of relationships while using an online learning mechanism. Traditionally, online instructors post supporting material, assignments, and grade assignments every week while providing feedback. There are different types of software for intuitions to use. The software is user friendly for instructors as well as students and easy to apply lesson plans and submit assignments.

Online learning is not traditional and has only recently grown in popularity within the last ten years. Like traditional programs, not every student succeeds using this platform. Students that successfully navigate through distance learning programs tend to be the organized type who needs very little supervision or motivation to get their work done (Gros& Lopez, 2016). The online learning culture can be challenging for many because not everyone is organized or self-motivated. , online learning technology continues to evolve into a more learning friendly environment. Learning technology includes tools such as videos, blogs, discussion forum, and collaborative meeting sessions for professors and students to meet and discuss topics, virtually.

A challenge for online instructors is emotionally connecting with students using a technology-based forum. The emotionally intelligent instructor charged with teaching online is responsible for espousing leadership. Values such as authentic leadership, servant leadership, transformational leadership, cultural/multicultural leadership, responsiveness, and patience.

Authentic Leadership

A simple definition of an authentic leader is someone who conducts his or her self in the same manner outside of work, as they do when they are leading others within the organization (Kruse, 2013). Authentic leaders are genuine and lead from the heart. Authentic leaders drive themselves by principles and values. They are self-aware and genuine to themselves and others (George, Sims, McLean, & Mayer, 2007).

Authentic leadership is important for online learning because students need to trust and believe in the faculty and administration so they can achieve their dreams of graduating. A published research study in 2014 suggests that students who were aware of instructor's community outreach involvement were more likely to trust them and more likely to view them as educational mentors (Purcell, 2014). Since online students do not benefit from a live meeting with the instructor, the instructor should post weekly announcements. A brief bio of the instructor should be included in the first announcement of the semester. It is important for the instructor to share his accomplishments and community outreach endeavors in an attempt to connect and start a relationship with his students. Another study suggests that administrators are responsible for teaching the principle of authentic leadership to faculty (Mullen, 2010). Bradley Grubb concluded that there is a direct connection between authentic leadership and cultural intelligence, suggesting instructors would be more motivated to work with students of multicultural backgrounds if they had a high-level of cultural intelligence (2014).

According to experts like notes, there is not enough research on authentic leadership and its moral aspect is never clearly defined (Northouse, 2013). Others believe that being authentic is not necessarily a good thing. For example, if a leader is rude, is it okay to be rude to others outside of work? When others charge leaders to be their best self, it usually creates resistance among constituents because few want to admit their flaws (Gruenfeld & Zander, 2011). This could be a challenge for instructors as students look to them to have the right answers at all times.

Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership has been heavily researched in recent decades (Judge & Piccolo, 2004) Kouzes and Posner describe it as, "the kind of leadership that gets people to infuse their energy into strategies" (2007, p. 123). Transformational leadership applies to every aspect of a community, although it is usually associated with business. Apart from business, transformational leadership occurs among many segments of society, including women, minorities, and in educational institutions.

In urban areas, online students are mostly Black and Hispanic backgrounds and most of these are women. While women and minorities share equal rights, there is still a gap when it comes to leadership roles in society. Women in the workplace benefit from the understanding of transformational leadership, as they obtain more education and training in order to level the professional playing field in an effort to eliminate disparate treatment in the workplace (Chin, 2011). Other studies indicate women transform through the support of each other as they strive for equal treatment and opportunity (Collay & Cooper, 2008). Women and minorities are capable of possessing the same leadership traits as others that are successful, thus having the capability of being effective leaders (White & Smith, 2012). Education then becomes a means of socially progressing, while obtaining leadership skills.

Institutions of higher learning in inner-city areas have the potential to be leaders in educating the principles of transformational leadership, because of its service to a high population of women and minorities. Educators in urban

communities have an opportunity to inspire a community of ethnic students. Unfortunately, this is contrary to what some research has shown. Research shows that most colleges in urban communities are not doing enough to develop leaders and critical thinkers (Andersen, 2014). While the phenomenon of underrepresentation of minority students prevail (Michael-Chadwell, 2011), educators have an opportunity to embrace the role of serving this segment of the urban community. Not all colleges in urban areas fail at this, some colleges focus on the development of minority leaders. It is a testament of its commitment to transformational leadership. They are able to link theory into practice (Sherman, 2005).

Transformational leaders are broadly known for their visionary outlook and for inspiring others. However, they tend to struggle on a micro-level with small details and organization (Kokemuller, 2015). Because of this, transformational leaders will often surround themselves with people that are more apt to follow detail and display a high level of organization. This collaborative involvement with other skilled individuals allows them to lead in a more deliberate manner that maintains focus in a transactional way and follows the vision of the transformational leader because any oversight can potentially disrupt an effective long-term vision for an organization (Arrington, 2010). Thus, it is easy for these leaders lose focus due to disorganization. Effective online educators should work diligently at being organized, posting work, and grading in a timely manner. Students tend to appreciate this type of responsiveness and they often respond in kind.

Cultural/Multicultural Leadership

Culture is a phenomenon grounded in the present tense (Dunn, Dastoor, & Sims, 2012). According to Robbins and Judge, culture is a result of our interaction with others and our own behavior (2013). Organizational culture, simply defined, is the behavior of people within an organization and the means in which they approach their actions (Bartlett & Ghoshal, 2002). Notes, broadly defines leadership as the ability to influence another's behavior (2013). Culture and leadership relate well to organizational cultures and micro-cultures. Schein explains that culture is created by leaders and is manipulated through their model of behavior (2010, p. 3). Barter and Russel state that culture surrounds everything, therefore, it is important to understand it in order to master it (Barter & Russell, 2014).

Juana Bordas defines multicultural leadership "as an inclusive approach and philosophy that incorporates the influences, practices, and values of diverse cultures in a respectful and productive manner" (2007). An article published in the *Harvard Business Review* describes Multicultural leadership as involving a deep "immersion within different cultures to understand their values and specific context" (Soo, 2012). Johnson suggests that organization should be more aware of multiculturalism and develop policy to meet employee needs based on diversity and to support the inclusion (2014).

Culture lies below the surface of an organization. Schein argues that culture is a victim of interpretation throughout history. Therefore, Schein suggests that as a concept, culture can be very abstract. The author additionally argues that, more complex, anthropological models should replace the superficial models of culture (Schein, 2010, p. 14). These anthropological models are in the following list:

- Observed behavioral regularities when people interact
- Group norms - Standards and values that evolve within working groups
- Espoused values – Announced principles and values
- Formal philosophy – Broad policies and ideological principles that guide a group's action

- Rules of the game – Implicit, unwritten rules of the game
- Climate – Feeling conveyed by physical layout, and the way members interact with each other, customers, or outsiders
- Embedded skills – Special competencies handed down from generation to generation
- Habits of thinking, mental models, and/or linguistic paradigms
- Shared meanings – Emergent understandings created by group members for interaction
- “Root metaphors” or integrating symbols – How groups characterize themselves through evolution
- Formal ritual and celebrations (2010)

"This concept of culture implies structural stability, depth, breadth, and patterning and integration" (Schein, 2010). Studies have shown a direct correlation between culture and job satisfaction among educators (Imran, Arif, Cheema, & Azeem, 2014). Job satisfaction is important to productivity and the ethical behavior of people in organizations (Robbins & Judge, 2013). For institutions of higher learning, culture links directly to ethical conduct. Educational institutions must create a culture of virtue in order act out and promote sound ethical behavior (Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

RESPONSIVENESS

Responsiveness is simply how quickly an organization, or a person, reacts to something (Daft, 2007). Stein and Book refer to this as being aware of your social environment (2011). Distance learning is a result of higher education being responsive to the demands of the adult learner, who cannot attend a college traditionally. Technology, in general, is responsive to culture and trends (Doyle, 2015).

On a micro level, responsiveness can be of critical value when displaying emotional intelligence. For example, the idea of responding to emails within 24 hours seems like a reasonable turnaround time for communication. If a student has an emergency or needs a faster response, they should have the instructor's phone number and should be encouraged to call in case of an emergency. Texting is a recent phenomenon of communication. Communicators send and receive messages instantaneously through their smart phones. Many in education and in business are discouraged to use this method of communication, but it is part of the natural evolution of technology and if students are comfortable communicating in this manner, then they should be encouraged to communicate this way. Texting relates to the idea and need for obtaining immediate information. Most people now receive instant news feeds through various forms of social media such as Twitter, Face book, Instagram, and many other forums (Omar, 2014).

Instructors can also practice responding by posting information on time and grading work, within seven days of deadlines. When grading assignments, instructors should provide detailed feedback that encourages the students by acknowledging what they do well and providing constructive criticism when the situation warrants it. People respond positively to attention and acknowledgement from others, resulting in increased motivation. This applies to Maslow's *Hierarchy of Human Needs*, which demonstrates to us that all people have *esteem needs* (McLeod, 2007). Students, especially students of under-represented segments of society, need to know they matter and they are important.

PATIENCE

Conflict resolution teaches us a concept called the ABCDE approach to understanding situations, which lead to mismanaging stress brought on by irrational thought (Berg & Karlsen, 2013). Part of exercising patience is managing stress and trying to eliminate these conditions from daily routines. Stress occurs easily in every college course at one point or another. Distance learning is a segment of higher education that requires the understanding of stress management at all levels, students, faculty, and administration. Online learning is full of deadlines and often times, miscommunication. A study published in the Journal of Management Education suggests that institutions of higher learning should include lessons in emotion regulation and self-leadership in introductory management courses, in order to aid the management student's ability to cope with stress. The logic being that management students would be better able to cope with the stress of their imminent careers (Houghton, Wu, Godwin, Neck, & Manz, 2012). While that study was limited to business schools, it may be a good idea for academic majors to incorporate educating students in stress management.

There are certain best practices an online instructor can do to exercise patience and reduce anxiety among students. Such as keeping an up-to-date and transparent online Grade book, this allows students to see their progress in the class, eliminating the mystery of "how am I doing?" To be strict about assignment deadlines, but also give grace to students depending on the situation, but this should be limited to a case-by-case basis. Lastly, it is important to understand that not every student is on the same level of competence. An online instructor must be a master of communicating detailed feedback to students who need it most but the instructor must be careful to offer challenging lessons that satisfy the needs of the more advanced students.

CONCLUSIONS

Online learning has now become a viable form of obtaining an education. Many working students use this medium to obtain a degree and some use it to enrich their lives or careers. Educationally qualified instructors manage the information students receive to navigate these courses. Emotional intelligence is not a competence required to teach online. If it is not a required skill, then there will always be varying levels of emotionally intelligent instructors.

In closing, all institutions that have an online learning component should include emotional intelligence as part of the dialogue when interviewing and hiring instructors. Additionally, institutions should explore emotional intelligence training and/or seminars that introduce EI and explain its importance in leadership and education. The idea of *connecting* almost seems rhetorical when discussing online education because many see it as schools connecting to students through technology, but let us not forget the importance of connecting to the student's as well as the mind.

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