

Optimizing Emotional Intelligence in Management Education: A Role for Vedic Sciences

He who know others is wise, he who knows himself is enlightened – Laotse

Rashmi M Shetkar*
Alex Hankey**

Abstract

Background: Emotional Intelligence is an important core competency of contemporary management science, enhancing and refining which is much needed in today's competitive corporate environment. Traditional knowledge provides a new perspective on how to achieve this. Here, we present a deeper understanding of conscious experience as a basis for emotional intelligence, derived from Vedic sciences, together with means for its application.

Methods: We analyse emotional intelligence by elucidating both eastern and western conceptions of self and their neuroscientific basis, in order to show that traditional methods have a vitally important, scientific role to play in modern management education.

Results: the neuroscientific perspective on autobiographical self provides key inputs for understanding individual emotional and cognitive states. Vedanta regards the Self as the ground for all experience and action, while Yoga provides means to free a person from the limitations of the autobiographical self. It provides scientifically validated techniques such as deep relaxation and focussed attention training to refine a manager's emotional intelligence.

Discussion & Conclusions: Focused Attention Meditation, and other similar systematic meditation techniques described in Yoga Sutras and Bhagavad-Gita, should now be integrated into management education, thus bringing much needed balance of mind, equanimity and goodwill to create institutional excellence.

Keywords: Business, Emotional Intelligence, Management, Self, Yoga

Introduction

To an increasing extent since the millennium, modern management practices have been focusing on the subjective well-being of individuals and corporations. Means of decreasing and, if necessary, defusing, emotional conflicts in the workplace are seen as increasingly important. To this end, the ability to handle human emotions in a wise and insightful manner has come to be regarded as of fundamental value, and worthy of training and development. The basic concept of Emotional Intelligence was developed by Salovey and Meyer¹, based on earlier work by Bar-On²; later it was popularized by Harvard's Daniel Goleman³. Since that time, emotional competence has come to be regarded as an important core competency in management science.

Despite the concept's popularity, there is still an enormous need for emotional intelligence training

throughout the sector. Certain medical problems including lower back pain, Primary Care's No. 1 reporting condition⁴, are mostly ascribed to deflating attitudes of the patient's boss at work. Enhancing the application of emotional intelligence, and refining its use and implementation⁵ is much needed in the competitive environment of today's corporate sector. What is needed is deeper understanding of the human condition, and inspiring leadership based on charisma, not bullying by managers frustrated by failure to achieve promotion.

History contains many examples of successful personalities, who were famous for their balance of mind, empathy and personal consideration. In ancient Greece, self-knowledge and understanding were placed at the highest level. Plato's dialogues contain numerous examples of Socrates' emphasis on the importance of seeing life in a wider context⁶

*Assistant Professor, Doctoral Fellow - Neuroscientist at Svyasa University, Bangalore

**Professor, Svyasa University, Bangalore

and using that perspective to make wiser and more considerate choices in personal decisions and personal relationships. The phrase 'Know Thyself' was inscribed in the forecourt of the Greece's most famous temple, the Temple of Apollo at Delphi, home of the Delphic Oracle, internationally consulted by the great and good from far and wide. As in the case of China's Laotse (see initial quotation), Greek philosophers were fully aware that knowing oneself was an essential pre-requisite for all wisdom. In his personal teachings, Socrates emphasized that finding oneself – a path of personal growth and development – is a major priority of life⁶. According to Shear⁷, Socrates' recommended method, the 'Dialectic', contains transcendental elements, making it in some sense equivalent to self-transcending systems of meditation⁸.

The ancient Vedic wisdom of India is replete with knowledge of how to achieve this, and provides a new perspective on the whole field. Central to Vedic wisdom is the concept of '*Dharma*'^{9,10}, the means of maintaining life of the individual (*swa-dharma*¹¹) and society (*dharma*) in harmony with the Laws of Nature.¹² When individual interests coincide with those of the group there is harmony, societies prosper. Altruism can clearly be seen operating in such societies. Maintaining harmony in the workplace is a precise example of this concept. In light of this, insights provided by Vedic knowledge¹³ assume greater significance, as do its methods such as meditation^{12,14} (*Dhyana*).

Studies have shown that methods derived from Yoga can increase development of Emotional Competence and Emotional Intelligence^{15,16}. In particular, the Stress Management for Excessive Tension (SMET) program¹⁷ has been found particularly effective¹⁸, as has the Transcendental Meditation Program¹⁹. In order to understand these findings more deeply, we here present a new model of conscious experience²⁰ as a means for understanding the biophysical basis for emotional intelligence, derived from Vedic sciences, together with means for its application.

Methods

Emotional intelligence is traditionally said to develop as a result of increasing ability to relate to one's own emotions and those of others in a detached way that

gives a person the ability not to react to outbursts²⁰, but rather to resolve problems, and achieve positive results despite the emotional challenges presented. This becomes easier when a person gains deeper understanding of the ego or 'small self', and accepts that it is based in a higher 'Self', which is a source of peace and stability, and which traditional methods can enable them to access. The nature of the 'Self' is that it is always present, but is not usually accessed. This is due to mind's preoccupation with circumstances, rather than resting in the present moment, and being a witness to activity, and not over-involved in it. The function of the Self is to know itself directly without intermediary, and to provide the grounds for self-knowledge under all circumstances. This requires the Self to be represented by an information loop²⁰ in a state of perfect self-observation. This possibility has been shown to imply a new kind of information at the basis of subjective experience. The new form of information has two aspects, the first an 'information vector', $\langle \text{=====} \rangle$, and the second an information loop, \mathbf{O} , the direct product of which form an 'information loop vector', $\langle \text{=====} \mathbf{O} \rangle$.

Interestingly a similar conclusion was drawn from the neurophysiology of attention, classic results in which state that there are two main modes of attention: a 'Vector Attention' (Flow) mode, and Matrix Attention (Non-Flow) mode²¹. In the Vedic literature, these two modes can be equated with Chit-Nadi (Vector Attention) and Chit-Sagara (Matrix Attention)*¹, the first with a direction (arrow) and the second without a direction i.e. no directed arrow but a loop. The Vedic literature describes this in the following way, "A mind where all desires enter without creating any disturbance, as river waters enter the full ocean without creating a disturbance, attains peace"⁹. i.e. for the mind that has attained peace, there is no pressing outward direction of awareness i.e. attention; it has the power to rest within its own level of contentment i.e. in a self-referral, loop state. When in such loop states, it is easier for mind to connect to mind, in the sense of heart connecting to heart. Connections of this kind are all 'Yoga', they are based on higher faculties of understanding, and represent the highest form of coherence between two individuals.

*¹ Dr Vinod Deshmukh, private communication.

If we consider emotional intelligence from this perspective^{16,18} it is clear that developing the capacity for the Chit-Sagara style of attention should develop the capacity for emotional intelligence. The witness capacity is developed by allowing the mind to stay at rest within itself, so that, having no object of experience, it gains access to a sense of unboundness, ocean-like in space and timeless within time (*Mahakala*). Eventually this sense of boundless infinity, which comes in the state of the pure loop with zero length arrow, <O, representing experience with zero information content, is equated with the higher 'Self', beyond the mere ego 'self', or Core Self (CS) of modern commentators on 'self'^{22,23}.

The above shows that the western conception of self is far simpler than the eastern. The west equates 'self' to our sense of individuality, which gets dressed up in a garb of character types and specific personality traits, based on innate tendencies and life-experiences. These make the 'autobiographical self' a central concept, which can be healthy or pathological depending on the levels of stress to which it has been exposed. The role of meditation or psychotherapy is then to resolve the stress, by whatever means are available, necessary, or possible. Damasio has clearly spelled out the current understanding of the neuroscientific basis of how the mind can generate a sense of 'self'²², while others^{12,14,19} have treated various meditation processes and shown how they can enhance the sense of 'self', or even 'Self'.

Since the expansion of awareness associated with the mind approaching the experience of 'Self' in meditation apparently creates a 'space', in which there is increased freedom to make choices, this would explain why the practice of Yoga-based relaxation and meditation techniques have been found to enhance emotional intelligence. This suggests that traditional methods may have vitally important roles to play in modern management education and practice. Indeed, several leading schools of Yoga have specific arms involved in business training programs: S-VYASA has its SMET Program¹⁸, the Transcendental Meditation Organisation has its Corporate Development Program¹⁹, and Sudarshan Kriya Yoga runs specific courses designed for business.

The general theory for why these are effective based on the two component information structure represented by the loop vector $\mathbf{O} \Rightarrow$ described above, shows that the well-acknowledged, internal, subjective sense of time passing, first pointed out by Immanuel Kant²⁴, can be modelled by the loop. At the same time, the loop is in a state of 'criticality', shown to be a universal condition in the cortex by modern physiological investigations^{25,26}, which means that it is at the 'Edge of Chaos', and confers greater freedom of choice, because chaos make choice available.

Results

Damasio's autobiographical self²², which can show how feelings and emotions are generated during normal intention-based activity²⁷ is now being understood from a neuroscientific perspective following work by Feinberg²³; recently, Bercovitch and Glicksohn²⁸ have postulated a consciousness state space along related lines, a new phenomenological way to understand how consciousness and selfhood can project into, and combine, the dimensions of time, awareness and emotions. Their approach can be put on a firm neurophysiological and biophysical basis grounded in complexity²⁹. All this enables contemporary neuroscience to shed clearer light emotional and cognitive states.

Central to the new understanding is the traditional vision of the Self as both self-experiencing, and the ground for all experience and action. It is experienced directly by developing the capacity for deep meditation^{12,14} and corresponding clear experience of information-free states of mind. Traditionally, it has been said that one should count to ten before losing one's temper. Clearly, losing the temper is not emotionally intelligent, while counting to ten, and then deciding not to be aggressive corresponds to an improved level of emotional control. The question is how to achieve the freedom to 'count to ten'.

The previous analysis suggests why learning a (self-transcending) system of meditation is a good strategy to gaining this freedom: such systems take the awareness to the <O state, which (a) contains a greater sense of internal 'space'; (b) is more closely associated with the subjective sense

of time passing; and (c) being in closer proximity to chaos, possesses greater freedom of choice, and can therefore achieve greater control over internal states, including the emotional states, which normally drive the mind to action. This they are designed to do, and the role of the palaeo-cortex, the principle organ of higher control in reptiles and lower mammals, can now be viewed objectively from the higher levels of mind made available by the neo-cortex. It is just a matter of enabling the neocortex to function more independently of the midbrain centres of emotion and motivation. The process of meditation creates strong coherence in the neocortex⁸, making it much stronger, and more stable, and able to resist pressures from the lower structures to commit untoward emotion-based responses.

The above model was formulated based on Vedanta's perspective³⁰, which regards the 'Self' as the ground for all experience and action. In our model, the state in which 'Self' is experienced is represented by the information free loop, $\langle \mathbf{O} \rangle$, which becomes the basis for modelling its effects on the individual. This suggests that, by providing scientifically validated techniques such as deep relaxation and focussed attention training to refine a manager's emotional intelligence, Yoga offers means to free us from the limitations of the autobiographical self, and all its associated angst, mid-brain activations and problems. Once free of these, emotions automatically become more stable, and are easier to treat in a wise and more detached manner.

Discussion & Conclusions

Like Transcendental Meditation¹², Focused Attention Meditation¹⁴ is a well defined system of meditation taught with precisely repeated, exact instructions, which may be expected to produce reliable and repeatable results. It forms a prime example of a Yoga-based system that can be widely used in business to improve the quality of office life by developing the sense of inner space, detachment and patience associated with actively functioning emotional intelligence. This and other such systematic meditation techniques described in Ashtanga Yoga^{14,31} and Bhagavad-Gita⁹, should now be

integrated into management education. They will bring much needed balance of mind, equanimity and goodwill throughout a corporation's professional environments, and create institutional excellence. From a more personal perspective, to create more authentic leadership styles based on their own personality, managers should invest in themselves and their own emotional intelligence to construct a happier, creative, fulfilling, productive future for themselves, their employers and their fellow employees.

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