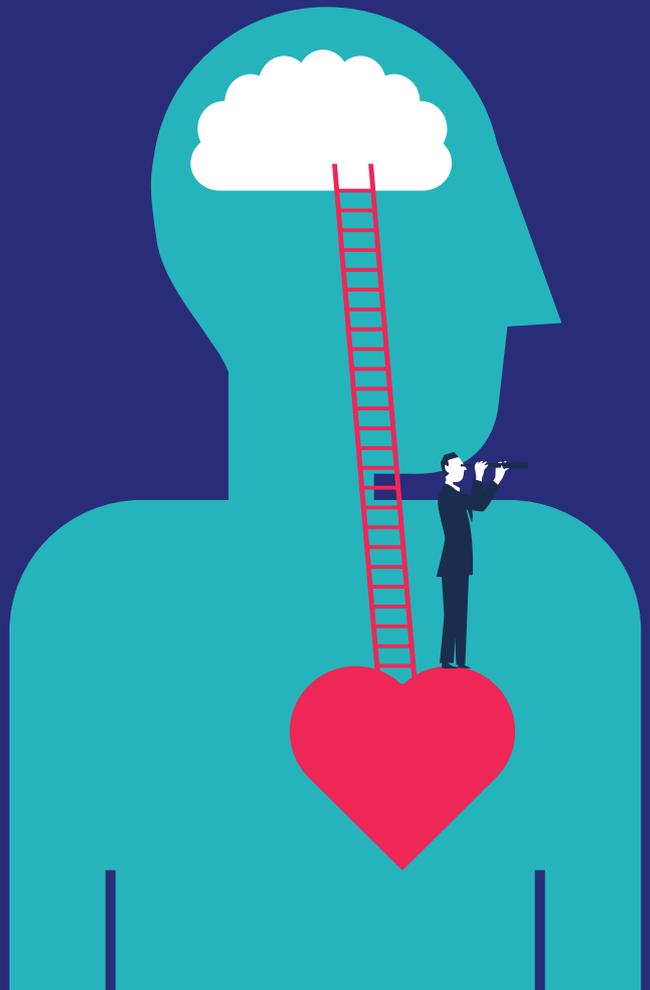


THE THREE ELEMENTS OF AN EFFECTIVE EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

BY DR BEN PALMER



According to research by the Australian Institute of Management, the most critical skill to possess right now is emotional intelligence (EI). Even more critical than other soft skills and functional excellence. This is due in part to the COVID-19 environment where relationship skills and wellbeing have become invaluable.

With this rise in popularity, many learning and development professionals are being asked to either design and deliver emotional intelligence development programs in-house or source them from learning providers. With so many options now available, this task can be daunting. It's more important than ever to understand what works and what doesn't in terms of developing emotional intelligence – and how to source or design a great program for the people you work with.

What is emotional intelligence?

EI, by definition, is a set of skills that help us perceive, understand and respond effectively to emotions within ourselves and others. Like improving any skill, improving emotional intelligence takes time and the systematic practice of applying effective tools and techniques designed to help us.

Unfortunately, there are a lot of tools and techniques that are not effective – and much scepticism and disappointment abound because of their use.

Indeed, there are a number of variables to get right in improving emotional intelligence.

Three key factors are:

- 1 the content of the program**
- 2 the format of it**
- 3 the skill of the facilitator or coach**

Getting these three variables right is critical to ensuring an EI program will deliver demonstrable benefits to people and your organisation.

1

THE CONTENT OF THE PROGRAM

Like any type of program, the content needs to be engaging, experiential, appeal to different learning styles and, most importantly, comprise practical tools and concepts that can be applied on the job. Effective programs will also involve scenarios and real-plays (or role plays) where participants practise applying tools and techniques during the session, receive feedback on their performance and then refine their approaches.

The use of an emotional intelligence assessment is also critical. Known as the Dunning Kruger effect (after the researchers who discovered it), research has shown that most people overestimate their level of emotional intelligence believing it to be 'a bit better than average', while top performers often underestimate it. When used in development programs, EI assessments help to increase self-awareness of the participants emotional intelligence levels. They can also aid in personalising learning programs, by helping participants to identify personal strengths and development opportunities.

2

THE FORMAT OF THE PROGRAM

Whether via one-on-one coaching, group webinar or traditional group classroom, all good emotional intelligence development programs entail the following:

- a clear purpose
- expected outcomes
- an EI assessment, and
- a journey format (for instance, a session that focuses on a development model or concept for one emotional intelligence skill at a time, starting with self-awareness).

This learning journey format allows people to apply the tools and techniques provided in the program on the job. It also enables further learning to occur through practical application.

Subsequent sessions should start with reflection and include a peer-coaching or mentoring component to help facilitate participant-led learning. Between sessions, participants can be paired-up (and rotated each time) and asked to share their approaches and insights in how to apply the content.

One or two-day workshops can be great for introducing models and concepts, shifting mindsets, and getting people to practise different approaches. However, real behaviour change takes time, reflection, refinement, and experiences from real-world application, which is why the learning-journey format works best. If you are planning on designing one or two-day programs, ensure there is additional follow-up and support to maximise ROI.

3

THE SKILLS OF THE FACILITATOR OR COACH

There is a wealth of information focusing on the competence of facilitators and coaches, and the outcomes they can produce. I personally find that while formal qualifications provide a good basis, emotional intelligence itself is critical and perhaps more predictive of success.

Unlike the great swimming coach who cannot swim, those who teach emotional intelligence need to practise it themselves and apply or demonstrate it in their facilitation or coaching. Self-awareness, empathy, vulnerability, good story-telling ability, and the capacity to positively influence the way others feel, are key skills of an effective emotional intelligence facilitator or coach.

Choose well and expect a strong return on investment

On average, good programs have been found to improve emotional intelligence by 17 percentile points. This number is quite remarkable when you think about it. Ask yourself, what it might mean to you personally to improve your empathy and how you feel on a day-to-day basis, by even 2, 3 or 4%? For businesses, the results can be game changing. A recent study by consulting firm Cap Gemini found businesses reporting improvements in productivity, employee satisfaction/engagement, wellbeing, and openness to change by way of example.

For program participants, improvements in their emotional intelligence can be life changing. EI not only underlies how well we connect, communicate and influence at work, it also underpins the quality of our relationships outside of the workplace. Participants often report improvements in their parenting, friendships and close relationships with their partners, parents, or siblings.

Now is the time to find the right EI program for your organisation. Your business and people will thank you.



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