EMOTIONAL COMPETENCIES AND PROFESSIONAL EXCELLENCE

AUROBINDO SAXENA *

INTRODUCTION

Technology is changing the world at a frightening speed. Professionals should therefore develop competencies that are not only based on sound and proven theories and concepts, but are also laced with practical and contemporary issues and dimensions. They need to be creative and possess and demonstrate qualities and characteristics that they would advocate as signals of success. From effective time-management, self-awareness, self-organisation and self-confidence to updating knowledge, networking and effective communication skills – all these should not only be mere percepts and concepts, but possessed, practiced and demonstrated by a professional in his day-to-day life.

DEFINITION OF PROFESSIONAL

When asked to define a “Professional”, many would emphasise on traits such as intelligence, toughness, determination and vision – the qualities traditionally associated with a professional. Such skills and traits are necessary but insufficient for today’s professional. Although a certain degree of analytical and technical skills are required for success, yet studies indicate that emotional competency may be the key attribute that distinguishes outstanding professionals from those who are merely average.

In today’s talent-centric workplace, since there is no dearth of qualified and talented professionals, it makes sense to brand oneself as a unique entity. Branding oneself focuses on creating a unique set of values by identifying the stakeholders’ needs and developing strategies to satisfy these needs over a long term.

In the middle ages, craftsmen marked their wares with a letter or symbol. This mark assured the customer that they were buying a particular artisan’s work and provided a guarantee of quality. Professionals should also project themselves as a brand and strive to develop brand loyalty for themselves.

THE CONCEPT OF COMPETENCIES

Competencies are a collection of characteristics such as skills, knowledge, self-concept, traits and motives that enable one to be successful in his interactions with others at work, home, and in the society at large. Basically, a competency is what outstanding performers do more often; do in more situations; and do with better results than average performers. In today’s hypercompetitive environment, a successful professional should have a clear understanding of her/his core competencies, which can be leveraged to gain competitive advantage over competitors.

Broadly, core competencies can be defined as a collection of skills that make up the essence of a professional’s characteristics. It has three main characteristics namely:

(1) It is a source of competitive advantage and makes a significant contribution to perceived customer benefits;
(2) It can be applied to a wide variety of areas; and
(3) It is difficult for competitors to imitate.

* Assistant Education Officer, Academics & Professional Development, The ICSI. The views expressed are personal views of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the Institute.
On the other hand, competitive advantage is the ability to perform in one or more ways that competitors cannot or will not match. These competencies should ideally be sustainable over a period of time and if not sustainable these should atleast be leverageable.

It is desired however that before developing any strategy, the Professional should do a thorough SWOT analysis. SWOT is an acronym, which stands for Strength, Weakness, Opportunity and Threat. The SWOT matrix below illustrates how the external opportunities and threats facing a professional can be matched with his/her strengths and weaknesses. Further, it can also help a professional to devise a set of possible strategic alternatives that might not be otherwise considered.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Internal Factors</th>
<th>Strengths (S)</th>
<th>Weaknesses (W)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>External Factors</strong></td>
<td><strong>SO Strategies</strong></td>
<td><strong>WO Strategies</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Opportunities (O)</strong></td>
<td>Generate strategies that use strengths to take advantage of opportunities.</td>
<td>Generate strategies that take advantage of opportunities by overcoming weaknesses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Threats (T)</strong></td>
<td><strong>ST Strategies</strong></td>
<td><strong>WT Strategies</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Generate strategies that use strengths to avoid threats.</td>
<td>Generate strategies that minimise weaknesses and avoid threats.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Professionals must nurture their competencies in the race to stay ahead of rivals. W. Chan Kim and Renee Mauborgne in their article “Blue Ocean Strategy” discuss how to develop uncontested market space that makes the competition irrelevant. Blue Ocean is defined as a previously unknown market space. In blue oceans, demand is created rather than fought over. There is ample opportunity for growth that is both profitable and rapid.

There is another related concept also known as “Red Oceans”. In Red Oceans the market places already exist and the market players compete by grabbing for a greater share of limited demand. As the market space gets more crowded, prospects for profits and growth decline. Products turn into commodities and increasing competition turns the water bloody. Creating blue oceans helps in building brands, so powerful that they can last for several years. However, in today’s competitive environment, rivals quickly copy the competencies and thus most competitive advantages tend to be temporary. Thus, a professional can outperform competitors over longer periods only if he/she can establish a difference that can be preserved.

Broadly speaking, professionals can remain competitive in their profession by following three basic strategies:

(i) By continuously developing competencies and integrating one kind of competencies with another to create higher order value for all stakeholders;

(ii) By concentrating on core competencies; and

(iii) By translating core competencies into competitive advantages.

Generally, a professional’s work involves making judgements in situations where even knowing all the facts does not make it clear what would be the right course of action. Professionals are therefore required to keep their knowledge up-to-date and continuously improve their technical skills. Although knowledge and other technical skills can be of great use, yet they alone cannot guarantee success in one’s professional life. Many non-technical skills are also important, these include the ability to work effectively with others, motivate and guide subordinates, and handle stress, all of which involve emotional intelligence.
EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

The concept of emotional intelligence is an umbrella term that captures a broad collection of individual faculties and dispositions usually referred to as soft skills or inter and intra-personal skills that are outside the traditional areas of specific knowledge, general intelligence, and technical or professional skills. It has been emphasised that in order to be a fully functioning member of the society one must possess both traditional intelligence (IQ) and emotional intelligence (EQ).

Emotional Intelligence is something that can be consciously learnt, imbibed and improved at any point of time, through self-observance, introspection and experience. Although Emotional Quotient (EQ) is gaining importance and widespread acceptance in measuring individual’s capacity for success, it is not likely to supplant Intelligence Quotient. Emotional Intelligence only describes attributes that are distinct from, but at the same time complementary to academic/cognitive intelligence.

EMOTIONAL COMPETENCES

Emotional Competencies are learned capabilities based on Emotional Intelligence that results from outstanding performance in anything one does. It consists of (I) Personal competencies and (II) Social competencies. The following diagram describes the framework of emotional competencies.
PERSONAL COMPETENCIES

The personal competencies include competencies such as self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation and stress management. Self-awareness involves knowing one’s internal state, preferences, resources and intuitions. It involves how aware one is of his/her feelings and how one views oneself. The skills needed for this are emotional awareness, self-assessment, and self-confidence.

Self-regulation, which is another key component of personal competencies, involves managing one’s internal states/emotions, impulses and resources. It is both trying not to be distressed, or stifling an impulse, and at times intentionally eliciting an emotion. The skills needed for this are self-control, trustworthiness, conscientiousness, right attitude and innovativeness.

Most often it is not the rewards that make one enjoy work but the creative challenge and stimulation of the work and the opportunity to keep learning. Some of the factors that motivate outstanding performers are achievement drive i.e. striving or working towards improving or meeting an ideal standard of excellence, commitment, Initiative, Optimism, and happiness.

Professionals face stress in their day-to-day work and therefore it is important that they know how to manage it. Stress Management is concerned with one’s ability to withstand stress without caving in, falling apart or losing control. It deals with remaining calm, not being impulsive and coping well under pressure.

SOCIAL COMPETENCIES

Social Competencies constitute skills or competencies that determine how one handles relationships. Those who are competent in this sphere of emotional intelligence understand, interact with and relate well to others in varied situations. They also inspire trust and function well as part of a team. Social competence can be broadly divided into aspects such as Empathy, Social Responsibility and Social skills.

Empathy is the ability to sense or be aware of, understand and appreciate the feelings and thoughts of others especially without their saying so. It is the knowing and understanding of what, how and why people feel, think and act the way they do. Empathy in fact represents the basic skill of the social competence aspects of emotional intelligence and includes understanding others, developing others, leveraging diversity, and having political awareness.

One must not forget that Professionals are a vital element of the society. The society provides them all the resources for effectively operating in the market space. Thus, they have a great deal of responsibility towards the society. Social responsibility can be defined as the ability to demonstrate that one can be a cooperative, constructive and contributing member of the society at large. It involves acting in a responsible way, doing things for others, accepting others, being conscientious and upholding social rules, even though one may not directly benefit from doing so.

Since this competency is directed outward to the group or society, it is possibly one of the easiest components of emotional intelligence to change. Being socially responsible in fact has more benefits than demerits. By helping others one definitely helps oneself. By focussing on and trying to solve the problems of others one gains new and clearer perspective of one’s own problems and dilemmas.

On the other hand social skills are the abilities in inducing the desirable or required responses in others. Competencies that collectively form the social skills are communication, influence, conflict management, leadership, change catalyst, problem solving, building relationships, collaboration and co-operation and team capabilities.

From the above discussion it is clear that each element of the emotional competency is necessary but is not sufficient on its own. To be successful in any profession and to have a high EQ depends on a number of emotional intelligence competencies. No component of emotional intelligence exists in isolation, they are all intertwined and are all equally valuable. Competencies in one area are usually imperative to be competent in another area. The impact of each element increases to the extent it is part of a process that includes the other competencies.

When one’s Emotional Intelligence is strong one is better equipped in life and is more likely to find success in every sphere of life, be it work, personal life, relationships etc. As already stated Emotional Intelligence can be learnt and enhanced at any time in a person’s life, it indeed is an ongoing and continuous process throughout a person’s lifetime.
CONCLUSION

It is observed that a Professional often faces ethical dilemmas. Professionals in order to gain something, sometimes keep their morality and ethics at stake. Here, it is important to note that the principles laid down by philosopher Immanuel Kant, can be used as a guide to actions:

(1) A person’s action is ethical only if that person is willing for that same action to be taken by everyone who is in a similar situation. In simple words, treat others, as you would like them to treat you.

(2) A person should never treat another human being simply as a means, but always as an end. This means that an action is morally wrong for a person if that person uses others merely as means for advancing his or her own interests. To be moral, the act should not restrict another people’s actions so that they are left disadvantaged in some way.

Therefore, it is critical for professionals to act ethically at all times and think integratively across diverse disciplinary perspectives to understand and address real world problems, which are complex, dynamic and uncertain.

REFERENCES