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Do Emotions Matter?

A Study of HR Professionals on their Perception of Line Managers' Emotional Intelligence



Abstract

The role of HR as a functional unit has been undergoing changes recently. Rather than a mere administrative unit taking care of all the bureaucratic work for line managers, HR professionals today take on a more strategic role (Barney & Wright, 1997; Welch & Welch, 2012) and become enablers for line managers (Cherniss, 1999; Suryanarayana & Ravi, 2011, Brockbank & Ulrich, 2005). HR professionals thus have an important say when it comes to leaders' ability to successfully direct their staff members into the right direction. Many organizations struggle to be successful because their leaders feel that their employees do not always perform optimally. Only the fine minds and spirits of motivated people actually transform other resources into value. To lead these minds into a direction generating real value for an organization is the core task of any line manager. Although the seemingly most capable people are chosen for taking on a leadership role in an organization, it often turns out that they lack a certain "ingredient". Therefore, the actual challenge for leaders is to recognize that they themselves might lack a certain ability, which finally impedes a more optimal leadership and that they find ways to overcome this deficiency. The real added value that HR professionals can bring into the bargain is to accompany leaders in the process of obtaining higher vital skills beyond mere cognitive knowledge: Emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1998). It was Goleman (1995) who reiterated that successful leaders today not only necessitate a bright mind, but that the matters of the heart are even more important for successfully leading people. The aim of this research was to start from the very beginning. Rather than already proposing specific measures for HR professionals to make sure that their line managers acquire the necessary social competences, the goal of this research was to first measure the pulse of HR professionals regarding their attitude toward emotional intelligence and to what extent they attribute emotional intelligence to their line managers. The results of the research showed that HR professionals generally assess that their line managers are emotionally intelligent. However, it also clearly showed that from their point of view that there is yet potential for development regarding the issue. HR professionals have an ambiguous role. They are a service to their line managers, and at the same time they have to challenge them as well, especially in times when habits have to be changed for the better of the organization. The framework which was established following the research and which is based on the 22-step model of the EI Consortium (Cherniss, Goleman, Emmerling, Cowan & Adler, 1998) is not intended to give clear instructions of how to implement specific steps to increase emotional intelligence of line managers. Rather, it serves as an inspiration for HR professionals to kick start the discussion about emotional intelligence in organizations.

Keywords: Emotional intelligence, HR professionals, line managers