

LEADERSHIP INSIGHT

No. 28 – September 2021

*The Centre for Army Leadership (CAL) is the British Army's custodian of leadership debate, thinking and doctrine. It seeks to stimulate discussion about leadership and to further the institution's knowledge of best practice and experience. **Leadership Insights** are published periodically by the CAL to feed and shape the leadership debate in the Army through a range of themes and ideas designed to inform and challenge its readership. The views expressed in **Leadership Insights** are solely those of the author and do not necessarily reflect official thinking of the British Army or the Ministry of Defence.*

Emotional Intelligence and the Army Leader

By Capt Verity Duncan AGC(ETS)

Have you ever noticed that you need to take a step outside after a row to calm yourself down? Have you seen a stroppy child suddenly smile when presented with an ice cream? Has a positive comment from your boss ever made you feel appreciated? Have you wondered why the mood in your office affects your colleagues' performance? These questions – as diverse as they are – point to one common element: Emotional Intelligence. If you can see and recognise emotions in yourself and in others, if you find yourself reflecting on them, and if you know how to bond with others, you have used your Emotional Intelligence.

Emotional Intelligence and the Army Leader

In 2009, I was a Unit Education Officer for a Battle Group serving in Afghanistan. One task was to deliver part of the Command, Leadership and Management (CLM) package. I clearly remember the first day of the course: when given a written task, one of the Sgts suddenly looked up and admitted he was sick with nerves. He even showed me his shaking hands.

After a short while, however, he managed to calm himself down, focused on his assignment, and passed the course with flying colours. Fast forward several months: he was killed whilst running across a field strewn with IEDs to rescue a fallen soldier. He left behind a wife and children.

Remembering him, I am often struck by the thought that such a brave and strong man could be so frazzled by a written assignment. It is something I think about often. What I remember is how he succeeded in calming himself down, in becoming focused, and in putting his full attention into a task that unsettled him so deeply. He really was master of his own emotions.

Since the publication of Goleman's seminal study (1995), the concept of Emotional Intelligence (EI) has become popular. EI is the ability to recognise, understand and manage emotions. Individuals with high EI can do so with their own emotions as well as with the emotions of others. They can use their EI to guide thinking and behaviour, to navigate group dynamics, and to adapt to different environments. Building on his previous work, Goleman (2004) was the first to recognise that there is a direct link between EI and leadership, which has now become a field of study in its own right (Higgs and Aitken 2003. Sharma 2014).

There is a strong argument for all leaders, including Army leaders, to be aware of how EI defines them and what impact it has on their teams. According to the new Army Leadership Doctrine:

Leaders who have strong emotional intelligence can inspire and develop individuals. They can form, motivate, and manage teams. In a rapidly changing and increasingly complex global environment in which the demands placed upon our people are as great as ever, leaders require emotional intelligence to ensure balance between a focus on the task, team, and individual' (ALD 2021, 3-03).

EI requires self-awareness to understand your own strengths, weaknesses, and motivations. Knowing and anticipating your responses to different environments, stresses and pressures is critical. In fact, self-awareness is the cornerstone of leader development. A leader who does not know themselves, their strengths, and limitations and who is not open about it will fail to create an environment where people feel safe and trusted (Jurd 2020).

Self-awareness goes hand in hand with self-control, which is the ability to manage your own emotions and to stay calm and focused in difficult or dangerous situations (O'Donoghue and Rabin 2003).

EI also needs empathy. It means being aware of the impact that your behaviour has on others and be mindful of how people perceive you and your behaviour. Leaders with empathy understand the effect that their actions have on those around them, they listen to others' opinions, and accept criticism (Goleman 1995. Covey 2020).

Finally, EI requires relationship management, which is the ability to know people, both as individuals and as groups, and to be able to read, understand and anticipate their reactions and their group dynamics. They also know how to manage conflict within their team and how to recognise and break negative patterns of behaviour. Finally, as leaders want everyone in their team to grow, they take the time to develop others and to support them.

The Profession of Arms is people-centred. No matter what rank or role, our focus has always been on our people. Hence, Army leaders need to understand the ambitions, interests, wants, needs and desires of their team members, so that they can understand how best to motivate their team and care for them. Hence, EI is an essential attribute of the Army Leader

Emotional Intelligence and Achieving Your Potential

I have recently re-joined the Army as a Reservist after a long career break and what makes me most proud of being in this organisation is the fact that the Army is a driver for people to reach their full potential. No matter how long you serve, most soldiers and officers are given opportunities to transform themselves for the better, to challenge themselves, and to learn new skills. This ultimately means that they will grow in confidence and become more resilient. Working along inspiring colleagues like the Sgt on the CLM course is a strong driver towards self-improvement.

According to Goleman and Boyatzis (2017), core EI skills such as self-control, self-awareness, persistence, and the ability to motivate oneself are not a given and can be developed and strengthened in people. David Rock (2007) argues that we can achieve 'new wiring' in our brains at any stage in life, which can then form new habits and change the way we think.

This means that Army leaders can and must support their team in developing stronger self-control, self-awareness, and persistence. One way of doing so is to use positive and constructive feedback, which strengthens self-confidence and resilience and lifts the individual and the team (Rock 2007). Research shows that experiencing positive emotions (including joy, pride, interest) enhances people's commitment to a project and it encourages them to be open to new ways of thinking and of doing things. This process is essential for individual and team growth (Boniwell and Tunariu 2019).

Coaching and mentoring help individual grow, too. They both require strong EI to be effective and to be able to connect with different individuals. Coaches and mentors must be able to understand what motivates the people they are working with. They must establish a culture in which failing is acceptable and where mistakes are not seen as a problem but as a learning opportunity. Leaders with strong EI often use their own life experience and their own mistakes to guide and support others (Chapman, Best and Van Casteren, 2003). Today,

seeking feedback and making mistakes is often seen as a sign of weakness. It takes humility to accept that no one is perfect. For this reason, leaders at the very top of an organisation must set the example by sharing their own limitations and by showing a commitment to work on them and to improve (Chamorro-Premuzic 2019).

Conclusion

Army leaders with strong EI have the motivation and determination to develop themselves and their teams. They seek opportunities to gain experience, knowledge and understanding. They welcome criticism and are not afraid to experience new ideas and new ways of doing things. Self-awareness and self-improvement are a never-ending journey that involves both professional and personal development. Army leaders must engage with EI if they hope to be able to connect, inspire and motivate their teams.

Questions

- Think of a time when a leader displayed particularly good or poor EI. How did their behaviour impact the team?
- Discuss an instance in which a leader had a positive impact on you. What inspired you? What helped you see things differently?
- How can a leader change group dynamics in a unit that is unable to work together?
- How can a leader encourage a fail-safe culture in which mistakes are seen as learning opportunities?

Sources

Army Leadership Doctrine, 2021.

CAL Leadership Podcast, Episode 5, Dr Claire Yorke, 27 January 2021.
<https://armyleadership.podbean.com/e/episode-5-dr-claire-yorke/>

Boniwell I., Tunariu A.D., *Positive Psychology: Theory, Research and Applications* (London: Open University Press, 2019).

Chamorro-Premuzic T., *Why Do So Many Men Become Incompetent Leaders? And How To Fix It*, (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2019).

Chapman T., Best B., Van Casteren P., *Executive coaching: Exploding the myths*. (London: Palgrave, 2003).

Covey S.R., *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People: Powerful Lessons in Personal Change*. Revised and updated 30th anniversary edition (London: Simon & Schuster, 2020).

Goleman D., *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ* (New York: Bantam Book, 1995).

Goleman D., 'What Makes a Leader?', *Harvard Business Review* 1 (2004).

Goleman D., Boyatzis R.E., 'Emotional intelligence has 12 elements. Which do you need to work on?', *Harvard Business Review* (Feb. 2017).

Higgs M., Aitken P., 'An exploration of the relationship between emotional intelligence and leadership potential', *Journal of Managerial Psychology* 18 (2003).

Jurd N., *The Leadership Book: A Step By Step Guide To Excellent Leadership* (Mr Gresty, 2020).

O'Donoghue T., Rabin M., 'Self-Awareness and Self Control' in Loewenstein G., Read D., Baumeister R.. (eds), *Time and Decision: Economic and Psychological Perspectives of Intertemporal Choice* (Russell Sage Foundation, 2003), pp. 217-244.

Rock R., *Quiet Leadership: Six Steps to transforming Performance at Work* (New York: Harper Collins 2007).

Sharma S., 'Theory & Relationship between Emotional Intelligence, Leadership Styles and Leadership Effectiveness', *International Journal of Education and Science Research*, 1 (2014).