Change Leadership: The Role of Emotional Intelligence

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Abstract
This article presents the role of emotional intelligence in leading change in an organization. Specifically, the article highlights the different perspectives of emotional intelligence, and the related five components—self-awareness, self-regulation, self-motivation, empathy, and social skill—are discussed. In furtherance, I propose how emotional intelligence contributes to change leadership focusing on building a team to affect change, and overcoming resistance to change.

Keywords
emotional intelligence, change leadership, organization, resistance, change recipients

Introduction
The ever increasing pressure on organizations and institutions to undergo change to survive and maintain their relevance cannot be overemphasized in the era of globalization. Consequently, leaders in the 21st century have enormous responsibility to successfully lead change in their organizations. However, the change process involves emotions because nobody likes to surrender the comfort associated with the status quo or surrender what they value. Despite that, leaders will have to succeed in the midst of these challenges, among which are the emotions of those to be affected by the change. Therefore, there is an increase in focus on emotional intelligence in leadership in managing the process of change.

Change always involves some form of emotions because people enjoy comfort. However, change disrupts this comfort creating a situation filled with anxiety and uncertainty among change recipients. For instance, when change touches on issues close to the hearts of those affected, they will most likely react emotionally due to anxiety or fear of the unknown; Moreover, when change affects the assumptions, values, beliefs, and to a large extent identities of individuals and can make the change recipients reluctant to accept the proposed status. As Foltin and Keller (2012) noted, the creation of an environment characterized by freedom to communicate is crucial for the introduction of change to an organization. According to the authors, it is common to observe members of an organization become resistant as well as skeptical when faced with the need for a change:

Change leadership is the engine of change, it’s about urgency, vision, empowering people, and seizing opportunity. The goal is to make change happen smarter and faster with an accelerated efficiency. It is the process that fuels large-scale transformation (John Kotter).

Leaders have the responsibility to overcome challenges and implement the change in their organization or institution. For instance, over the years, efforts to reform schools have been futile, and one reason is the leaders’ lack of emotional intelligence to overcome challenges associated with reform. The “set of emotional and social skills that influence the way we perceive and express ourselves, develop and maintain social relationships, cope with challenges, and use emotional information in an effective and meaningful way is emotional intelligence” (Mayer, Caruso & Salovey, 2004, p. 197). Emotional intelligence is an important skill set in leading, hence leaders identified to be effective have an appreciable level of the skill set (Goleman, 2004, Table 1). Emotional intelligence distinguishes among leaders who are successful in organizations, where technical skills are less of a significant factor (Goleman, 2004). Moreover, for any “leader to be successful in reflecting on experiences, interpreting environmental cues, relating to followers and developing relationships, emotional intelligent competencies” are a necessity (Watkins, Earnhardt, Pittenger, Roberts, Rietsema, & Cosman-Ross, 2017, p. 150).

Indeed, experts (Barbuto & Burbach, 2006) have suggested that in bringing about change through higher
performance, “leaders must fully engage and connect with their followers” (p. 53). Moreover, leaders can improve organization and institutional effectiveness if they respond to coworkers with empathy. Available literature suggests the increasing importance of leaders to understand, recognize, as well as manage emotions for effective leadership (see Foltin & Keller, 2012; Momeni, 2009; Srivastava, 2013). According to Salovey and Mayer (1990), people who have developed emotionally intelligent-related skills use their moods and emotions and that of others to motivate them to adapt the desired behaviors. These abilities and skills are essential for leaders to successfully facilitate change.

Central to institutional or organizational change is leadership, Moore (2009) suggested that leaders equipped with the appropriate leadership behavior and skills will likely succeed in leading change. It enables leaders to evaluate their and others behavior effectively and is able to integrate both mental and emotional processes to adapt appropriate behaviors and manage situations. This article discusses how leaders equipped with emotional intelligence can employ the set of social skills in leading change. Emotional intelligence is the quality shared by effective leaders (Goleman, 2004).

### Perspectives of Emotional Intelligence

Three perspectives of the concept of “emotional intelligence” are identified: The “ability model” that “focuses on the ability” of the individual “to process emotional information and use it appropriately within the social environment”; the “trait model focuses on behavioral dispositions and self-perceived abilities”; and the “mixed model describes the combination of mental abilities, dispositions and traits” (Mayer, Caruso, & Salovey, 2000, p. 268). For instance, the traits perspective focuses on “emotion-related pre-dispositions”; it involves the tendency to focus, especially under, emotion-related “situations,” whereas the “mental ability model” is about the ability to apply the knowledge of emotions in emotional situations (Nelis, Quoidbach, Mikolajczak, & Hansenne, 2009, p. 36). Proponents of the ability model argue that the operations of concepts, relationship to intelligence, and the characteristics of development applied to the emotional domain (Humprey, Curran, Morris, Farrell, & Woods, 2007).

However, both perspectives agree that cognitive ability is not a distinct predictor of success in the ability to adapt and that both experts and practitioners need to consider emotional competences as well. Emotional intelligence is defined as “the ability to (a) perceive emotions, (b) use emotions to facilitate thought, (c) understand emotions, and (d) manage emotions, to promote emotional and intellectual growth” (Mayer, Caruso, & Salovey, 2004, p. 199). Similarly, Goleman (2004) defined emotional intelligence as “the ability to be aware of and to handle one’s emotions in varying situations” (p. 4). The author asserted that the concept of “emotional intelligence” consist of five competences. This article focuses on the five competences “of emotional intelligence” as conceptualized by Goleman (2004, p. 4).

### Change leadership and emotional intelligence

In any situation of change, a key determinant to the level of success is the degree to which the leader is able to communicate a need for the change to members of the organization. Among the conditions of change identified by Ely (1999, p. 3) is “dissatisfaction with the status quo,” and therefore, the ability of the leader to effectively communicate the need to change the status quo will determine the extent to which members of the organization will accept the idea of change.

| Component       | Definition                                                                 | Elements                                                                 |
|-----------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Self-awareness  | Ability to understand one’s modes, emotions, and drives as well as its affect on others | Self-confidence  
Realistic self-assessment  
Self-depreciating sense of humor |
| Self-regulation | Ability to control or redirect disruptive impulses or moods  
Propensities to suspend judgment, think before acting | Trustworthiness and integrity  
Comfort with ambiguity  
Openness to change |
| Self-motivation | Passion to work for reasons beyond money or status  
Propensity to pursue goals with energy and persistence | Strong drive to achieve optimism, even in the face of failure  
Organizational commitment |
| Empathy         | Ability to understand the emotional makeup of other people  
Skill in treating people according to their emotional reactions | Expertise in building and retaining talent  
Cross-cultural sensitivity  
Service to clients |
| Social skill    | Proficiency in managing relationships and building networks  
An ability to find common ground and build rapport | Effectiveness in leading change persuasiveness  
Expertise in building and leading teams |

Source: Goleman (2004, p. 4).
Even in situations where members of the organization are satisfied with the status quo and therefore become resistant to the idea of change, the communication skills of the leader is equally essential to create dissatisfaction with the status quo among the members (Gaubatz & Ensminger, 2017). The initial stage in the change process triggers the sense of fear, anxiety, and emotions of the change recipients. At this stage in the change process, the social skills of the leader is essential for effectively communicating the change to the staff (Foltin & Keller, 2012). Emotionally intelligent leaders know and therefore create an environment of open communication for those to be affected by the change to contribute in analyzing the present situation of the organization and to share in the future desired state of the organization (Foltin & Keller, 2012; Issah & Zimmerman, 2016). Change usually happens within an organizational environment where chaos, individual uncertainties, and psychological reactions to change exist (Foltin & Keller, 2012). Thus, effective leadership is central to a successful organizational change. Emotionally intelligent leaders can effectively facilitate change and manage the emotions involved in change. It enables leaders to identify the talents needed to build a winning team, and the ability to overcome resistance to change. “Emotional intelligence is the most important ingredient contributing to increase moral, cooperation, teamwork, motivation, and a positive work environment” (Strickland, 2000 in Foltin & Keller, 2012, p. 22).

**Building a Team/Coalition to Affect Change**

Change in “the 21st century” demands a team effort to develop and communicate the vision to large numbers of members, overcome resistance, generate short-term wins, and integrate the changes into the organizational culture (Kotter, 2012). Leaders who attempt to implement change alone are more likely to be isolated and might not succeed in the change process. The role of the leader is therefore to put together a winning coalition. The members of the coalition must be enthusiastic, committed, and credible to ensure a successful transformation of the organization (Kotter, 2012).

More so, an effective coalition can process information quickly and spread the implementation of important management decisions. Leaders should not set up a coalition and expect it to succeed in the transformation, but rather work with the coalition to share the sense of the problems, opportunities, and commitment to the change process. In furtherance, leaders must appeal to the emotions of the members to motivate them to desire to achieve excellence (Kotter, 2012).

According to Goleman (2001), a strong desire to achieve goals as well as an interest in maintaining scores can energize members. Therefore, leaders with such characteristics have a greater chance of building a team with similar attributes to lead transformation. These are elements of the motivation component of emotional intelligence. Consequently, emotionally intelligent leaders can recognize the motives of members and act appropriately by providing the tools and needed support, which will motivate them to achieve excellence (Foltin & Keller, 2012). Leaders and team members “accurate social perception allows individuals to gain considerable knowledge of other group members’ attitudes, goals, and interests, which should enable influence by identifying, understanding, and addressing members’ unstated needs and creating goals that might be accepted” (Srivastava, 2013, p. 9).

“Social skill component of emotional intelligence is a culmination of the other components of emotional intelligence” (Goleman, 2004, p. 9). For instance, empathetic individuals who are leaders know when to engage with emotions and when to engage with reason. Goleman (2001) asserts that “socially skilled leaders are adapt at managing teams, a manifestation of self-awareness, self-regulation, and empathy combined” (p. 10).

Emotionally intelligent leaders can employ their social skills in building and maintaining relationships (Goleman, 2001). Kotter (2012) notes that the presence of trust in a coalition is essential for the creation of a teamwork irrespective of process adopted in forming the coalition. According to Goleman (2001), the hallmarks of self-regulation, a component of emotional intelligence include trustworthiness, integrity, and openness to change. Leaders who are not judgmental but think before acting have the propensity to redirect disruptive impulses and moods into positive energy toward organizational transformation.

**Overcoming Resistance in Change Leadership**

During the process of organizational change, some followers feel reluctant to participate in the change efforts. Two categories of resistance have been identified, the rational and irrational resistance. de Jager (2001) states that rational resistance includes the feeling of noninvolvement by followers, whereas irrational resistance refers to resistance from members for its sake. According to the author, followers who fall within the rational resistance are more likely to be persuaded to participate in the change efforts. In furtherance, Gaubatz and Ensminger (2017) observed that some members resisting change may be “contentions” and are more likely to derail the change attempts based on either the feelings of resentment or the fear that they are not recognized for the value they bring to the department or organization and until their original negative feeling is addressed, they could continue to interfere with the change process. (p. 160)

Thus, emotionally intelligent leaders can use their social skills to inspire and persuade this category of followers to
adopt the proposed change and strive to contribute efficiently toward achieving the organizational goal (Srivastava, 2013).

Similarly, emotionally intelligent leaders do not quit when they encounter irrational resistance but employ the emotional skills and what the organizational culture permits to overcome the resistance. The reasons for the reluctance or resistance to participate in the change efforts can range from threats to identity, competency/skills or the lack of self-confidence, fear of the unknown future, and losing something valuable (de Jager, 2001; Kirkpatrick, 1985). In addition, because employees have a fear of losing something valuable, emotionally intelligent leaders can manage the emotions by enabling members change their emotional reactions and that of other members to particular courses of action (Srivastava, 2013).

According to Moore (2009), the emotions within any organizational environment confronted with change can be disruptive, motivating or de-motivating, exhilaration, positive or “negative, and can challenge the abilities of any person” entrusted with the responsibility to lead change (p. 21). An emotionally intelligent leader recognizes and understands his or her emotions as well as that of the subordinates and subsequently manages and redirects these emotions into a positive energy for change. Furthermore, self-aware leaders are self-confident. If followers observe that the leaders are confident in the change they propose, they may be influenced to have the confidence in their ability to implement the change. “The accurate expression of emotion ensures that people are able to effectively communicate with others to meet their needs and accomplish the goals and objectives” (George, 2000, p. 8).

For instance, to overcome similar challenges in the school system, school leaders will have to demonstrate appreciable level of emotional intelligence (Moore, 2009). Moreover, “awareness of the emotions of staff members during school reform initiatives will enable the” leader to provide “support and” guide the “teachers” in “the change process” (Moore, 2009, p. 22).

According to Kouzes and Posner (2007), leaders of organizations often lack the patience for getting things done because in addition to the organization’s vision, is the sense of urgency. However, when followers are left behind due to the leaders’ sense of urgency, the organization fails to realize the vision. Therefore, leaders identified as effective take into account the needs and values of followers to create a community of shared values that will ultimately lead to the generation of a common course of action (Kouzes & Posner, 2007). Another important skill that can enable leaders to listen, understand followers, and retain talent is empathy. Empathy is “putting yourself in the shoes of the other person” (Kirkpatrick, 1985, p. 112). By recognizing the concerns of individual members, emotionally intelligent leaders use their social skills to convince those who seem reluctant to participate in the change efforts. In addition, such leaders are sensitive to diversity—a challenge in the 21st century organization. Leaders competent in empathy take time to understand the perspectives of others before offering direction, advice, or support (Issah & Zimmerman, 2016). In addition, emotionally intelligent leaders recognize that the reaction of the change recipients is a reflection of the underlining fear and uncertainty (Foltin & Keller, 2012). Coupled with self-awareness, leaders make decisions that does not thread on buried values which has the potential to create inner turmoil (Goleman, 2001).

For instance, Mulford (2006) notes that change leadership for “student achievement” will succeed when people are empowered to actively engage in the act of making decisions by the creation of reciprocal trust and respect through leadership. In addition, leaders “promote professional development, and win the support of influential teachers” (Zimmerman, 2006, p. 241). Therefore, any leader who is taken by surprise at the reaction of change recipients in the form of fear and anxiety upon a decision to alter the status quo is probably not well informed about the factors that determine emotions. Meanwhile, leaders “who are emotionally intelligent are” expected to “manage their emotions” in addition to that of others (Moore, 2009, p. 25). Consequently, leaders in schools can channel their emotions into the accurate processing of cues about any challenges, threats, and opportunities facing their institutions (George, 2000). However, emotional intelligence does not necessarily signify the interest or the readiness to apply the skill within a context (Ivcevic, Brackett, & Mayer, 2007). Therefore, reliability, fairness, and openness are important in the attitudes of leaders in creating a favorable change environment (Tiuraniemi, 2008).

According Momeni (2009), emotional intelligence is a mental ability that has influence on other abilities of managers, especially, their leadership abilities. Moreover, the culture experienced by employees in the organization is influenced more by what they make of the reliability of the behavior of their managers or leaders. Managers need to show care, respect, fairness, and adopt face to face communications as well as make jobs meaningful and worthwhile for employees to increase their loyalty to the organization. By extension, emotionally intelligent school managers can create a favorable environment to secure the loyalty of teachers, students, parents, and administrators in their efforts toward school reform.

According to Bennis (2009), a leader being self-aware is the foundation to developing emotional intelligence. Leaders are able to understand and support others if they know their strengths, weaknesses, emotions, and have the capacity for self-management (Jacobs, Kemp, & Mitchell, 2008). Similar to Kouzes and Posner’s (2007) examples of leadership practices, emotional intelligence is not fixed genetically as in IQ after certain age but can be developed throughout life. More so, the favorableness of change agents depends on the kind of relationship they establish with all the interest groups in the organizational environment. Gaubatz and Ensminger
In view of the challenges confronting leaders in the 21st century, I believe that training future leaders toward the development of emotional intelligence will go a long way to adequately prepare them to provide effective leadership. “Emotional intelligence” was the influencing factor in the difference observed in “the performance of principals of two schools” (Bipathi, 2008, p. 6). For instance “the self-awareness displayed by the principal in the functional school showed an understanding of his moral purpose as a principal to the learners in his school” (Bipathi, 2008, p. 6).

Leaders cannot expect others to change if they themselves are not willing to change. By displaying adaptability, self-confidence, innovation, and initiative and by serving as change catalysts (see Boyatzis, Goleman, & Rhee, 2000), emotionally intelligent leaders demonstrate a willingness and ability to change. By setting such an example, leaders gain credibility with followers, which is critical for gaining follower acceptance of proposed changes. As noted by Foltin and Keller (2012), preparing leaders in the domains of emotional intelligence will enable them “to engage with staff, build commitment, forge working relationships, and increase staff-satisfaction” (p. 22). Emotionally intelligent leaders will be able to apply the skill set in providing support and encouragement to change participants during the change process (Gaubatz & Ensminger, 2017).

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