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### EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE TRAINING FOR ORGANIZATIONAL LEADERSHIP: EXPERIENCES OF DEVELOPING AND FACILITATING THE EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE MODULE IN NEPAL

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### ABSTRACT

In this article, we present the development of a module for Emotional Intelligence to foster organizational leadership in Nepal through the use of Collaborative Autoethnography (CA), a qualitative research method. The authors use their personal experiences related to the development of the module, its facilitation, and its impact when implemented in one of the organizations in Nepal to share their personal journey and the lessons learned. The reflections illustrate

how participation in an EI module helped the organization gain insights into its leadership approach. The article also demonstrates how reflecting on the experiences helps both the facilitators and the participants draw tangible lessons associated with the content, to further improve their practice.

**Keywords:** Collaborative autoethnography, emotional intelligence, organizational leadership.

## INTRODUCTION

The objective of our article is to take a pause and reflect on our journey so far as Emotional Intelligence (EI) practitioners in Nepal. We, four practitioners who have been working on training and practicing EI for around five years now and have been developing multiple modules that will help organizations nurture EI practices, through this paper have come together to share our learning. This article shows how we came to know each other and started working on EI and developed courses related to EI for organizational leaders in Nepal over the last three years. It also shares the reflection and learning of the two organizational leaders who introduced EI in their organization through our module and its effects on their organization.

This article presents the development of an organization that has been working on nurturing EI in Nepal and how working with other organizations through EI has been helpful to their personal development as facilitators. It also charts the development of the module and what is discussed in the course. We, as researchers, illustrate how becoming aware of our emotions helped us become better in our practice. It also offers an account of the relationship between EI and organizational leadership.

## METHODOLOGY

We are Bhusan, Shiva, Anju, and Pukar (name changed for anonymity at the review stage) who work in the same organization that works on EI in Nepal called ABC (name changed). Saloni and Rusha (name changed) are from the same organization called XYZ (name changed)

and took the support of ABC to nurture the practices of EI in their organization. While Bhusan and Shiva are the founders of ABC, Anju and Pukar joined the team later, first as the participants of the workshops facilitated by Bhusan and Shiva, and later became part of the organization themselves. All of us knew about EI later in our lives after careers in other fields. However, the positive changes that we experienced in our lives after learning about EI and practicing it regularly, reflecting more on it, and helping others learn more about it has been our goal. We hold a regular discussion and sharing sessions to reflect on our learnings both as EI practitioners as well as facilitators of EI courses. But in one of our meetings when Shiva and Pukar completed facilitating a module for XYZ and shared the transformation that the organization is noticing, the deeper need to share further about both the challenges and the outcomes to wider diaspora emerged among us enthusiastically. Sharing about our interest with Saloni and Rusha and their positive response to our interest got us going. Bhusan who is also an academician currently pursuing her Ph.D. studies on EI and its relationship with leadership took the initiative and wanted to get it published. When questioned with doubt about how all the other authors are novice researchers and do not have prior experience in research writing, that's how we decided to use collaborative autoethnography with the intention to improve our practices, share our learning, and develop further knowledge about our actions with reflexivity (Dyer et al., 2022).

One of our core values, authenticity, quickly brought us together in helping us figure out what we wanted to share. We realized that illustrating our journey so far and how it led us to develop our module, what has been working, and what has been challenging was what we wanted to share, embracing the value of authenticity. Authenticity has been explained in relation to the individual personal identity and one's ability to become true to themselves inspired by their lived experiences (Walker & Taylor, 2014). With Collaborative Autoethnography (CAE), we could fulfil our needs. CAE, as a methodology, helped us reflect deeply on our work by interacting with each other's narratives and helped us learn further about each other (Duffy et al., 2018).

In this article, we first share our personal narratives illustrating our journey so far. Secondly, we share the journey of ABC and share how the module was developed. Then we share the reflections from

the organizational leaders after introducing EI through ABC. In this sense, this article reveals the reflection process of the authors by helping them enquire about their own practices on the one hand and focusing on their contribution to the field of knowledge, especially in organizational leadership on the other hand. Basically, we answer two research questions here:

1. What prompted us to develop a module on EI for organizational leadership?
2. How was the module on EI for organizational leadership developed and what was the outcome?

To answer these research questions, the data has been collected over the last few years in the form of conversations, narratives written after the events, and descriptions of our formative years in our lives.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Situating Ourselves in the Field of EI Through Narratives

#### *Bhusan's Story: Striving for the Clarity to Self*

Growing up in a small town in Nepal, I was an inquisitive schoolgirl. And like most inquisitive school children of Nepal, most of my curiosities would be shunned by my teachers and relatives. I can relate that enrolling in school is only a part of the picture, gender discrimination persists in Nepali schools at different levels where the feeling of inclusion and safety is a constant challenge for girls in Nepal. *'You'll know better when you grow up.'* This was the phrase I used to get as an answer to all of my questions. This left me confused as to where to go and whom to ask my questions. It wasn't until my father bought a brand new black and white television. That was just a 14' black and white television. But that gave me the sense that journalists were the most empowered people who could both get answers from others as well as answer tough questions themselves. I grew up believing adults had answers to life's most pertinent questions, especially journalists who I grew up watching on television. But I sensed something. All journalists that appeared on my television screen belonged to some other communities.

Like any hopeful teenager who envisions conquering the world, I dreamt of representing my community to change the prevailing mindset shared by people in my hometown via journalism. And with passion and perseverance, I became part of Eastern Nepal's first television. Through journalism, I was determined to ask the hard questions that would unravel facts as to why societal problems existed and how they could be solved. Little did I know then, but I was going to discover that there was another aspect to questioning, and perhaps more important than I had realized the significance of understanding feelings. I didn't know it at that time but my experience in journalism was going to teach me that there are emotions in people lurking behind the surface and understanding feelings would help uncover them to foster greater self-understanding and empathy.

In my third year of journalism, I came in contact with an 8<sup>th</sup> grader whom I call Sarita. Sarita was brutally gang-raped and was in a state of despair and devastation when I met her for the very first time. I met her in an isolated state in her home and just like everyone else, I had been there to find answers to what had just transpired to someone so young. But answers were hard to come by; especially at a time when her own mother was blaming her for inviting the boys' attention. As others who had arrived prior to me were stating, Sarita was refusing to talk to anyone. It was understandable as all the journalists including me had come there to know the facts relating to the case rather than to find out how she'd been coping with this trauma. Realizing that she badly needed some space, I asked my cameraperson to take away his camera with him to leave the two of us to talk.

Allowing her all the space that she so badly needed, for the first time, I had to put an effort to move away from my customary facts-based questions to feelings-based queries to really understand her. The first question that I had really thought of and put a lot of effort into asking her was "*Sarita, is this the right time for you to talk?*" I had never asked anyone this question before assuming that everyone is willing to share their facts. I had anticipated that she wouldn't talk but to my surprise from among so many who had tried to get her to open up, that one question "is this the right time to talk" helped her to confide in me; perhaps she found warmth in my intention to sit with her vulnerabilities. Then I put on another effort to build the ground of trust between us and asked "*Sarita, are you willing to trust me*

*to share what you are going through right now?"* and then similar feelings-based queries followed one after another.

During the conversation, I found out that the culprits were none other than her own classmates who had apparently been harassing and bullying her time and again and sadly, neither did others notice this nor could she express her discomfort. But for the first time, she shared everything with me. I was used to asking questions. But what was different this time around? I started questioning myself. I used to ask questions to get answers. But for the very first time, I found myself asking questions to really understand the other person. After that encounter, something in me shifted. I started asking questions to now understand myself better. And not just any sort of questions; the more important feelings-based questions that prompted me to take a long hard look at myself and that led me to understand the fact that what I wanted to be wasn't journalism.

I found a unique connection between Sarita's situation and my childhood. Just as I was shunned for my inquisitiveness, perhaps she too had learned to keep her miseries to herself. This made me reflect on many adolescents who suffer silently; adolescents whom I could have saved way before such tragedies would happen to them. I stepped back and reflected and came to the conclusion about being an educator. In my journey as an educator, I met Shiva who too was pondering on similar concepts and that brought us together in exploring further about EI.

### ***Shiva's Story: Personal Struggles That Led to a Deep Realization***

If I look back at my life from 2008 to 2015, even though I had the best grades and was an active participant in extra-curricular activities, I'd honestly say that I wasn't very accountable. I don't mean in the sense that I was insincere; I was quite reliable to follow through on things I said I'd do. But what I possessed for the most part was my tendency to get defensive whenever things weren't to my liking. I would fall into a cycle of self-pity and resentment towards those around me. This, it seems, stemmed from my lack of EI. According to Luca and Tarricone (2001), when individuals in teams lack EI, they lack the skills to communicate feelings and harbor resentment towards each other.

This was especially true for my professional life. I'd make a lot of assumptions about others (I believed I understood what others

were intending), take things personally (I'd misunderstand the emotions others were experiencing and make it all about me), and not communicate what was important to me (I didn't want to appear needy as asking for what I'd like seemed risky). All these traits weren't obvious to me. These were my blindspots. Our blindspots refer to our human tendency to evaluate ourselves by our thoughts and intentions and not by the impact of our actions (Edmondson & Dimmock, 2020). If anyone were to point them out, I'd feel threatened and so would jump to my defense. These blindspots and ego barriers kept me from honestly seeing the contributions I was making to the very problems I complained about. As Hougaard and Carter (2018) point out, a bloated ego keeps us from reflecting and learning from our mistakes and builds up a defensive wall that reduces the possibility of learning from failure. As a result, there were unnecessary misunderstandings, miscommunication, and conflicts. I left a job complaining about my supervisor without ever having had a conversation to better understand him and to help him understand me. I went around saying the supervisor lacked leadership skills but failed to see how I lacked personal accountability to help things go right.

The 2015 earthquake was an eye-opener. Faced with a near-death possibility, the uncertain days filled with vigorous shakes brought with it an opportunity to slow down and self-reflect. Life, as I saw it, was fragile. All the striving for material wealth like owning your own house seemed ironic given how everyone was trying to find shelter in the open, scared of their own building collapsing onto them. Suddenly, it seemed like a lot of what I had learned earlier had to be unlearned. I had the opportunity to spend time with a neighbor of mine who, to me, seemed to possess everything I did not. He was calm and had the ability to watch his own reactions as well as the ability to listen and empathize with others. In him, I saw a sense of possibility regarding the kind of person I could be. He never preached; he just listened and asked thoughtful questions and embodied a way of being that drew me to self-reflect more and to live in accordance with my values.

I didn't know my values back then. But as I started digging deeper into the idea of introspection, I came across EI in 2015. I was fascinated by the different models of EI, especially the Six Seconds Networks' KCG-123 model from 1997. This model offers a three-step process that emphasizes that individual's check-in and label their feelings first,

look for options to respond and to choose a response that is aligned with one's values and long-term vision (Freedman, 2022). This led me to an understanding that I should work on making these concepts available to others whilst learning more about them myself. In this process of digging deeper, I started a mentorship program at a college with three students. The program focused on creating a space for students to self-reflect and express themselves. The primary reason I focused on this was that there was a big emphasis on presentation skills at the time. Although I personally loved making presentations myself, I felt students needed something more basic before they could find the confidence to go on stage and present. And so, the mentorship program kicked off. And it grew. Over time, I met Bhusan Shrestha, who was asked by the institution to become my co-mentor. A few months into it, we met Anju as our mentee who was exploring further to navigate through her challenges associated with her emotional management had joined the mentorship program.

### ***Anju's Story: Challenges that Led to Unhealthy Relationships with Emotions***

Growing up, I was always labeled as a diligent child. Some of my teachers and teacher figures used to remark, "*She will do something in her life.*" I never understood what they meant by that, but it gave me a sense of security amid the existential angst that I felt since the time I was a teenager. Those remarks were always coupled with statements like, "*Only if she knew how to work on her anger.*" "*Only if she didn't hesitate to speak up.*" "*Only if she was more of this and less of that.*" Even though I was sincere, I had a hard time dealing with my thoughts and emotions because I wasn't equipped to do so. Studies show that adolescents' resort to various cognitive approaches or strategies for emotional regulation especially when it comes to dealing with stressful or unpleasant situations. Such strategies peculiarly emerge through the experiences that one goes through during the adolescent biopsychosocial development stage (Garnefski et al., 2001 as cited in Tanzer et al., 2020).

Both at home and school, I grew up in environments where conversations would happen regarding studies, whereabouts, and sustenance needs, but hardly ever about how we felt, what was going well, and what wasn't. So, I was dealing with curiosities, challenges,



and stressful situations on my own. Empirical studies related to cognitive coping have found that there are four maladaptive strategies—blaming oneself, blaming others, ruminating, and catastrophizing—that adolescent pertain to when it comes to dealing with unfavorable and stressful situations (Garnefski et al., 2005, as cited in Tanzer et al., 2020). I can connect to this finding through my own experiences because any small or big inconvenience led me to either blame other people for making my life difficult or guilt-tripping myself for being incapable of dealing with situations. This especially proved to be true after I passed Grade 12 and spent three years trying to get into a medical school.

The only dream I had since my adolescent years was to become a doctor. After finishing my schooling, I moved forward to act on that ambition without a second thought. I used to prepare for entrance exams for months, give a couple of exams one after another, and wait for the results. But, each time, I fell short of getting a scholarship by 7-8 marks. At the end of the first year, I started to grow anxious, but I was somehow convinced I was getting better. So, I started studying even harder. I isolated myself. I stopped seeing friends and other people I used to hang out with, so I could concentrate better. I kept myself away from all the possible distractions. Despite all these, even in the second year of my attempt, I had no luck.

Then, came the third year of my striving, which became a turning point in my life. I was eagerly waiting for an exam result that I had high hopes for. To my dismay, I found out that I fell short of getting a scholarship by 2.5 marks. Those were the best grades I had obtained in the three years of my striving and yet, it wasn't enough. I recalled the times people told me, "*She will do something in her life.*" Feelings of inadequacy, loathing, and grief hit me hard, but I did not know what to do; or how to deal with them. The culture that we build through the education system, the challenges of academics, and individual characteristics can all together contribute to the failure of different kinds. Since the academic settings don't readily accept and tolerate failure, it can lead to negative emotional experiences in individuals, which in turn, can contribute to mental illnesses (Edwards & Ashkanasy, 2018).

I had a major breakdown and just didn't know how to cope with what I believed was a massive failure of my life. All my life up until that

point, my education backed me to try and win in life. But it failed me big time when it came to dealing with failure and the emotions that emerged thereafter. I went into spells of rumination and started believing that my life was over long before it was over.

After a lot of re-evaluations and giving myself some space and time, I slowly started to realize that there was much more to life than an ambition of mine that didn't work out in my favor. So, after taking some space and time to think about what to do next, I joined the undergraduate program in 2016. In my endeavors to get my life back on track and find something meaningful, I started exploring different programs and experiences. A friend of mine in the undergraduate program told me about the Mentorship Program—a 10-week program on EI. This is when I first met Shiva and Bhusan who were leading the program in a bid to develop a co-creative learning experience for students to introspect and express their thoughts and feelings. After experiencing two or three sessions down the line, I had a strong feeling that the kind of mentorship I received in the program should have been available to me right from the days I was in school. This realization transpired because the sessions helped me reflect on my emotions, question my choices, and know myself better than ever; which sadly, I never got to experience during my schooling years. The self-improvement that I experienced as a result of taking the 10-week learning experience encouraged me to give back what I got and so I decided to join the program as the program assistant. The growth, learning, and sense of contribution that I had from the experience were unparalleled and there was no looking back thereafter. With Shiva and Bhusan leading the program, which then turned into a Center for Emotional Intelligence at the college, gradually leading to the inception of ABC as an organization in 2018, my life had never found a better sense of meaning. That's when we met Pukar as one of the participants of our program to explore his life further with EI.

### ***Pukar's Story: Exploring with Emotional Intelligence***

Growing up, my brother participated in a lot of quiz competitions and won most of them. What he would require for that to be done well was having an understanding and knowledge of a wide variety of human fields of exploration. While my stint with Quiz never really lasted as much, I picked up the habit of staying curious and exploring

things that didn't necessarily have anything to do with my education. My college years were a peak moment for my explorations as the internet was then available and no field of exploration lay beyond my reach. One of the struggles during that time was that of connecting with others and not being affected by their judgments as much. That exploration led to me stumbling upon the term EI. I picked up some ideas soon after and realized its importance, and would then throw around the term here and there as something that was relevant to our personal growths.

The next time the idea surfaced up for me was during the time when I found out that 'ABC was helping individuals and organizations work on the same idea. As a budding Software Engineer, my focus was mostly on growing technically and I could only praise and celebrate the new initiative from afar. After a stint in a large Data Warehousing Firm, I along with friends from different software firms united to form a Software Development Business with a solid vision to not just leverage our expertise but also invest in capacity building for the nation. The next three years were a journey of soaring highs and bottomless lows with the tides of the market and operational challenges. My focus then was on primarily hiring, onboarding, and leading the Software Development Team.

As Cofounders, I took up the responsibility for how the employees were doing during their engagement with the company. Having had some experiences with mental health research and counseling, it was quite pertinent to me that the employees there felt a positive emotional impact from the workplace. To ensure this, regular check-ins were done through weekly One-on-Ones and light conversations beyond work.

In the last year of my engagement with the company, we had Shiva from ABC offer an introductory session on EI for Workplace. While I had already trusted they had been doing important work, being part of the session validated my trust in their effectiveness in doing that important work too. We discussed in our team about running the complete course that ABC would offer to all the team ABCbers including the employees. Later on, the 'EI Mindset' course run by ABC was then offered online to be taken up by managers. Considering that to be a good place to start, I participated in the course along with

quite a number of my friends who were in some managing capacity in different workplaces. It was only then that I realized I had only been aware of the term EI but not aware of how to put it into practice. That was how my journey of practicing what it means to be emotionally intelligent started.

Participating in the course and reflecting based on the learnings was quite remarkable in that it showed what is really meant to not be emotional but to operate from an understanding of what emotions are indicative of. One of the bigger implications of coming to this realization was that my journey with the team I was working on was coming to an end. To simply work through the emotions and not understand what I was needing came at a significant cost. I tied my loose ends, wrapped the projects I was leading and working on, and handed them over to the team to move on to something else.

I had always had an understanding that the lack of EI would wreak havoc on someone's individual lives, teams, families, and organizations. I knew not many were willing to work on this and that for a team like ABC to exist was quite rare. I had wanted to contribute from the time I realized they had been operating to help individuals, institutions, and organizations work through this. And so, after I left the company I co-founded, I knew ABC would be one place where I'd belong and can most contribute to. After my formal application process and a couple of rounds of interviews with the CoFounders, I joined the team and made working on EI my primary goal thereafter.

### **Developing EI Course for Organizational Leadership**

In 2018, Shiva and I (Bhusan) decided to start ABC as an organization to work exclusively on EI in Nepal. As part of testing the waters to see what works and what doesn't, we started with a program called Start Here; a 10-day program for youths aged 18-25 to explore and express themselves. Although we had quite a successful run initially, with the feedback provided by the participants, the need for EI in organizations was brought into the limelight by the participants. We started having numerous conversations with organizational leaders regarding why EI is important for organizational leadership. Dulewicz and Higgs (2003) argue that EI is a crucial factor in leadership and that it becomes more noteworthy as one makes their way up the

leadership hierarchy. Our conversations led us to a realization that for most organizations in Nepal, EI was a unique term. They were fascinated about it and wanted to try a one-off workshop. But we figured that most were reluctant to give a sustained effort in learning and reflection to cultivate an emotionally intelligent culture in their organizations. As we were going around doing one-off sessions, something unexpected happened in 2020. Punit Jajodia, the founder of XYZNepal, a transcription-based IT company, wrote an email to ABC asking if we could bring ABC's sessions to his team. He said he wanted his culture to be built around EI and therefore wanted something that's applicable and not just theoretical. XYZNepal and ABC agreed to have one 2-hour introductory session. The intention was to conduct a pilot program for 20 participants who attended the introductory session and shift towards a longer program if the team gave positive feedback. Having taken the introductory 2-hour session, all of the participants were interested in exploring the concept further. Thus, we began crafting our 10-hour EI Mindset course.

### **Relevance of the EI Mindset Course**

Edmondson (2011) shares that most executives they have interacted with believe that failure isn't good. They argue that it is because failure and fault are virtually inseparable in most households, organizations, and cultures. Edmondson (2011) suggests that every child eventually comes to realize at some point that admitting failure means being at the receiving end of blame. That is why very few workplaces have been able to shift to a culture of psychological safety in which learning from failure is rewarded. As we see it, Edmonson doesn't suggest that failure should be encouraged, but that individual/team failure in organizations can be seen as opportunity for learning and growth. It's difficult to help organizations realize this because of the widespread practice of 'rewarding wins' and 'punishing failures/mistakes.'

It's well within a leader's capability to create and sustain a culture that uproots the blame game and helps people become comfortable with as well as responsible for admitting one's contribution in failures and learning from them (Edmondson, 2011). This can only happen when people have learned the "mindset" required to do so and not just "behavioral corrections." Based on this fundamental idea, we developed the 10-hour Emotional Intelligence Mindset course

based on the principles of the Arbinger Institute and the Nonviolent Communication Model by Dr. Marshall B. Rosenberg. Drawing from the work of the Arbinger Institute and Marshall B. Rosenberg, ABC's EI Mindset course offers 5 sessions as a learning journey that helps participants with frameworks and vocabulary to understand if their own mindset and behaviors are contributing to the problems they complain about. This is what Arbinger calls "Being in the BOX" where one cannot see clearly and therefore remains stuck. They then learn a four-step Nonviolent Communication (NVC) model developed by Dr. Marshall B. Rosenberg to "get out of the BOX" by transforming judgmental thoughts of blame and self-blame into the understanding of one's own feelings and needs and that of others'. The NVC model seems to be an innovative interprofessional educational method that can cultivate openness, empathy and trust (Museux et al., 2016). All in all, the course was designed to

- Assist in the personal growth of individual participants by empowering them with practical frameworks, vocabulary, and reflective space to become self-aware, empathetic, and engage in empathic communication
- Assist in team-building by offering a common language and shared space to have conversations around both personal as well as collective needs, objectives, and challenges
- Assist in nurturing conflict resolution skills in team ABCbers so that self-awareness, empathy, and empathic communication can replace misunderstanding, miscommunication, and conflict.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Reflecting on the Impact of the Course**

The hope of the ABC EI Mindset Course was to create a space that brings people together, to provide them with tools and frameworks to self-reflect and understand each other, and to provide a common language to bring everyone on the same page so that they can resolve pertinent people problems through the lens of an impact-focused mindset rather than a self-focused blaming mindset. As we completed facilitating the course, it was important for us to reflect on the impact of the course, thus we asked the human resource team from the XYZ

team if they would be willing to be a part of the process. Here's the story from their side.

### ***Reduct's Reflection: From Saloni's and Rusha's Point of View***

XYZNepal is an IT service company that helps companies with reliable, quick, and accurate transcription, translation, and caption services. Reduct's focus has always been on investing in the team's learning and development and striving for healthy work culture. Performance is an important aspect of competitive advantage because individual performance impacts team performance and this team performance ultimately affects the performance of the whole organization (Ronny & Susanti, 2019 as cited in Edward & Purba, 2020). It is very important for us to have a strong, reliable, and empowered team. And to achieve this, the EI session seemed perfect. We were a young team and we needed to work on our soft skills, teamwork, and empathy, and this applied to both our full-time employees' team and transcribers' team. Also, as our transcribers' team works remotely, we hoped that EI sessions would help in minimizing the chances of misunderstanding and miscommunications. For instance, quite a lot of times we found many difficult situations result from miscommunication. We would then change the way of communicating or frequency or similar factors. The course led us to the understanding that unless all those changes result from a shift in mindset, all behavioral changes are futile in the long run. This realization came not only as a conceptual clarity but something that we had witnessed all along in our organization, but had difficulty pinning. Later this was validated more by McKinsey's research on change management where they found that 70% of change programs fail to achieve their goals (Ewenstein et al., 2015).

We were exploring different training and development opportunities. When we came across ABC, we were not sure what could be expected from the sessions or if they would be helpful for the team. We were barely familiar with the term EI but we knew for sure that EI would be very important for us. Thus, we instantly agreed to take the sessions. We had expected that the session would help us to better understand and manage our emotions, improve our personal and professional relationships, work on empathy, and improve our overall company culture. The content was very rich, with practical tools and lessons. Also, most of the sessions catered to our organizational needs of



developing a culture where people get along with each other, and take time to listen and understand each other so that collaboration is easier. So, they were relatable to us. All of our team ABCbers have felt that the sessions have added value to their well-being and have impacted their way of thinking and interactions. The sessions helped us to identify how our emotions are triggered; we are more aware of why we feel a certain way. We have also become more aware of how we tend to jump to conclusions without giving second thoughts. Now, more focus is on the underlying motive or needs rather than on the actions when dissecting our emotions and feelings. For instance, in a recent conversation with a team ABCber, he shared that he was feeling disconnected from the team as he was mostly working from home but his teammates were working from the office. He also shared that he didn't have a spare two-wheeler at his home to be used for the daily commute, and hence this was his major blocker in coming to the office. So, we proposed financial assistance to buy a two-wheeler, and the employee was more than happy to have his problem solved. We feel this open conversation was a result of investment in psychological safety and empathy, as well as being more inclined towards employee well-being. Devonish (2016) suggests that leaders should prioritize EI in their recruitment decisions, learning and development programs and the overall performance management systems to optimize job performance as the well-being of individuals is a key driver of positive work behaviors.

The concepts from the sessions have been a guiding component in our role as Peoples-Operations Team. The sessions' concepts have helped us ensure our organization as a psychologically safe space. Psychological safety refers to a climate in which individuals can openly ask questions, share concerns and ideas and admit mistakes all without fear of being judged, humiliated or punished later on (Edmondson, 2018). We are able to better understand and identify our team's needs and take responsive actions in different situations. Instead of just asking *'how is everything going?'* we break it down into specific questions about the person's needs and well-being – both personal and professional. In our one-on-one conversations and meetings, we never miss asking the team ABCbers if their needs have been met or not, or if they are facing any challenges. If yes, we also inquire about how it can be solved or how we and the organization can be of help. It is dealt with on a case-by-case basis. We also focus



on how the workplace feels like to an employee, and why it feels like that. One of our most used methods to identify the needs of our employees is through periodic one-on-ones and open conversations. If an employee is facing any problem, we try to make sure that he/she feels comfortable coming to us and sharing about it. Either way, we focus on needs identification and desirable course of action through conversation and two-way feedback. For example, recently, we were able to identify the different needs of the different departments. We had no spare work area in the office. So, the lounge room, which was supposed to be used for recreation, was being used by some teams as a working space. The teams were aware that their needs for productivity or relaxation were not being fulfilled or only partially fulfilled. So we designed another designated working space that could be used by any team for work. This made the lounge room available for relaxation all the time, and we also had a spare work area. As the HR department, we always engage in identifying the needs of the organization and the team ABCbers and design the needed course of action

Careful implementation of EI models in organizations can assist organizations in helping leaders, supervisors, and employees to increase personal effectiveness which ultimately leads to improved organizational outcomes (Kunnanatt, 2004). These sessions have helped us grow personally more than professionally. We are able to open up more regarding our problems and have grown to become more of a listener who listens to understand than to reply. Instead of trying to provide suggestions and opinions, we now try to first understand the root cause of the problem that people are facing and what's causing them to react in a certain way. It has helped us understand the mindset each person holds and how their behaviors are derived from it. It has also made us become aware of the importance of an impact-focused mindset that takes others into account.

EI module has enabled different positive changes within the team and the overall organization, starting with the reflective spaces that have been provided to us. It has helped us build psychological safety within the organization. It has also helped us reflect upon how sometimes our work lacks human touch based on the digits and numbers that we're crunching on a daily basis and help us get back according to the need. After participating in the sessions, we now feel completely safe to share our problems with our team ABCbers without worrying

about the judgment that might follow next. We've started developing the habit of taking accountability for one's actions rather than shifting blame within each other.

## **REFLECTION**

For XYZ Nepal, the course of ABC became an agency of meaning and impact for the team, but we did have our own share of highs and lows of working in the organization. Though organizations want to get in touch for short-run sessions and workshops with them, for us to see the impacts of EI on the overall organizational culture and output, dedicated longer sessions are important. Facilitating a complete course on EI helped us see the shifts in understanding about how human emotions work and what these are indicative of in every course.

Facilitating the sessions would present situations where participants would come up with their own understanding of what it meant to understand emotions. The primary goal the participants would have in mind, was to control their emotions with the understanding that emotions are not something that should be visible or expressed, or acknowledged. To help them come to terms with how emotions are essentially important data, offering us a glimpse of what is happening for us, and not assets that need to be managed, diffused, or sanitized would offer them a completely new paradigm with which to think about their own emotions (Petriglieri, 2014). The check-ins were done after a period of the course's completion which would equally offer a glimpse of the effectiveness and relevance of the course. Participants keep coming up with instances in their professional as well as personal lives by integrating the concepts learned as part of emotional literacy. The EI sessions have led to realizations and helped them to catch themselves from staying self-deceived, making conflicts worse, or making assumptions about others' objectives to name a few.

Meanwhile, apart from Reduct, we also facilitated several short sessions for other organizations as well. Reflecting on our experiences, organizations normally look for something that is quick to grasp and easy to apply. Perhaps this is the reason why many have preferred engaging in a two-hour session. As practitioners or trainers, we feel that although a two-hour session is a wonderful way to get started on

the type of concepts we offer, it isn't enough. A two-hour session is only a partial introduction to educate participants on self-awareness, empathy, and empathic communication. A deeper dive is important to understand the full scope of the content. This first session is just the education phase. Two more stages emerge beyond the education stage: implementing the learnings on a day-to-day basis as well as making these practices sustainable. For all the three stages to be intact, organizations need to be willing to:

1. Have participants join a longer course for a better understanding of EI
2. Identify ways to incorporate the key concepts and vocabulary in their everyday culture
3. Do regular check-ins so that the concepts are fresh in the minds of participants
4. Ensure leaders are modeling emotional intelligence principles in their roles
5. Improve systems in a way that addresses the needs, objectives, and challenges of team ABCbers

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