Emotional Intelligence and the Winds of Change in Academic Libraries

Dana Hendrix

Emotional intelligence involves the ability to perceive accurately, appraise, and express emotion; the ability to access and/or generate feelings when they facilitate thought; the ability to understand emotion and emotional knowledge; and the ability to regulate emotions to promote emotional and intellectual growth.

–John D. Mayer and Peter Salovey[1]

The Winds of Change in Academic Libraries

Popular media predictions of the demise of libraries and printed books; shifting conceptions of librarians' roles; structural reorganizations; financial strictures; doomsday pronouncements about the future of academia; and the googlization of absolutely everything—these and other pressures create the winds of change that are buffeting academic librarians.

Excerpts from the *College & Research Libraries News* "2012 Top Ten Trends in Academic Libraries" further illustrate the turbulence of the academic library environment:

 "Academic libraries must prove the value they provide to the academic enterprise….

"Higher education institutions are entering a period of flux, and potentially even turmoil….

"Social networks and new publishing paradigms…challenge the library's role…and place libraries under pressure….

"New scholarly communication and publishing models are developing at an ever-faster pace, requiring libraries to be actively involved or be left behind….

"New skill sets are needed…."[2]

Managing the emotion that change and uncertain futures can engender is a current challenge in many fields; change can have wide-ranging emotional impact on people in the corporate and academic, public and private arenas. "Change is both an individual and a social phenomenon, and emotions are not destructive but a vital part of change. Emotions structure how people create meaning in the face of change and help people navigate change."[3] Change management resources address emotion in the workplace in varied implicit or explicit ways; in *Changing on the Job*, for instance, Jennifer Garvey Berger writes about "ancient reflexes" such as fight versus flight that may not serve modern workers as well as they did "on the savanna." She asks, "in a world where our reflexes are increasingly misleading, and the skills we need are increasingly complex and multifaceted, how can we manage ourselves better?"[4] People working in changing environments can manage themselves better by having an articulated framework and vocabulary for attending to the emotional terrain of change for themselves and their colleagues. Improved management of workplace emotion can help create successful change by enhancing optimism and agility and enabling people to make sense of change efforts.

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Are workplace change-related emotions more challenging for academic librarians than for some other professionals? The library has long been the symbolic heart of a university, and librarians' professional identities and culture are strong; change that disrupts identity or culture can be more of a challenge to manage emotionally. Understanding and fostering emotional intelligence for oneself and one's colleagues is a recommended component of organizational change planning and implementation because librarians in the midst of change who focus on understanding, assessing and strengthening their own emotional intelligence, no matter their place in the library organizational chart, can better cope with workplace stress. They can manage challenging emotions and are less likely to cause increased stress in others. The benefits of an emotionally intelligent workplace improve the chance of successful creative and productive change efforts and also improve personal outcomes for individuals affected by change. This paper explores the academic library management literature on organizational change and emotion to find support for the assertion that emotional intelligence is a useful framework in the current academic library environment.

Organizational Change and Workplace Emotion

Emotion attendant to organizational change can be intense; the recent reorganization of the Harvard University Libraries provides an excellent example. A mid-2012 report in *American Libraries* noted that "despite a series of communications from Harvard officials…campuswide worries about the fate of the library system and its staff have not eased," and noted that anxiety is a typical accompaniment to reorganization. It was made clear in Harvard's case that involuntary workforce reductions would occur, and a staff member was quoted saying that some employees were "terrified."[5]

Research on the role of emotion in the workplace is relatively recent, but the emotional part of the human brain is ancient and emotions actually appear to have evolved "so as to signal and respond to changes in relationships between the individual and the environment (including one's imagined place within it). For instance, anger arises in response to perceived threat or injustice; fear arises in response to perceived danger….Moreover, each emotion organizes several basic behavioral responses…for example, fear organizes freezing or fleeing."[6]

Emotions have a particular role to play in a changing environment. Neuroscience research has revealed the complex role of the brain in human emotion and emotional response. Goleman notes, "Many…are traditionally skeptical of 'soft' psychology and wary of the pop theories that come and go, but neuroscience makes crystal clear why emotional intelligence matters so much."[7]

Change may lead to positive emotion—it can be energizing and engaging, with opportunities to be creative, learn new skills, re-imagine workflows and policies, and extend professional impact. But it can instead or in combination lead to negative emotion—unhelpful levels of anxiety, self-doubt, suspicion, anger, grief, or helplessness. Stress from emotions that are difficult to manage can negatively impact an individual's performance and damage physical and mental health—and may be "contagious"[8] to coworkers and thus either detrimental or beneficial to the organization.

The impact of employee emotion in the workplace is not in question. "Organizational life evokes joy, hate, anger, despair, curiosity, and esteem….Work life is emotion laden, and emotional expression has become more accepted in U.S. organizations with the popularity of emotional intelligence as a core interpersonal competency."[9] Both theory and research indicate that emotional intelligence can moderate workers' reactions to stress related to job insecurity.[10] Though the primary focus of any organization is to achieve its mission and goals, the secondary focus "is to take care of the emotional life of the people in the system….the emotional health of the organization reflects its adaptive capacity and determines its ability to be creative, innovative and responsive."[11] Concepts in emotional intelligence are crucial to functioning in a changing workplace.

Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence (EI) was popularized in the U.S. in 1995 with Goleman's bestseller *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ*.[12] Since then, there has been burgeoning empirical work on the topic as well as a proliferation of popular works based more—or, often, less—on academic studies.[13] Goleman, a PhD researcher who also writes for a popular audience, illuminates EI this way: "Our emotional *intelligence* determines our potential for learning the practical skills that are based on its five elements: self-

awareness, motivation, self-regulation, empathy, and adeptness in relationships. Our emotional *competence* shows how much of that potential we have translated into on-the-job capabilities."[14]

Since, as noted above, our emotions originated specifically to help with recognition of and response to change, the awareness and management of related emotions makes sense as part of any intelligent change process; awareness and management of emotion is the core of EI, and though there are varied definitions and many questions, significant research exists.

The root concepts of EI extend back to the 1930s, but in the 1990s work began by today's leading researchers, including Goleman, Salovey, and Mayer. These and other experts have offered varied definitions, claims, studies, and assessment approaches.

Salovey and Mayer's work has been subject to the most academic study and their assessment tool found to be valid. They say, "emotional intelligence involves the ability to perceive accurately, appraise, and express emotion; the ability to access and/or generate feelings when they facilitate thought; the ability to understand emotion and emotional knowledge; and the ability to regulate emotions to promote emotional and intellectual growth." These abilities include four branches: "Perception, appraisal, and expression of emotion," "emotional facilitation of thinking," "understanding and analyzing emotions; employing emotional knowledge," and "reflective regulation of emotions to promote emotional and intellectual growth."[15]

In the popular press, EI is widely discussed and often misunderstood. There are many books and assessment tools available that claim to measure or enhance EI that have not been empirically validated. High EI is not the same as being "nice" or accommodating, nor does it involve psychological counseling of coworkers. Rather, it encompasses nuanced functional competencies that are appropriate to the workplace, as demonstrated in numerous sources from the academic library literature.

Library Literature on Organizational Change + EI: "The Profession is Clamoring for These Missing Soft Skills"

Within the library management literature, this author identified many resources strongly advocating for the importance of EI during times of organizational change, and only one article that questioned whether EI research relating to library leadership has proven itself. In that case the matter was primarily method-

ological; Jody Condit Fagan's critique was that two frequently cited articles failed "to fully connect…with existing research."[16]

High EI correlates with job performance ratings for those where emotional affect matters, as in service professions where interaction with customers or clients is part of the job.[17] In librarianship, EI has been considered as an element in varied service contexts, including the reference interview.[18]

Hernon provides an excellent overview of EI research in chapter 2 of *Academic Librarians as Emotionally Intelligent Leaders*. In it, he notes bluntly that EI is "necessary for leaders engaged in change management to possess."[19]

Organizational Change Leads to Emotional Response

Organizational change creates emotional response in workers, and the emotions can be strong and varied. Scott et al. surveyed academic librarians about their emotional responses to change, and noted that "given myriad pressures not least financial, academic libraries are fundamentally reinventing themselves in order to remain a valued partner in achieving the missions of their institutions. This process of change may present a challenge to library administrators seeking to obtain buy-in and support from the librarians and staff in their institutions." Scott's survey found that budget cuts, loss of staff, and change in management were the top reasons for change in libraries, and that as a group as well as individually librarians' emotional responses to change were mixed and contradictory, including cynical (57 percent), anxious or worried (54 percent), optimistic (51 percent), and discouraged (46 percent). Those who felt satisfied with their level of involvement in the change process were more likely to be optimistic, excited, or confident; those who were not satisfied with their level of involvement were more likely to be cynical, anxious, discouraged, or apathetic.[20]

In *The Challenge of Library Management*: *Leading with Emotional Engagement,* vanDuinkerken and Mosley note that "employees can bog down on a change when the issues resonate at an intensely personal level and conflict with their core values or self-identity in their jobs. In this sort of situation, the change may actually be more reflective of a bereavement situation and the individuals will be going through a manifestation of the grief process, with an accompanying sense of loss of something very important to them or abandonment by the organization."[21]

The emotional impact of the changes in academic libraries is partly due to a sense of loss. Barclay writes explicitly about the grief staff may experience during times of change and the need to acknowledge it. "Library staff often feel genuine sorrow over the ending of some thing into which they may have poured years of their professional lives. This sorrow needs to be acknowledged, as does the fact that their work was, and always will be, of genuine value."[22] Mixed or clear messages that one's work is not valued or is no longer relevant leads to strong, sometimes disabling, emotion.

The significance of employees' change-related emotions needs to be acknowledged patiently and repeatedly over time. Von Dran, in a broad overview called "Human Resources and Leadership Strategies for Libraries in Transition," notes that "during crises and times of change, employees need emotional support. They are looking for hope, inspiration, and confidence in their leaders, who in turn need to communicate their faith in employees' abilities to weather the storm and forge ahead into new territories. This requires continuous encouragement to change as well as providing safe opportunities to share personal fears and feelings of insecurity."[23]

Library managers must contend with many kinds of concurrent change and attendant emotion. In a 2009 article, vanDuikerken and Mosley write from an emotional perspective about a specific change context, that of reconfiguring workspaces. They say, "Change related to one's work area can be personalized beyond the manager's intent. Underlying beliefs may lead some employees to feel anger, hostility, anxiety, and despair toward the management that is implementing the change….Dealing with the logistical planning is easy compared to dealing with these emotional responses. However, the savvy manager can turn a stressful event into a morale building…activity by effectively addressing these emotional responses through communication and direct empowerment activities."[24] Reading Mosley and vanDuinkerken's article on workspace changes based on their experience with reconfigurations at Texas A&M University provides an excellent case study of a common work situation handled with high EI. They advocate for and discuss in detail an intentional process integrating excellent communication, employee empowerment, and continued communication by follow-up and evaluation throughout the change process. Recognizing the emotional picture for management and staff increases the likelihood of success, fosters trust, increases buy-in, and demonstrates respect, and it led to successful workspace reconfigurations at Texas A&M's library.

Are Change Efforts More Likely to Fail in an Environment of Low EI?

The library management literature includes repeated assertions of the need for EI on the part of leadership during times of change. Maureen Sullivan, a past president of the Association of College and Research Libraries and current president of the American Library Association, was asked in a 2012 interview, "How do you see the new generation of leaders? What kind of qualities should they possess?" She responded: "Emotional intelligence. The ability to be aware of your own emotions, and of others' emotions, is key to managing one's self and others." She recommended beginning such leadership development at the MLIS level.[25] And in their classic text *Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice, and Leadership*, used in the ACRL/Harvard Leadership Institute for Academic Librarians (which Sullivan helped establish), Bolman and Deal address EI, noting that "many change efforts fail not because managers' intentions are incorrect or insincere but because the managers are unable to handle the social challenges of changing."[26]

In their 2008 edited volume *Academic Librarians as Emotionally Intelligent Leaders*, Hernon, Giesecke, and Alire echo Bolman and Deal when they write, "Too often, in creating change strategies, leaders may develop strategies that do not build on the strategies that create emotionally intelligent organizations. They risk alienating employees who feel disengaged from the organization. When employees disengage from the organization, they no longer perform at levels that can lead the organization to excellence."[27]

What High EI Looks Like and How Leaders Use it to Create Successful Change

Much of the broader EI management literature focuses on positional leadership's responsibility and motivation for establishing an emotionally intelligent style and organizational culture. Hernon et al focus on the roles and responsibilities of leaders in academic libraries in *Academic Librarians as Emotionally Intelligent Leaders*. They assert that emotionally intelligent leaders "do not breed fear. Instead, they build on the organizational vision and mission to engage employ-

ees in the organization so the group will connect emotionally with the organization in a positive way, giving them an understanding of how meaningful their work is to the organization."[28]

High EI in leaders is linked with the "transformational" style of leadership, which is characterized by charisma, articulation of a vision of the future, intellectual stimulation, and a focus on involving the individual employee.[29] In the conclusion of a chapter-long literature review of EI research, Hernon notes: "Most…studies have shown that EI is a component of transformational leadership."[30] A study by Hernon and Rossiter mapped an analysis of job advertisements from 2000-2004 to EI traits drawn from Goleman's work. They analyzed ads for library director positions, and then also surveyed Association of Research Libraries library directors to find out how they prioritized the various traits. Hernon and Rossiter's work replicated studies showing that leaders with high EI have much in common with transformational leaders, showing that a "defining characteristic that emerges repeatedly in the literature on transformational leadership is that the leader is an agent of change, a catalyst for change, but not a controller of change." They also identify numerous change abilities that overlap with EI traits such as being 'comfortable with change,' and being 'flexible in adapting to change or overcoming obstacles.'"[31]

Acknowledging emotions that arise in reaction to change may foster employee buy-in and also help build or rebuild trust. Porter notes, "Managers can employ emotional intelligence (EI) to build trust among employees, to effectively handle crises, and to produce an efficient, team-oriented work environment."[32] Jackson writes about implementing a workflow change and seeing that "shared interests in improving the workflow…became clear through the discussions I had with faculty and staff [about the change]; however, so did hesitation and fear. Communication was also very hard, and the barriers had to be broken down. A key element that has to be built is trust—in one another and in the process."[33]

EI-infused change in a workplace may take longer than change processes that do not incorporate EI. It requires patience, respect for the people involved, and inclusion of the individuals in the process rather than simply a determined focus on new structural, mission, and technical goals. It takes time for people to advance through the stages of change, explained

by vanDuinkerken and Mosely (after Kubler-Ross) as denial, resistance, exploration, and commitment. They note that the length of time for an employee to proceed through each stage will vary, that individuals may not progress directly through the four stages in strict order, that the resistance stage is where the most intense emotions occur, and that "most employees will eventually move past the resistance stage and into the exploration phase."[34]

EI and the Rest of Us: Leading from Anywhere

It is clear that EI is an important competency for library leaders; the strong focus on EI research in leaders implies that leaders, with their responsibility for strategic direction, determining organizational culture, and leading change and managing people, bear most of the burden for using and modeling EI. This is true, but is not the entire picture; in a changing work environment employees at all levels can use their own EI skills to function well. Porter notes, "emotional intelligence skills are just as important in enabling effective relationships with colleagues and supervisors, no matter where they sit in the hierarchical structure." She recalls the challenge of working for a supervisor with low EI and recommends listening, watching, and adjusting to the reactions of others.[35]

Kreitz studied EI and library leaders when she surveyed university library directors and also their senior management teams regarding the most important EI traits. As she notes, leaders are not always those at the top of the organizational chart; they may be anyone in the organization with positive influence and the trust of their coworkers. She observes that "the number of EI traits possessed by leaders affects their degree of success in running organizations. A leader's high EI has been linked to the emotional climate of an organization and its financial or operational success. Leadership, however, is not confined to one person (that is, to the boss). Others in the organization may also be leaders, influencing those whom they supervise and impacting the top leader's effectiveness." The article presents three lists of prioritized EI qualities: one for library directors, one for senior managers, and for one all leaders, at any level.[36]

In "Lead Like You Really Mean It," Parker includes EI among leadership competencies for associate university librarians and discusses the increase in research on emotion in the workplace, libraries included. She points to a correlation between positive organizational

climates and high EI scores of the managers involved, and uses a four-domain structure of EI developed by Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee to guide new associate university librarians in their transition into leadership, emphasizing the importance of being "self-aware and act[ing] with intention" and noting that "the importance of understanding the emotional impacts of change has begun to emerge as a topic of research."[37]

Promis asserts that with "massive changes occurring in the library environment of today….emphasizing the development or enhancement of Emotional Intelligence (EI) competencies can give information professionals the edge needed to succeed….If cognitive intelligence and academic credentials are no longer enough." She notes that "the importance of behavioral competencies surfaces repeatedly in the literature…." Her study of "soft skills" in position advertisements from entry level to dean and director, categorized using Goleman's Emotional Competence Framework, revealed that "a significant percentage of job advertisements are not designed to attract emotionally intelligent individuals" though "the profession is clamoring for these missing soft skills."[38] Clearly, hiring processes should include awareness of EI for candidates coming in to create change or coming into a changing environment.

EI is of heightened importance during times of organizational change in academic libraries. Emotion in the workplace may be neglected as focus on structural, technological, and mission changes predominate—but these changes may engender complex emotions that in turn may hinder organizational and individual efforts if not managed well by employees and managers with high EI abilities. Perceiving emotions, using emotions to facilitate thought, understanding emotions, and managing emotions are abilities that are needed in a changing organization.

Emotional Intelligence: Do You Have It? Can You Get More of It?

Salovey and Mayer are among the leading authorities on EI and since 1990 they and others, including Goleman, have developed and refined valid assessment tools for measuring it. Copyright compliance requires fees be paid for use of the tests, which may be taken online or in print by individuals or groups; rates vary and may be waived for research purposes.

Some EI tests are so-called 360-degree assessments, and some are self-reporting. A 360-degree as-

sessment includes constructive input solicited from others such as coworkers, family, and friends—as well as and in comparison to one's assessment of oneself—in the final analysis. Self-reports rely on the individual's own answers to the instrument. Two assessment tools that are determined to be valid by the Consortium for Research on Emotional intelligence in Organizations (CREIO) are the MSCEIT and the ESCI; both may be of special interest during change processes.

Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT)

- Self-reporting assessment
- Developed by John D. Mayer, Peter Salovey, and David Caruso
- May be particularly useful before beginning "large-scale organizational development initiatives such as structural change" or "for facilitating employees' transition from one organizational structure to another."[39] This model "enjoys the strongest theoretical and empirical support among the competing definitions of emotional intelligence"[40]
- Available from Multi Health Systems [www.mhs.com]

Emotional and Social Competence Inventory (ESCI)

- 360-degree assessment
- Developed by Daniel Goleman and Richard Boyatzis
- May measure "competencies that are not necessarily emotional" but could be useful, "such as serving as a change catalyst or flexibility in handling change"[41]
- Available from The Hay Group [www.hay-group.com/TL]

There are other tests that are valid as well, but many of the commercially or freely available tests in books or on the web have doubtful validity so *caveat emptor*—buyer beware.

Can EI abilities be increased in individuals, whatever their role in the organization? It is certainly worth the effort to try, since as Goleman bluntly observes, "out-of-control emotions can make smart people stupid."[42] On his website, Mayer notes that "when most people ask the question, what they may mean is, "Is it possible for someone to increase his or her emotional knowledge?" and, perhaps, "Is it possible for someone to improve their social and emotional functioning?" In both cases, the answer is almost certainly yes."[43]

Research over the past 15 years has shown that training and development approaches can increase EI in customer service positions and among those in health care, law enforcement, and other fields.[44] Kreitz asserts that for librarians, "EI skill improvement can be developed through formal coursework, workshops and leadership institutes, mentoring, on-the-job coaching, analytical tools, and, finally, rigorous self-scrutiny and practice."[45] CREIO offers 22 guidelines for developing EI in organizations in four phases: preparation, training, transfer, and evaluation.[46]

In "A Place to Begin: Emotional Intelligence," Montgomery and Cook note that libraries may recognize the importance of EI skills and bring in a "quick fix" trainer to address an EI-related topic, but developing EI is not the same as other kinds of workplace training that may be accomplished quickly. "There is…a need for support of and commitment to the principles and success of any EI training program by management at every level of the organization."[47] Two examples of library EI development efforts that have continued in commitment over time are found at the Washington State University Libraries and the University of Houston Libraries.

In 2007, the Washington State University Libraries formed a task force that developed an internal leadership training program that included emotional intelligence among five topics addressed. Several cohorts were formed over a period of time, and emotional intelligence was the most popular of the five topics, which led to additional opportunities for training in EI being offered. In 2009 the Libraries were planning to develop the program as an annual offering and the task force members believed that the program had a positive effect on organizational culture.[48]

In 2012, the University of Houston Libraries offered their staff a workshop called "Emotional Intelligence and Organizational Culture" conducted by consultant DeEtta Jones. In spring and fall of that year, after finding there was strong interest in the impact of emotional intelligence on job performance, additional workshops were offered and participants invited to take the Emotional Quotient Inventory [EQ-i, another validated assessment tool] as well. A member of the university's human resources staff conducted these workshops. Some library departments are using what they've learned in these workshops to improve internal communication, and the Libraries' training committee is sponsoring a series of informal discussions about emotional intelligence as well.[49]

EI can be increased, and raising it for a work group or individual is not a quick or foolproof process. It requires individual buy-in and determination as well as ongoing organizational support and mentoring. Given the benefits of high EI during times of change, it is worth exploring and investing in.

Conclusion

Academic libraries are in a period of rapid organizational change, which can be engaging and stimulating and can also arouse strong emotion as a result of perceived losses and conflicting values; librarians are experiencing a range of emotion including optimism, cynicism, anxiety and apathy. On university campuses libraries have traditionally been highly valued, but the changes occurring in academic libraries now may seem to call libraries' role into question. Individuals facing reorganizations, budget cuts, and altered job duties and anticipating or experiencing change, especially change that is outside their control, will likely have feelings of wariness, anxiety, or concern—variations of fear. Unmanaged emotion can be contagious to others and detrimental to the change process and to the individual.

Low EI workplaces can struggle more with change than workplaces where EI is an integrated part of the environment. Library leaders—who may be in positions of leadership or in entry-level jobs, where they lead by example—can and should work to develop their own EI, since low EI can derail a change process by creating alienation and disengagement. Mixed or clear messages that one's work is not valued or is no longer relevant may lead to resignations when retraining and adaptation might have been possible. Emotions evolved to help our earliest ancestors respond and adapt to changes in the environment; all employees should bring their own EI skills to bear on whatever challenges they face as changes are made around them or at their direction, and library hiring decisions and professional development planning should be made with an eye toward EI especially during this time of exceptional change.

EI matters for employees at all levels, and anyone in an organization can lead by example. But implicit in the emphasis on leadership in academic library emotional intelligence literature is the notion that there is a higher expectation for EI on the part of leaders. In

change management, the person driving the change has a greater responsibility to understand and manage the emotion of the situation. A high EI leader will help employees see what is important to the organization and how they can be involved, making it less likely they will be emotionally resistant to change.

Change managed with EI has many benefits. It creates a positive organizational climate; increases employee buy-in and trust; strengthens creativity and the ability to handle crises; and it enables more productive relationships with colleagues and supervisors. Change managed with EI is more likely to be respectful to employees: in a time of change, top-down processes that ignore the predictable stressful effects of change and do not provide them appropriate assistance to adapt fail to meet the obligation of employers to work with people as expectations and demands of a job are altered. Finally, as demonstrated in library studies, high EI abilities make job candidates in the field more desirable.

Perceiving emotions, using emotions to facilitate thought, understanding emotions, and managing emotions for selves and coworkers are abilities that make a positive difference in a change process, and EI can be measured and improved upon. There are practical steps librarians can take to increase their EI and use it like the blades of a wind turbine, harnessing the current buffeting winds of change in academic libraries to generate the energy needed to create a healthier organization and more adaptable employees.

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