ENHANCING EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE IN THE ENGLISH FOR PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATION CLASS

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Abstract: In a society which has become more and more sophisticated in terms of diversity, emotional intelligence is one of the most sought-after skill in the world of work. Apart from specific expertise, professionals need to prove they have efficient social negotiation styles, so as to be able to bridge communication gaps at the workplace and to work with others for a common goal, by successfully managing the inevitable mismatches brought about the issue of alterity.

The paper is looking into possible ways of enhancing emotional intelligence in the "English for Professional Communication" class. It discusses the importance and the structure of a theoretical approach of issues such as cultural intelligence, career planning, personal work style, networking, time management, leadership, team work, negotiation skills, conflict resolution, and public speaking skills. In addition, it gives practical examples of activities that could trigger students' awareness of work style preferences, strong points/ weak points and other issues that might influence their performance at the workplace.

Keywords: Emotional intelligence, career planning, cultural intelligence, English for Professional Communication

I. Emotional Intelligence at the Workplace

Increasing emotional intelligence at the workplace has long been on organizations' agenda. By now, it has become obvious that expertise is not enough to achieve one's potential as a participant in the business game and that specific technical competence needs to be backed up by the skilfulness to juggle the uniqueness and the diversity of people and circumstances one has to deal with in one's professional life. There are many ways in which lack of EI of both individuals and groups has proven to impact on the effectiveness of organizations, among which: "employee recruitment and retention, development of talent,

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teamwork, employee commitment, morale and health, innovation, productivity, efficiency, sales, revenues, quality of services, customer loyalty, client or student outcomes" (Cherniss, 2001:6). Therefore, taking into consideration EI and its effects as early as possible in one's life is in itself a sign of emotional intelligence and a prerequisite to a successful career and to a successful business.

Theoreticians have captured the elusiveness of the EI under the form of various models, all of them pointing to two main areas of research to be covered: the emotional life of the Self and that of the Others. Therefore, EI is defined as the ability to recognize, assess and regulate one's own internal dialogues and to sense and react properly to the others' emotional manifestations (Garner 1983; Goleman 1995; Bar-On, 1997; Mayer, Salovey and Caruso, 2000). Howard Garner speaks of intrapersonal (relationship with oneself) and interpersonal intelligence (relationship with the others). Reuven Bar-On breaks down the concept into five distinct items: intrapersonal skills, interpersonal skills, adaptability, stress management, and general mood (Bar-On, 1997). The Mayer and Salovey four branch model includes the abilities 1) to accurately perceive emotions in oneself and others 2) use emotions to facilitate thinking 3) understand emotional meanings, and 4) manage emotions (Mayer and Salovey 1997). In its turn, the best-known paradigm of all, Goleman's EI paradigm, criticized and refined, but, to our mind, the most comprehensive EI model to date, formulates EI in terms of a theory of performance and it highlights its four aspects: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness and relationship management (Goleman 1998). According to Goleman, there is a distinction between emotional intelligence and emotional competence, as "an emotional competence is a learned capability based on emotional intelligence that results in outstanding performance at work" (Goleman 2001:27). Thus, the dimension of self-awareness, which is our main interest in this article, describes three competences, namely "emotional self-awareness, accurate self-assessment, self-confidence", while social awareness comprises "empathy, service orientation, and organizational awareness". In their turn, self-management involves "emotional self-control, trustworthiness, consciousness, adaptability, achievement drive, initiative", and relationship management relies on "developing others, influence, communication, conflict management, visionary leadership, catalysing change, building bonds, teamwork and collaboration" (Goleman 2001:28).

Basing his theory on the above mentioned frameworks, Liptak states that "personal and career counselling should be integrated for a holistic counselling approach" (Liptak 2005: 175) and he puts forth the CCM model (The Confluence Counselling Model) in which he

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identifies three sets of skills students need in order to succeed at the workplace: career and job search skills, personal competence skills, and social competence skills. While the first type of skills overlaps the types of skills to be expected from regular career counselling (ability to find a match between one's potential and the professions available on the job market, decision-making skills and ability to adjust to the routine and the unwritten codes existing at the workplace), personal and social skills come to refine the self by making the students more aware of who they are intrinsically and who they are in relationship with the others in their working life. Thus, confluence counselling bridges the gap between the self and the outer world, and it addresses the questions of integration and social negotiation in a more complex way, which takes into consideration the sophisticated and ever changing nature of human interactions.

While the "English for Professional Communication" seminar is essentially a language class, and cannot claim to compete for the title of a career counselling module, it does pertain to what specialized literature has called CLIL, Content and Language Integrated Learning, since its objectives go beyond mere teaching of language, and the term of "confluence" between language, personal development and acquisition of social negotiation skills is representative of the philosophy underlying this seminar. Thus, students are familiarized with a variety of issues related to the world of work (intercultural communication, company organogram, telephoning skills, writing short professional documents, elements of the employment file, job interviews, presentation skills, time management, leadership, delegating tasks, successful meetings, networking etc.), and equipped with formal English vocabulary meant to help students project a more sophisticated personal and professional image at the work place. The following section puts forth a description of some of the tasks assigned during the seminar and the students' feedback, in an attempt to show how such tasks are able to promote self-awareness and social awareness, and thus, they become exercises of emotional intelligence in their own right, a first step to a better management of one's own inner world and of one's relationship with the outer one. The feedback was given by means of an anonymous mini-questionnaire in which a total of fifty 1st year students in the Faculty of Automatic Control and Computer Science had to answer the following questions: 1) Which was the most interesting task assigned during this semester and why? 2) Which was the least interesting task assigned this semester and why?, and 3) To what extent did any of these tasks make you aware of something new (ex. the realities of the world of work, your own weaknesses and strengths etc.)

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II. Enhancing Emotional Intelligence in the Class

One of the most important topics to be covered during the English for Professional Communication seminar I teach at the Polytechnic University of Bucharest pertains to the issue of intercultural communication. Under this overarching term, a series of concepts are briefly described and exemplified: definitions of culture, cultural intelligence, cultural shock, ethnorelativism/ethnocentrism, stereotypes, political correctness, positive discrimination, communication patterns, para-verbal/non-verbal communication in various cultures, work styles etc. During the seminar students are exposed to a wide range of tasks and teaching methods: direct teacher input, elicitation of answers, for and against debates, listening and reading exercises, research-based presentations of various cultures or cultural critical incidents. At the end of this mini-module on intercultural communication, students had to complete their own personal cultural orientation map, based on the cultural models of G.Hofstede, E.Hall, and B. Petersons, and to reflect on how their preferences and inclinations may foster or hinder their progress in their future professional life. All the tasks and the activities are designed with the dimensions of self-awareness and social awareness in mind. Here are some comments testifying that some of the tasks have attained their objective: "Now I understand that I should respect the values of others, even if I don't like them."/ "I've realised that I have things to improve, in order to be ready to deal with work colleagues."/ "I realised that different people may have very diverse views on life and that made me think more about mine."/ "I think I am definitely more prepared to deal with people from different cultures now, as well as with people from my own culture, who have other values."/ "I realised that I [as a Romanian] have some weird habits, if you were to ask a Japanese."/ "The cultural orientation map made me know myself better…and that it is better to listen to the others' opinions, to be open-minded".

Some other topics approached during the English for Professional Communication seminar are related to company life. During the seminars, students are exposed to formal, advanced vocabulary related to the world of work, and are made to reflect and research on issues such as: their idea of success, their intrinsic and extrinsic motivation to work, their ideal workplace, their employability skills, company identification and research, time management, effective written communication, networking, teamwork, delegating tasks, leadership, self-actualization etc. The topics are introduced with the help of a variety of tasks: watching videos related to the psychology of work (writer and philosopher Alain de Botton's video series and essays on career from his personal development institute "The School of

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Life" have proven to be quite popular with my students); solving vocabulary exercises which introduce notions and concepts related to work routines and business etiquette; listening and reading exercises; reflecting on one's personal image at the workplace, values and professional skills, transferable skills included, and work habits. The latter turned out to trigger obvious changes in terms of awareness, according to my students' feedback. Here are some answers: "I found your ideal workplace [task] the most interesting because it made me think about my future, it made me realize my weak and strong points…"/ "The videos related to the world of work helped me overcome procrastination."/"The most interesting task was the one about personal values and skills. Not only that I got to understand other persons, but I also understood myself."/ "The task about personal values raised my awareness about my own habits and personality and made me discover more about myself and what I can do, what I cannot do and where my boundaries are."/ "[the tasks made me aware of the fact that] we are all different and it's OK to be like that."/ "I learned more about myself, made a list of my values and traced the characteristics of my personality. I find this very useful and I am glad I had the chance to take part in it"./ " I see these tasks as mental exercises, and any kind of such exercise brings you closer to the best version of yourself."

One last topic I will dwell on is the job interview simulation. The job interview simulation is the penultimate issue to be tackled during the English for Professional Communication seminar, right before oral presentation skills. It is the final stage in which the students make proof of the self-awareness and the social awareness gained hitherto through their participation in the class and their exposure to different tasks. Successful participation in the interview simulation entails careful prior preparation and engagement with the task; it is also a time when a variety of issues come together to shape the individual into that particular type of employee that would make a difference to the company. Self-aware students will be given the opportunity to resort to self-management and to take control of their own emotions and channel them into positive energy; socially aware students will equally show their ability to manage a relationship with the others: if they are interviewees, to show the " emotional self-control, trustworthiness, consciousness, adaptability, achievement drive, initiative" Goleman was speaking of, or, in case they have chosen the interviewers' role, to show their ability "to develop others" (in this case, to make their candidates show their true potential during the interview) and to make proof of their ability to collaborate and work in a team whose members are supposed to choose the best match for a certain job. Here are some answers related to this task: "It made me realise how important body language is."/ "The

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simulation made me aware of the selecting process that goes on during the interview. I will use that to my advantage."/ "I realized I need to improve my communication skills."/ "The interview made me aware of the fact that I am nervous and shy in this situation." / "I learned that I should be more open-minded and calmer."/ "I know now I can easily work under a lot of pressure."/ "It made me more confident."/ "What I found interesting was that we could see the interview from both perspectives (the interviewer and the interviewee)."/ "It made me realize that life is harder in practice than it is in my head."

III. Conclusion

We can conclude that, while all the tasks assigned during the seminar are meant to raise awareness of a particular life situation in a way or another, reflection-based tasks seem to be the best at achieving this objective. Taking time to think about one's own wishes about the professional future, likes and dislikes, feelings and values, strong points and weak points, seems to result in better relational outcomes. Thus, the English for Communication seminar can bring its modest, still essential contribution to the enhancement of emotional intelligence by honing those soft skills required in the workplace nowadays. The rest is up to the student, who, now that s/he is more aware of his/her own limitations and potential, will hopefully remain interested in self-actualisation throughout his/her professional life.

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