

Do U-Lead Cohort Leadership Programs Improve Emotional Intelligence? Measuring Change in EQi Scores of MARL Program Participants

Extension Educators: Michael J. Liepold, Catherine Rasmussen, Kim Boyce, and Extension Leadership Specialist, Denise Trudeau-Poskas, Center for Community Vitality

Introduction

As Extension strives to empower individuals with effective leadership skills, it has become apparent that there is a need to enhance participants' effectiveness in handling complex situations, communicating effectively, and moderating their ability to react. Extension's U-Lead cohort leadership programs have a strong track record of building cognitive and analytical skills. However, a key component to being an effective leader today is "emotional intelligence." Emotional Intelligence is best defined as *the ability to identify and manage emotional information in oneself and others and focus energy on required behaviors.*

Previous Research

Existing research has shown that an individual's emotional intelligence quotient (EQ) can better predict success in life, both in professional and personal pursuits, than IQ or cognitive intelligence (Goldman, 1995). The US Air Force is just one of many organizations that is using EQ assessments and trainings to improve retention, increase productivity, improve performance and gain savings (BarOn, 2006). Multiple studies have shown that emotional intelligence competencies often account for the difference between star performers and average performers, particularly in positions of leadership (Durek, 2006). Additionally, a growing body of research demonstrates that EQ is also a predictor of "success" in leadership roles. And unlike cognitive intelligence, emotional intelligence can be improved by focused effort, coaching and training on specific areas (Pearman, 2006). Emotional intelligence is improved through assessment, demonstrating skills, practice and immediate feedback (Cherniss, 2010).

The BarOn EQi

Authored by Dr. Reuven BarOn, the BarOn Emotional Quotient Inventory was published in 1997 by Multi-Health Systems. The BarOn EQi measures 15 facets of emotional intelligence within five main categories: intrapersonal, interpersonal, stress management, adaptability, and general mood. The EQi has been shown to be a strong predictor of success and is the tool used more than any other because it has more predictive validity (BarOn, 2006).

MARL Program

The Minnesota Agriculture and Rural Leadership Program (MARL) is an extensive eighteen month leadership cohort experience focused on developing the skills of Minnesota agricultural and rural leaders so they may maximize their impact in local, state, national and international arenas. This U-Lead program features nine educational sessions in Minnesota cities, a study tour in Washington DC and an international study tour. MARL has 150 alumni and is currently beginning class VI.



Class V

Intent of this Project

>To determine if emotional intelligence skills increase as a result of participation in a U-Lead cohort leadership program.

>To consider the support and strategies for EQi using it not as a predictor of leadership and job success, but as a developmental tool that will benefit the participants of the MARL program.

Research Methodology

>The 32 participants in MARL Class V took the BarOn Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQi) in November of 2009. Each participant received an individualized report and was personally debriefed on the results, in person or by telephone, by one of three certified Extension Educators.

>In December of 2009, Extension Educators presented a two-hour workshop on the basic understanding of emotional intelligence. Participants created individual development plans and identified specific behaviors to change.

>Participants self-selected triads based on their areas of strength and areas of development. These triads met at scheduled times throughout the duration of the 18 month program for reflective and peer monitoring.

>In March of 2010, participants again completed the online instrument and were debriefed by telephone by the same Extension Educator. Group summaries of both the pre and post EQi results were generated by Multi-Health Systems, Inc. and compared. Results were also compared using an unpaired t-test on each of the subscales of the 32 participants.

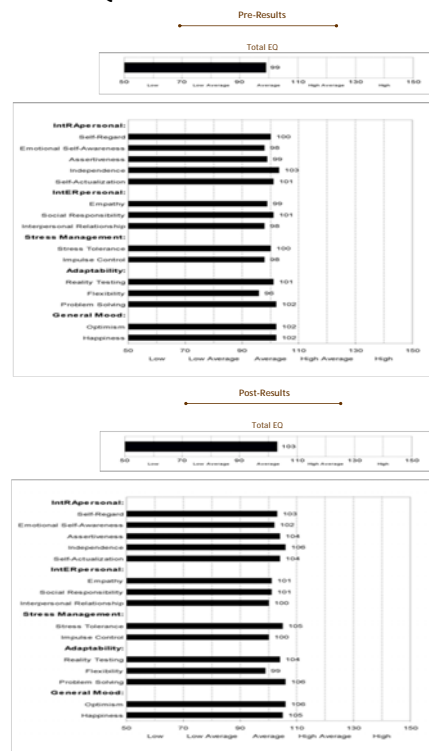
>Qualitative findings were gathered on participant's perceived degree of change through exit interviews.



References

- BarOn, R. (2006). The BarOn Model of Emotional-Social Intelligence (ESI). *Psicothema*, 18, suppl., 13-25.
- Cherniss, C. (2010). Guidelines for securing organizational support for emotional intelligence efforts. Retrieved May, 2010 from <http://www.eiconsortium.com>.
- Durek, D. (2006). *Selecting Emotionally Intelligent Leaders for a Competitive Advantage*. MHS.
- Goleman, D. (1995). *Emotional intelligence: Why can it matter more than IQ*. Bentam, New York.
- Pearman, R. (2006). *Introduction to Type and Emotional Intelligence: Pathways to Performance*. Palo Alto, CA. CPP, Inc.

Quantitative Results



Comparison of the pre and post results of the BarOn EQi showed no significant change in the five categories of the inventory but a slight significance in change in one of the 15 subscales of Problem Solving. The t-test results indicated there was no movement above the critical value as it relates to the categories of the EQi. MHS t-tests also showed the same results of no significance to slight significance in some of the subscales.

University of Minnesota Extension is an equal opportunity educator and employer. This material is available in alternative formats upon request. Direct requests to 320-234-0431.

Qualitative Results

When participants were asked if the EQi was of value to them in their development as a leader, 26 out of 30 indicated it was. Selected comments included:

- > "Yes, I appreciated these kinds of tools. Just having the validation of strengths and weaknesses and a plan of action was something I have honestly used. It has made a difference in how I relate to people."
- > "I think the value was not in the before/after scores but when the awareness we received by taking the test and having the review with one of the coordinators."
- > "Yes it brought out the values I felt I held and this reinforced what I knew and was surprised by some items it pulled out."



Participants were also asked, "Of the Emotional Intelligence skills you chose to work on, to what degree did you see successful change?" Following are selected comments by participants who reported that they had worked on increasing a specific emotional intelligence skill during the program:

- > "I believe I saw a number of positive changes overall when the two EQi's are compared. Patience, empathy and more understanding about people's needs have increased."



- > "Managing personal stress. I have worked on improving the recognition of what I can control and what is out of my control."
- > "The skill that I chose to work on was my impulse control. I feel there was an improvement over the last year, but it is something that I feel I need to continue to work on."

Conclusions and Implications

- > The majority of MARL participants reported that the EQi was a positive experience as a self-awareness building instrument.
- > The participants who reported focusing efforts on improving specific emotional intelligence skills felt that they had some degree of success.
- > It was not surprising that results of the pre and post assessments showed no significant change. The results provides a baseline of the changes one could expect without intentional intervention strategies.
- > The authors plan to administer the BarOn EQi prior to and following the MARL Class VI. We believe that by targeting individual skill areas, spending time in reinforcing class activities, developing personal action plans, allotting time for personal and group reflection and setting up accountability triads, we may be able to create measurable increases in emotional intelligence subscales.