

TOWARDS HUMAN-CENTERED SOCIETY: THE ROLE OF EMOTIONS IN THE COMPANY.

“Humans are uniquely able to give and receive love, and that's what differentiates us from AI. I can responsibly tell you that AI has no love”¹.

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Introduction and theoretical background

We are in the core of the Industry 4.0 era, where the connection between physical and digital systems allows companies to explore new opportunities and make production processes more efficient (Theorin et al., 2017). This transformation has consequences for the use of human capital and for the skills required in the job market. In this context, companies emerge as being oriented towards enhancing soft skills in their training activities and professional paths. These skills refer the set of non-specific skills and abilities that refer to each individual's knowing to be. More specifically, they are interpersonal qualities, also known as people skills, and personal attributes that one possesses (Robles, 2012). These skills are used by individuals both in work contexts and in the field of interpersonal relations.

Emotional intelligence (EI) has emerge as one of these soft skills. Nowadays, it is considered strategic and vital for companies because it allows to consciously recognize, understand and manage the emotions of those working for the organization at different level (Goleman et al., 2013). Specifically, EI is the ability to motivate oneself, to persist in pursuing a goal despite frustration, to control impulses, to modulate one's moods, avoiding that suffering prevents one from thinking, being empathetic (Goleman, 2006).

The older literature has emphasized the importance of hard skills in the context of work environment. However, emotionality and soft skills have now acquired a new meaning in business contexts, both at the level of managers and at the one of employees. In this guise, it has been suggested that the organizational climate influences the company's results and positive emotions can boost productivity (Akgün et al., 2007; Heffernan et al., 2008; Miao et al., 2018). Despite this, there are few empirical studies on EI. Therefore, we still know little about the role of emotions in companies and how they affect success, strategies and behaviours in the company. According to this, this paper aims to answer to the following questions:

¹ Kai-Fu Lee at TED2018 - How AI can save our humanity.

1. Is it possible to identify company's emotions?
2. Is it possible to intervene in such a way as to restore harmony and promote corporate growth?

Methodology

To answer to the two research questions, this research employs an empirical research involving in-depth interviews with a group of small and medium enterprises operating in northern Italy and a survey research approach with a group of students of the School of Management and Economics of the University of Turin. The questionnaire was administered to 462 students who were about to graduate and enter the workplace, with the aim of understanding whether and how emotional intelligence and emotions will play a significant role in the world of economic organizations, and to assess the use of this tool for the personal and professional development of human resources within companies. Questions were taken from previous studies (Oatley et al., 1987; Gross, 1998).

Qualitative interview was carried out on a sample of 30 SMEs and structured professional studios in northern Italy with a number of employees between 5 and 60, with the aim of collecting the personal opinions and subjective interpretations of the respondents regarding the relationship and use of their emotions in the business context. Specifically, the qualitative interview is aimed at understanding the degree of awareness and the ability to manage the emotions of the company leader, as well as the real role of emotions within the company context (Goleman, 2013). The interview is divided into 10 open-ended questions designed to leave space for respondents to tell specific episodes and examples.

Findings and conclusions

Overall, the results obtained from questionnaire administrated to students and from the qualitative interviews with entrepreneurs showed a particular attention to the importance of emotional skills, in line with the recent literature on EI (Huy & Zott, 2019).

In particular, from what emerges from the survey, students are self-aware regarding their emotional skills such as resilience, social intuition, perspective and empathy. The same applies to entrepreneurs who have tended to say that emotions play an important role in their daily work, both in their position as leaders and in their relationship with customers. In addition, the entrepreneurs interviewed showed awareness of the importance of emotions to enhance the

management of human resources, to create cohesion, promote motivation and, consequently, to increase business productivity.

The survey with students shows how aware and driven they are towards the emotional dimension, and this can only be a positive sign that companies will have to grasp and exploit. Regardless of whether these students become leaders or collaborators, emotional intelligence and emotional management will help them to interact positively with colleagues and customers in future job.

The leaders of the companies interviewed have shown that emotional skills are essential for good management of employees and can become useful indicators to detect the demotivation of staff or any tensions and problems in the work, especially when dealing with change. They also recognized that the emotions of the leader can influence positively or negatively the work team. Therefore, a good leader must first of all work on his or her emotional intelligence so that his or her collaborators can channel his or her emotions and focus his or her energies on completing daily tasks and achieving the company's objectives.

In conclusion, the research findings confirm that it is possible to detect company's emotions (RQ1) as both students and entrepreneurs were able to report specific emotions associated with episodes of professional life, as well as to describe the emotions of employees in certain situations.

Finally, to the question "Is it possible to intervene in order to restore harmony and encourage business growth?" (RQ2) the answer is affirmative because from what emerged from the research, the leader has a fundamental role in terms of harmony of the working group and, consequently, the organizational climate (Goleman et al., 2013). A serene business climate promotes productivity and cohesion, making the teams motivated and aligned with the company's mission and vision. Entrepreneurs should therefore work constantly on the development of their emotional intelligence and use tools, such as questionnaires, interviews or focus groups, to detect the development of emotions within the company to verify the existence of critical issues and intervene quickly. This is especially important for companies that are constantly changing.

In conclusion, emotions in the company play an extremely important role, because what differentiates human beings from AI is precisely the emotions and empathy. AI can be a valid support, but it cannot replace human beings, because emotions and empathy are an integral part of the working method.

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