A Case Study in Implementing Emotional Intelligence Programs in Organizations

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A Case Study in Implementing Emotional Intelligence Programs in Organizations

Some may still scoff at the apparent "softness" of the concept of emotional intelligence. But, way back before the term had entered the popular vocabulary, American Express Financial Advisors benefited from recognizing the role of emotional intelligence in business success. And the story of how the organization went about this groundbreaking work can offer a model for other early adopters of unconventional and passing solutions. It especially illustrates the critical need for leadership commitment in major change efforts. © 2001 John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Cary Cherniss and Robert D. Caplan

American Express Financial Advisors prides itself on helping clients develop financial plans that include the purchase of life insurance. But in 1991, the senior vice president in charge of life insurance at American Express Financial Advisors (AEFA) noticed that something was wrong. Seventy-three percent of clients with such plans never followed through with the purchase of life insurance. This is the story of how the vice president's process of inquiry led, a year later, to a novel solution—AEFA would train its financial advisors and their managers in "emotional competence." The year was 1991. Four years later, David Goleman's first book on emotional intelligence practically turned the concept into a household word in the halls of corporate America.

How did the AEFA program come about? And what was the impact on sales revenue?

The emotional competence program at American Express Financial Advisors was designed initially to help the company's advisors cope with the emotional reactions that they have to selling life insurance. The advisors learn about the impact of emotions on human behavior, and they learn how to identify and manage their own emotional reactions. Several versions of the program are currently being or have been offered. One version is an integral part of the training that all new advisors receive. Another version is for managers and is a standard part of the new manager development program. A third version is offered to regional management sales teams. There also are versions designed for sales consultants, veteran advisors, and corporate office management teams. In the earliest versions of the program, external licensed psychologists provided the training. Out-

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siders continue to provide the regional management team, or leadership, versions, but veteran advisors now deliver the program to new advisors.

One study showed that when group vice presidents and their direct reports received emotional competence training, their advisors generated 11 percent more growth in sales revenue during a 15-month period.

Two versions of the program have been evaluated. The findings suggest that advisors who receive the training generate more sales revenue than advisors do who are not given it. Furthermore, when regional management teams are trained, their advisors generate more revenue than advisors working in regions where the management teams have not received the training. For instance, one study showed that when group vice presidents and their direct reports received emotional competence training, their advisors generated 11 percent more growth in sales revenue during a 15-month period than did advisors whose management team did not go through the training. The company estimated that this difference resulted in over $200 million more in sales revenue. Moreover, the program is well liked: 91 percent of participants report a positive personal benefit, and 88 percent of leaders report that it is relevant to their jobs.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE PROGRAM

In 1991, the senior vice president in charge of life insurance noticed that few of the clients whose financial plans called for the purchase of life insurance actually bought some. His first thought was that there was something wrong with the product, but his marketing people could not discover any serious flaws that would lead to such a low purchase rate. So he established a *skunk works* team comprising four individuals with different backgrounds, and he told them to take six months to study the problem and come up with a solution. They had complete autonomy and their own budget. The only restrictions were that they must support any conclusions with data, and they should be innovative in their thinking. Although this unconventional approach raised some eyebrows, there was little overt opposition because this executive had a great deal of credibility. He had come to the company a few years before and had quickly established a stellar record. He was viewed as one of the most successful executives in the life insurance industry. Also, the company was very profitable at this time.

The skunk works team commissioned a series of studies by an outside consulting firm. The results suggested that many advisors found it unpleasant to sell life insurance to their clients. Selling life insurance made them feel guilty, embarrassed, and even ashamed. They felt that selling was not congruent with their role or values. These negative emotional reactions seemed to be a major impediment to sales. Traditional methods of motivation encouraged the advisors to ignore or override their emotional resistance. However, these methods seemed to make the problem worse, not better.

The "skunks" sought permission to test a theory about why more insurance was not being sold. They proposed conducting a pilot program. This program would teach advisors how to become aware of their emotional reactions and to cope with them in adaptive ways. For instance, in one exercise, participants would learn how to focus on what they were feeling at that point in time; a list of *feeling words* would help them identify their feelings. In another exercise, they would learn to become aware of the *self-talk* that led to disruptive feelings like self-doubt or shame and to replace it with more accurate, constructive self-talk. Management gave the skunk works team members permission to conduct the experiment. They designed and implemented the program and evaluated its impact on sales revenue. They found that the advisors who went through the training generated more revenue than a matched group that did not.

After this successful pilot, the first corporate sponsor, the senior vice president in charge of life insurance, decided that the program should become a regular part of the training for advisors. The senior vice president in charge of sales agreed. He had long argued that the sales process was strongly influenced by emotion. He became a staunch advocate for the program, frequently mentioning it in his talks with advisors around the country and encouraging them to sign up for it.

About this time (1994), the skunk works team also changed. Some of the original members left to assume other responsibilities in the company, and a new person joined the team. Trainers and consultants from outside the company also helped with the planning. The team members now developed a new version of the program for regional management teams. It was intended to teach managers how to be *emotional coaches* to the advisors. The first session of the pilot program, however, was a disaster. The trainers and their material failed to connect with the trainees. The trainees felt that the trainers were unfamiliar with the process of financial advising and that their material was mostly "psycho-babble." The problem was partly due to the training design and a lack of fit between the trainers' personal qualities and the trainees' expectations. There was too much lecturing, and the trainers presented themselves as experts rather than as guides and facilitators. Another difficulty arose from social dynamics within the trainee group. The trainees came from two regional offices that had recently been merged, and there was still considerable tension between the people from the different offices. (As a result of this experience, trainers now find out beforehand about the dynamics of the groups they will work with so that they can take these issues into account during training.)

Two members of the emotional competence team revised the program after the disastrous pilot. They made the material more relevant and business-oriented, and they selected new trainers. A third team member used her influence to get a second chance to test the program. The second session went much better, and this leadership version of the program became popular with regional management teams during the next two years.

Over time the program evolved in both design and management. The skunk works team eventually was broken up, and two members were assigned to different groups in the company. One took charge of the leadership versions of the program, and the other focused on the advisor versions. Although research suggested that the program had a positive impact on sales, and the senior VP for sales continued to provide strong support, the initial resistance to the program continued. The program manager in charge of the leadership versions was assigned to other responsibilities and told not to spend time on the emotional competence program. She continued to work on the program in her spare time, and her performance review suffered as a result. Finally at the end of 1998, she was told there was no money in the budget for her or the program. Rather than try to secure another position in the company, she decided to leave to promote emotional competence training in a more supportive setting. Resistance to the program had persisted because some managers and advisors remained unconvinced that becoming more skilled in handling emotions would lead to more sales.

The trainees felt that the trainers were unfamiliar with the process of financial advising and that their material was mostly "psycho-babble."

In spite of this resistance, however, the company continued to offer the program. Within two months after the senior program manager left, the head of training for advisors assigned someone else to oversee it. Six months later, the program was more popular than ever, and the company was selling it to other companies. (A chronology of the case is presented in **Exhibit 1**.)

Despite continued resistance and a future that remains unclear, the emotional competence program represents a successful implementation in many ways. It was established in a large corporation several years before emotional competence became an "O.K." topic in business organizations, and it has survived for over eight years. The program's success results primarily from two factors. The first is how well it has navigated the three critical stages required for the successful implementation of an innovation: exploration, innovation and mutual adaptation, and institutionalization. The second is the emotional intelligence of the program's implementers.

STAGE 1: EXPLORATION

During the exploration phase, a proposed innovative program or practice needs a champion, and

1991	A skunk works project is set up by the senior vice president for life insurance to find out why clients are not buying more life insurance. He selects four people to form the team.
1992	The skunk works team conducts three studies on the role of emotion in the business and reports on the results throughout the company.
1993	The team develops and implements the first training program for a group of advisors.
1994	The team reports on the results of the first training program. Three of the original four members of the team leave, and a new person joins the project. Trainers and consultants from outside the company help with the planning. The project is shifted from the life insurance organization to the sales training organization; it is now under the sponsorship of the executive VP for sales.
1994-1995	A version of the program for leaders is developed and piloted with one regional management group. The first module is a disaster. The program is redesigned, the trainers are changed, and the second module is presented to the same group. The outcome is much more positive.
1995	The leadership version of the program is repeated in several other regions. There is much demand for it and positive feedback. A corporation-wide training initiative provides resources for offering the program throughout the regions. A new version of the program for veteran advisors is designed. Training on emotional competence is added to the standard training for advisors. Another version of the program becomes part of the new manager development program.
1996	The veteran advisor version of the program is scaled back from three days to one day. The results are disappointing. The program is offered to corporate office leadership teams.
1997	A version of the program for sales consultants is developed. The manager of the program begins to market it to other companies.
1998	The original program manager leaves the company.
1999	A new manager for the program is selected, and efforts to market the program outside the company intensify.
2000	The program continues to be implemented in the company and in other companies as well.

Exhibit 1. Chronology of Program Development and Implementation

that champion must be able to demonstrate that there is a critical need and that the innovation addresses that critical need. In addition, employees who are expected to adopt the new practice must be exposed to convincing evidence that they are capable of adopting the new practice. After all, what good is a perfect solution if nobody feels capable of implementing it? All three of these ingredients—a champion, demonstration that the innovation addresses a critical need, and convincing evidence that it can work—were present in the case of the emotional competence program.

Championing the Innovation: Sponsorship from a Powerful Executive. For better or worse, organizations are political entities. The support of an influential executive who can provide political protection and financial backing can make the difference between success and failure for a new initiative that promotes emotional intelligence.

The AEFA emotional competence program had two powerful sponsors who helped the program become established and gain widespread recognition. The first was the senior vice president in charge of life insurance. He was the one who brought together the four people who eventually developed the emotional competence program. When they recommended a solution that would train advisors to better cope with their feelings, there was much skepticism and eye-rolling. The vice president often heard comments such as, "Why do you want to allocate money for this touchy-feely garbage?" But he provided the protection that the project's designers needed to go on and validate their findings.

This executive was a particularly effective sponsor for several reasons. He had come to the company a few years before and had established a solid track record there. At the time, he was the head of the fastest-growing life insurance concern in the country and was viewed by many as a mover and shaker in the insurance industry. Moreover, he was an actuary by training, and actuaries are viewed as anything but reckless or "flaky." All these credentials gave him a great deal of credibility and clout. With this kind of sponsorship, the new program was allowed to move ahead with its unconventional message. A sponsor's power will depend on a number of factors, including position in the organization, perceived expertise, and likability. The executive who initially provided sponsorship for the emotional competence program scored high in each of these areas.

Once the program had been pilot tested and evaluated, the first sponsor handed it off to the senior vice president in charge of sales. He became an even more enthusiastic sponsor of the program. And he, too, was a powerful source of support. This sales executive had been with the company for twenty years, starting as an advisor right out of college. From the beginning he had been extraordinarily successful. Within a year he had been asked to help train new advisors and within two years he had been promoted to district manager. His district was the top in the country for seven of eight years. He had been the executive in charge of sales for over five years when he became the program's sponsor. He was viewed as an "excellent sales leader" and he was very well regarded in the field and in the home office. Also, he headed up one of the most valued parts of the company; as one person put it, "New sales is what generates revenue for the company."

The sales VP liked the program. He had long believed that emotions were crucial to selling. He was convinced that his own success had much to do with helping people deal with emotions. He even had written a book in which he discussed the importance of emotions and motivation in sales. Thus, when he became the "owner" of the program, he gave it more than just a home and a budget. He became an advocate and gave the program a strong plug every time he spoke to a new group of advisors. This sponsor's support was crucial for the program's acceptance and survival. As one person put it, "People in the field could have killed it, and would have, without his support."

Advisor empathy was crucial for developing trust with the client.

Demonstrating Need. One of the most important factors contributing to the program's adoption was that it developed as a direct response to a business need. Too many clients were failing to follow up on recommended purchases of life insurance. The marketing people had tried several approaches, but nothing made a significant difference. Finally, a marketing study that also studied the advisors led to the idea that advisor empathy was crucial for developing trust with the client. These studies also suggested that advisor self-doubt was a major barrier in selling. Emotional competence training then was developed and offered as a solution to this business problem.

The program's close link to a business need was reinforced by the fact that it was developed as part of a marketing effort rather than as an HR initiative. It was not initially designed as a course to improve the human relations skills of employees. It was the life insurance VP, not the HR VP, who initiated the first work in this area. None of the four members of the original skunk works team came from HR. Later the program was shifted to the VP for sales.

A strong research base also strengthened the link between the new program and the business need. The initiator of the emotional competence program expected it to be based on research from the beginning. The members of the skunk works group that developed the program were told that they had almost complete freedom to do whatever they wanted but that, succeed or fail, they should "learn something." One of the few criteria for deliverables was that "recommendations must be supported by research." Consequently one of the first actions taken by the team was to hire a consulting firm to study the ways emotions entered into the process of buying and selling life insurance.

The maximum impact was achieved by the combination of hard data on sales and emotionally gripping anecdotes.

After conducting an initial study that focused on the emotions stirred up for the clients, the same firm did a study focusing on the emotions experienced by the advisors when they tried to sell life insurance. The results showed that many advisors felt uneasy about this part of their role. To confirm the study results, the team proposed yet another study to look at the correlation between advisor success and emotional coping ability. When the results suggested that successful advisors were, in fact, more adept at coping with the emotional side of selling, the team did one more study: It set up an experimental training program designed to teach advisors how to cope better, and it evaluated whether those who went through the program subsequently sold more insurance than a control group.

A number of persons confirmed that these studies were important in helping to make the case for emotional competence training. One person said that he initially was skeptical about the whole idea, but when he saw the results of the research, "It was startling."

As results became available, the team made numerous presentations to different groups in the company. The fact that the studies were done by outside experts with strong academic credentials helped to give the results credibility. However, not all the research was compelling. The first two studies were not especially convincing for many people in the company. Nevertheless, they were strong enough for the team to get continued support for more research and development work.

Eventually, the team was able to provide convincing sales data, and that was what had the biggest impact for many. However, qualitative data that struck a value nerve were important, too. For instance, it deeply troubled some executives to read statements from the advisors study such as, "I feel like a used car salesman when I try to sell life insurance," or "It makes me feel unethical." Thus, the maximum impact was achieved by the combination of hard data on sales and emotionally gripping anecdotes. Of course, some managers and executives in the company remained skeptical. One person said, "The evaluation data haven't been persuasive at all. Everyone knows you can make data say what you want. The data were looked at with suspicion." For this individual and some others, it was more important that the program had the backing of powerful sponsors and that so many participants liked it. Nevertheless, many people in the company were impressed that the program was based on solid research.

The planners continued to focus on linking the program to business needs when the program shifted to the regional level. For example, the planners spent considerable time on the phone with each regional vice president to learn about the business needs of that particular group, and they were willing to modify the program to meet a region's particular needs. In delivering the program, the trainers also focused initially on linking it to business needs. They spent time early in the training on exercises that showed the trainees how emotional competence contributes to the advising process. In this case, really strong support for the program developed only after program advocates *demonstrated* that advisors could learn emotional competence and use it to improve sales.

During the early years of the program, considerable time was spent on demonstrating its relevance for important business needs, but as the program became widely used throughout the company, the managers and trainers seemed to spend less time on this important task. As a result, the company seems to have faltered in the critical third phase of implementation, institutionalizing the innovation. Continued resistance to the program after it had been in existence for several years might have been due, in part, to this reduction in emphasis on linking it to a business need. Rather than becoming an institutionalized part of the culture, the program seemed like an ongoing request for change, which is one of the most predictable triggers of resistance to change.

Providing Evidence that Individuals Can Use the New Practice. Unlike other innovations that might be introduced into an organization, the emotional competence program was not initially *observable,* and this made it more difficult than it might otherwise have been for program advocates to convince other managers and employees that the practices taught could actually be used. As a brand-new program created in-house, it could be observed by its creators and company executives only through a pilot run. The planners received permission to conduct such a pilot. The successful pilot, with the compelling data showing that the training led to increased sales, convincingly showed that emotional competence training could be implemented in the company.

STAGE 2: INNOVATION AND MUTUAL ADAPTATION

Once a decision has been made during the exploration stage to pursue a change, teams have to be given considerable freedom to *experiment and explore in* order to innovate and adapt—that is, to discover what works. As general principles evolve, considerable flexibility is still needed to allow the innovator to adapt the innovation to meet the needs and resources of particular implementation sites and contingencies.

Providing Autonomy and Support for Experimentation. In the development of the emotional competence program, using a skunk works team provided the freedom and flexibility necessary for navigating the second stage of successful adoption and implementation of innovative practices. Team members developed and pilot-tested more than one version of the program. They monitored each test run closely, and they spent many hours debriefing among themselves and modifying what they had designed. Putting the project in the hands of a skunk works team helped protect it from such creativity killers as close surveillance, evaluation, and arbitrary deadlines. Teams with comparatively less formality, more flexible roles, and more open flows of information seem best suited to developing initiatives such as emotional intelligence programs. To put it another way, successful innovation is most likely to flourish in groups based on the principles of Peter Senge's *learning organization.* In the formation of the emotional competence program, AEFA achieved these conditions by employing the skunk works technique.

Putting the project in the hands of a skunk works team helped protect it from such creativity killers as close surveillance, evaluation, and arbitrary deadlines.

In establishing the skunk works team, the senior VP for life insurance picked four people who he thought were risk-takers and told them they had six months and $500,000 to figure out why clients were not buying more life insurance. He also told them to be creative and innovative, even if it meant that they failed. "It's okay to strike out as long as you learn something," was the way he put it at one point. The written charter for the team stated: "The team should bat for the home run every time, even if it means we're 0 for 27 at the end. And no bunting! To play it safe, to manufacture a non-breakthrough result for the sake of saying we accomplished something concrete will not be acceptable." Although the team members brought different kinds of expertise and experience, initially there was no leader and no defined roles. The team's first activity was to hire a consulting firm that specialized in creativity training to organize and lead a retreat for them and a few other employees at the company.

Research on innovation suggests that in addition to a high degree of flexibility, development teams need leaders who protect them from outside interference and distractions and set a clear direction without managing too tightly. They also need sufficient resources, encouragement from management, and an atmosphere free of threatening evaluation. Finally, they need a challenge arising from the nature of the problem or its importance to the organization. The skunk works team had all these advantages. The life insurance VP provided the time, resources, and protection necessary for the team to innovate and experiment.

The skunk works mechanism itself played a crucial role in the development of the program.

Several people said that they did not think something as innovative as emotional competence training would have emerged from an existing, traditional group in the organization. In addition to autonomy and the mandate to be creative, a relatively long-term time to work was an important aspect of this skunk works setup. The original charter was extended after the six months so that the team eventually had almost two years and over a million dollars to incubate the program. Without so much time for learning, reflection, and experimentation, the team probably would not have been as successful in establishing the program.

A skunk works arrangement also works best in combination with some other factors. For instance, research shows that "newstream" groups need to be connected to powerful sponsors in the mainstream organization who define goals, allocate resources for experimentation, and integrate the new venture into the establishment. The senior executive who established the skunk works project at AEFA did precisely that.

Too much autonomy can be detrimental, for it can lead to isolation and marginalization of the group and its activities.

Balancing Autonomy and Connectedness. The effectiveness of the skunk works team during the mutual adaptation phase depended in large part on its autonomy and freedom. However, too much autonomy can be detrimental, for it can lead to isolation and marginalization of the group and its activities. A key task for the group is to keep its boundaries with other groups in the organization optimally permeable. In the emotional competence program case, the skunk works team had considerable autonomy, but it was not completely cut off from the rest of the organization. The group members came from other groups in the organization, and they expected to return to other groups after a certain amount of time. They also worked hard to maintain communication with other groups and to avoid ostracizing them or treating them as unimportant to the work in hand. For instance, when they arranged for a consultant to lead a retreat for them on creative thinking, they invited a number of individuals in the company who were not members of the team to attend it with them.

Adaptation Stage Problems. Some of the problems that had to be dealt with during the adaptation stage arose out of group dynamics in the skunk works team, and others were related to the nature of the innovation itself.

Although it proved highly effective in many ways, the skunk works project did have a downside. During much of its existence, internal tension and conflict plagued the group. Part of the problem was that one person was designated the group's "administrator," and another was put on the team because of her "process skills." Yet no one was supposed to be the "leader." Not surprisingly, these two individuals both exerted strong influence and occasionally clashed. Also, the person with the process skills was the only person selected explicitly for social and emotional competence. So in addition to its lack of structure and clear authority, the team overall seemed to lack critical personal and interpersonal competencies that could have helped it deal more effectively with internal tension.

The informality and flexibility of the skunk works team also became liabilities when it shifted into an operational mode and began to design and deliver programs. At that point, the group needed a somewhat more traditional structure. But, as members of the original team left and were replaced, a more viable structure resulted, with one individual emerging as the clear leader.

Furthermore, although the planners of the emotional competence program enjoyed considerable autonomy, their ability to modify and adapt the program as it evolved was hampered by obstacles inherent in the innovation itself. Successful adaptation of an innovation to a particular organizational setting requires that the innovation be somewhat divisible, easy to install, and user-friendly. The emotional competence program encountered difficulty in meeting all three of these needs.

First, the innovation was not easily divisible. After the initial successful implementations of the program, it began to be offered in different forms in different parts of the company. As new groups began to work with it, they tried to scale back the amount of time required for its implementation.

They also tried to use internal training people and even veteran financial advisors with no background in either training or psychology as trainers. These efforts were disappointing.

Second, the innovation was not easy to install. It required highly trained professionals with special expertise, as well as close monitoring by a program manager.

Finally, the innovation has proven to be rather user-unfriendly. The planning team worked hard to make the training experience itself a pleasant one, but emotional competence training cannot be as user-friendly as many other types of training because it involves a high degree of effort and some personal risk on the part of participants and their managers.

These three aspects of the innovation limited the extent to which the planners could adapt the innovation to meet the needs of different users.

But despite these problems, the skunk works team ultimately succeeded in launching the new program. In general, the team's high degree of autonomy and lack of structure proved to be an asset during the second phase of the implementation process when research and experimentation were the central tasks.

STAGE 3: INSTITUTIONALIZATION

Once an innovation has been developed, tested, and refined to fit local needs, planners are ready to move into the third phase of implementation. The challenge for the organization in this last phase is to make the new practice part of the everyday culture, to infuse it throughout the organization. Championship needs to be ongoing and to exist at all levels of management and administration. Although the emotional competence program has made some progress in achieving the tasks necessary for successful institutionalization, there still is much to be done. Evidence for this comes from the fact that many people in the company believe that the program may not survive if its current corporate sponsor leaves. Nevertheless, the program's managers have pursued some strategies that have contributed to at least a degree of institutionalization.

Infusing the Program Throughout the Organization. One way that the emotional competence program has achieved a certain degree of institutionalization is its infusion throughout the organization. Initially the program was designed for advisors. After the pilot the team proposed that a different version be designed for regional management groups. The rationale was that the regional managers met weekly with the advisors, and they could use this time to reinforce emotional competence lessons if they themselves had been exposed to the training. Eventually, an additional version was developed for advisors so that now there is one version for new advisors, which has become a regular part of the new advisor training program, and another version for veteran advisors. Somewhat later, yet a different version of the program was developed for new managers. It, too, has become a regular part of the training for this group. The next version to be developed targeted corporate office management teams. Finally, a version of the program was developed for sales consultants. These are individuals who provide technical assistance to advisors on a variety of matters. The program manager was able to convince the head of this group that many of the situations that sales consultants discussed with advisors had a large emotional competence component. By training the sales consultants to become *emotional coaches,* the company could greatly increase their usefulness to the advisors.

The team's high degree of autonomy and lack of structure proved to be an asset during the second phase.

In addition to all these different versions of the program, a program manager found another way to infuse emotional competence into the company. When she was assigned to a high-profile succession planning effort for the company's top executive positions, she made emotional competence part of the competencies on which executives were assessed. In short, infusion of multiple program versions throughout the organization has helped emotional competence training to survive for a long time and to become established in the company.

Establishing and Maintaining Quality Standards. Another important task for managers in the institutionalization stage is to set up monitoring, feedback, and reward systems to sustain the change. Quality control becomes particularly important, with quality standards clearly established. Then monitoring and feedback need to detect and correct lapses and deviations from the quality standards. "Booster shots" should be given to keep management and nonmanagement from drifting away from key practices. Maintaining a high level of quality control is especially important for emotional intelligence programs. If an emotional intelligence program becomes associated with shoddy, superficial work, resistance to it will increase. Opponents of such training need few excuses to kill it. Thus, the quality of a new emotional intelligence program will be another factor that affects its implementation. High-quality programs have a better chance of gaining acceptance and surviving.

If an emotional intelligence program becomes associated with shoddy, superficial work, resistance to it will increase.

In the case of the AEFA emotional competence program, the program manager was concerned about the program's quality from the beginning. She was constantly on the lookout for areas in which it might be vulnerable to criticism. For this reason, she monitored the trainers very closely, and she fired more than one because they did not meet her exacting standards. She insisted on employing doctoral-level psychologists as trainers, in part because she believed that they would ensure a certain level of quality. During the year following the pilot, the program manager and another member of the skunk works team sat in on every presentation of the program, even though it meant traveling all over the country and spending at least 30 days observing the program being delivered. After each delivery, they devoted several hours to a debriefing with the trainers. Although this close monitoring was expensive, it contributed to a very high level of quality.

One problem, however, has been that this emphasis on quality has never been standardized or formalized to any extent. The only clear quality criterion established concerns the credentials of the trainers: they are, as mentioned, to be doctoral-level psychologists. Everyone has agreed that this is not enough, that trainers need more than formal training in behavioral science. Nevertheless, the other qualities that trainers need have never been clearly spelled out. Even the requirement that the trainers be doctoral-level psychologists has been questioned. Although the original planning group believed that the trainers should be doctoral-level, licensed psychologists, other managers in the company believe that any effective trainer could deliver this training. This ambiguity and uncertainty has made the innovation more difficult to institutionalize.

Training Individuals to Use the Innovation. Another requirement for the institutionalization phase is that many members of the organization need to be trained to implement the innovation. Controversy over who is qualified to be a trainer and the continued reliance on two outsiders to do much of the training has meant that the emotional competence program has not made much progress on this front, either. The program initially relied entirely on outsiders (professional psychologists) with special expertise to deliver it. After two years, some parts of the company tried to implement the program with untrained trainers. In the version that was developed for new advisors, veteran advisors with no special training have been delivering the program. Some of these trainers have not even gone through the program themselves. They were selected because they were part of a pool of veteran advisors brought in to train new advisors. Not until very recently was anyone in the company trained to deliver the new advisors program.

Thus, the company has not yet found a satisfactory way to train employees to deliver the emotional competence program. Neither relying on outsiders nor using untrained insiders will provide the kind of stable foundation necessary for institutionalization of the program.

Routinizing Procedures. Institutionalization of an innovation also requires establishing routine procedures and ensuring that the program becomes a normal part of organizational operations. On one hand, the emotional competence program has made some progress on this front. It now is a standard part of training for both new advisors and new managers. On the other hand, the level of routinization necessary for institutionalizing the innovation has not yet been achieved. Although the program is part of standard training, it is a separate module that could be easily removed.

Offering Financial Incentives for Innovation Use. One other factor that has hampered institutionalization is the lack of financial incentives. Managers and advisors have few, if any, incentives to participate, other than achieving hoped-for gains in revenues. In fact, advisors face a strong disincentive, because they must give up time and opportunities for selling to attend the program.

Thus, although the program continues to flourish, it has not yet successfully navigated the third and final phase of implementation. As a result, the program's long-term survival remains in doubt.

THE EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE OF PROGRAM PLANNERS AND MANAGERS

Implementing emotional intelligence programs in organizations depends, in part, on navigating the three stages described in the previous sections. However, it also depends on *how* these stages are navigated, and this is largely a function of the emotional intelligence of those who orchestrate the implementation effort.

The individuals who implemented the emotional competence program used many social and emotional competencies during all three phases of the process. As mentioned, when the senior VP who set up the project picked four people to work on it initially, one of them was selected specifically for her emotional intelligence or, as it was described it at that time, her "process skills" and the fact that "she would tell the truth." She eventually became the team leader and the manager in charge of the program. During the next five years, she continued to be the primary person who oversaw its implementation. In promoting the program within the company, this manager displayed many emotional and social competencies.

The competencies of self-control, conscientiousness, and adaptability were especially important for establishing the new program. As one of the original team members said, "You need to be okay with ambiguity and okay with failures to do what we did. You need to be able to learn from failures rather than be thrown off by them." The team leader, she said, had this crucial ability. A good example of how the team leader was able to respond adaptively to failure occurred after the disastrous first pilot of the leadership version of the program. When the team gathered to debrief at the end of the program, anxiety and gloom filled the air. Most of the team members sat around and blamed the program participants and the lack of time to prepare adequately. No one wanted to work on fixing the problem at that point. The external facilitator quit the project and took an extended vacation. But the team leader quickly pulled herself together and spent her entire Christmas vacation working to revise the design. Then another team member was able to convince a regional vice president to give the program another chance.

The program manager also demonstrated high achievement orientation in the way she promoted the program. She established high standards for quality and monitored the program closely. For instance, during the first year or so, she was the one who sat in and observed virtually every time the program was delivered. After every training session she met with the trainers and spent countless hours with them to find ways to improve the program. When the trainers did not meet her high standards, their contracts were terminated.

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Most of the people familiar with the program said it never would have succeeded without the program manager's visionary leadership. She assumed leadership early on and inspired others to follow her lead. One of her bosses, who was not particularly supportive of the program, said, "Her passion was compelling." Another person who was not a particular supporter said, "If she had to choose between the program continuing and receiving more recognition for herself, she'd choose the program." She herself said, "I'm a servant of the idea."

The strength of her leadership and commitment was revealed three years later when she was moved to a new position with a new boss who was not supportive of the program. At this time the program management task was split and she became program manager for the leadership versions of the program. This boss gave her other responsibilities and discouraged her from continuing to work on the emotional competence program. In fact, one year her performance rating was reduced because her boss thought she spent too much time on the program. However, she kept managing it anyway in her spare time. That kind of commitment inspired others.

The program manager also scored high in her ability to influence. She was constantly thinking of ways to promote the program and generate support for it. For instance, since most of the advisors were male, the manager made sure that they knew that the program taught techniques used by the most successful professional athletes. She even recruited a sports psychologist to be one of the first trainers.

The program benefited greatly from the emotional intelligence and the high level of social and emotional competence that its manager brought to it.

The program manager also was particularly adept at conflict management. In talking about how she dealt with resistance, she described how she looked for common ground and win-win solutions. For instance, the skunk works team's approach to the program initially seemed incompatible with the views of the senior VP for sales. Instead of fighting or giving up, the program manager bought the VP's book about selling and read it to see what similarities with the program there were. She found there were many. So team members framed what they were doing more in terms of the VP's work, and he became a powerful sponsor of the program.

One other competence that proved to be important in this effort was teamwork and collaboration. The program manager was included in the original team because she was viewed as someone who possessed this competence, and she lived up to her reputation. One member of the team remembered that she was "phenomenal in dealing with process, in helping people to make sense of information and to make decisions." She was good at keeping the group on task, and at the same time, she was very supportive of other people. She also was fair. One team member said, "She never let personal issues affect her as a team member."

Innovators not only need to use many of the competencies associated with emotional intelligence, but also need to emphasize different ones at different points in the implementation process. For instance, during the scouting and exploration phase, competencies such as service orientation and organizational awareness are especially important. During the mutual adaptation phase, adaptability and initiative are critical. Finally, in the institutionalization phase, achievement orientation and conscientiousness are especially important. The first manager of the emotional competence program not only had many of the competencies critical for success but also was able to employ them at appropriate times. She could be adaptable and flexible during the exploration and mutual adaptation phases, and she could also exercise strong leadership and stay focused on achievement during the institutionalization phase. In addition, she used building bonds, initiative, and other competencies to enlist the aid of many others who had competencies that she lacked.

The program manager was not perfect, of course. She did make mistakes. For instance, her concern for quality sometimes led her to micromanage. Her independence and outspokenness got her into trouble more than once. And her commitment and passion for the idea sometimes became liabilities rather than assets. But, in general, the program benefited greatly from the emotional intelligence and the high level of social and emotional competence that its manager brought to it.

CONCLUSION: THE ROLE OF TIMING

This analysis of the implementation of the emotional competence program suggests a number of specific lessons and guidelines for those who wish to implement similar programs in large organizations:

1. Link the proposed program to a business need.

2. Secure the sponsorship of a powerful executive.
3. Provide program implementers with a high degree of autonomy and resources and a mandate to experiment.
4. Establish the program on a strong research base.
5. Monitor the program closely to ensure high quality.
6. Infuse the program throughout the organization.
7. Make sure the implementers have the emotional competencies that contribute to effective performance.

These lessons can help managers, trainers, and consultants establish emotional intelligence initiatives in work organizations. And one other factor—timing—will always be important as well. At any given time in the life of any organization, conditions will be more favorable or less favorable for the implementation of emotional intelligence training and development activities. The emotional competence program benefited greatly from good timing. That is, conditions were highly favorable at AEFA at the time it was implemented. For instance, when the skunk works project was initially established, the company was doing very well. There was relatively little pressure or turbulence. This meant that the people involved, including the executive who initially sponsored it, could take some risks. If, instead, they had been concerned about every dollar they spent, something that then seemed as radical as an emotional competence training program probably could not have happened.

Timing was opportune in one other way. When the training design team completed the first pilot and was ready to start offering the program throughout the company, a strong, corporation-wide training initiative for the salesforce had just begun. Much money suddenly was available for training, and the emotional competence program was among the offerings from which management groups could choose. This favorable climate for training did not last long; within a year the generous subsidies provided by the corporate office for training began to diminish, and within three years they had all but disappeared. But by that time the program had become well established and known throughout the company.

Thus, the first task for those who wish to bring greater emotional intelligence to their organizations is to consider whether the timing is right. If it is, this emotional competence program case study offers many valuable lessons. ■

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