Emotional Intelligence Integration: Elevating Regional Workforce Training for Success in the Post-COVID Workplace

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Executive Summary

The workplace ecosystem is constantly evolving; influenced by different macro factors such as: policy, economics, industry, and human resources. From a micro lens perspective, there are a host of factors that often go unnoticed but are key to the overall health of the ecosystem. One of the factors that is often overlooked is the foundational skill functioning level that workers exhibit within the workplace. The foundational skills needed to deal with interpersonal nuances in the workplace are often categorized within the overarching heading of soft skills. However, our research conducted through surveys and interviews of industry stakeholders and end users, informs us that emotional intelligence is at the crux of foundational skills and is a key component to the implementation of these skills.

The purpose of the foundational skills project was to take a deeper dive into what role emotional intelligence plays in job attainment and retention. Through our findings, we hope to create awareness of the need for strategic funding initiatives to support emotional self-regulation training and development in the Metro-Detroit area.

Emotional Intelligence, a Foundational and Critical Skill

Emotional intelligence in the workplace is a critical skill that improves communication, teamwork, decision-making, stress management, and conflict resolution, ultimately leading to a more positive and productive work environment. By integrating emotional management strategies into their curriculum, regional workforce training programs can prepare individuals to navigate the complexities of the professional world with greater emotional intelligence, resilience, and interpersonal effectiveness. Providing a supportive and resilient workforce ultimately leads to improved productivity and employee well-being.

Emotional Intelligence Policy Alternatives in the Workplace

Emotional intelligence is crucial in today's fast-paced work environment. Policy alternatives for integrating emotional intelligence learning in the workplace are essential. Programs can create a culture that values emotional intelligence and prioritizes employee well-being. This will enhance productivity, boost morale, and create a positive work environment.

Emotional intelligence (EI), defined by Dr. Peter Salovey and Dr. John D. Mayer in 1990, involves recognizing and managing emotions, making ethical decisions, fostering positive relationships, and avoiding negative behaviors. While widely acknowledged in education, its role in the workplace has gained recent attention.

Different research fields have varying definitions of Emotional regulation ER; even within the same area, there can be different conceptualizations. Most knowledge of ER is associated with health effects in social psychology research, which has focused on people and group relationships. Several policy alternatives can produce significant benefits, such as implementing EI standards, providing incentives for effective EI programs, increasing EI training for employees, and investing in research and development. However, to achieve these

policy objectives, organizations need to develop and implement social and emotional assessment systems that are rigorous and high-quality and learn from high-quality work done by others. Quality EI programs are a wise investment that can produce many benefits in the workplace.

Improving emotional intelligence (EI) among employees is crucial for any organization to thrive. Below are practical recommendations that can help organizations enhance EI and foster a more positive and productive workplace culture.

Incorporating social-emotional learning (SEL) into training programs is crucial for preparing students for the demands of the modern workforce. By integrating SEL skills into training programs, educators can equip students with the necessary tools to thrive in the workplace. To achieve this, training providers can follow a few key policies. Firstly, they can prioritize curriculum development that emphasizes SEL skills. This can be done by providing specialized training and professional development opportunities for teachers and trainers focusing on SEL.

Additionally, training programs can incorporate experiential learning opportunities such as role-playing scenarios and group discussions to help students develop their SEL skills. Finally, training providers can work to foster a supportive and inclusive learning environment that encourages students to develop and practice their SEL skills in a safe and respectful space. By following these policies, training providers can help ensure students are well-prepared for success in the workforce.

To address the critical need for social and emotional learning (SEL) in workforce development programs, various policies and initiatives must ensure that SEL skills are integrated into the program's curriculum and effectively taught to participants. This requires a multi-faceted approach that includes several key components.

First, policies must mandate the integration of SEL components into the curriculum of publicly funded workforce development programs. This can involve specific modules or training sessions focused on emotional intelligence, communication, resilience, and teamwork. Such modules can be designed to provide participants with the skills they need to navigate their personal and professional lives effectively.

Second, policies must enforce ongoing training and professional development for staff working in these programs, ensuring they can effectively teach and support SEL aspects. This can involve regular training sessions, coaching, and support from experts in SEL.

Third, policies must require evaluating and tracking participants' SEL skills throughout the program. This can involve regular evaluations to measure self-awareness, social skills, decision-making, and stress management progress. This will clearly indicate how effective the program is in teaching SEL skills and identify areas for improvement.

Fourth, policies must encourage partnerships between workforce development programs and experts in SEL to bring in specialized knowledge and resources to enhance the effectiveness of SEL integration within these programs. Collaboration with experts in SEL can provide additional resources and expertise to help ensure that SEL skills are effectively integrated into the program's curriculum.

Fifth, policies must encourage workforce development programs to establish community support networks focused on SEL. This can involve partnerships with local organizations, mentorship programs, or peer support groups to reinforce SEL skills. By building a strong community support network, participants can receive ongoing support and encouragement as they develop their SEL skills.

Finally, funding must be explicitly allocated for SEL initiatives within publicly funded workforce development programs. This financial support can facilitate the development of resources, materials, and activities to improve participants' social and emotional skills. This financial support can also help ensure that workforce development programs can integrate SEL skills effectively into their curriculum and provide ongoing support to participants.

Call to Action

Regional workforce training programs should intentionally integrate self-regulation strategies into their curriculums and should be funded to do so.

Program participants should receive information and strategies on:

- the significance of emotional intelligence in the workplace,
- regulation of emotions,
- Managing Distress and strong,
- negative emotions fostering empathy and compassion for self and others
- understanding triggering environments and events, and
- techniques for handling stress.

The foundational skills team held regular weekly meetings brainstorming an array of issues in our respective fields related to workforce, job training, job retention, foundational skills, our community of students, employers. We collected data from recent graduates, employers, career trainers, work studies, and articles. We conducted surveys and held focus groups with workforce students and recently hired young adults.

This extensive research led us to understand that although individuals entering the workforce may require foundational skills, emotional intelligence/regulation training is equally important but is not being addressed. Many organizations have come to realize that employees' ability to manage their emotions and interact effectively with colleagues, clients, and customers is crucial for overall productivity and a positive work environment. Experiences shared with the group were many examples and details of why individuals were being fired from assignments. We found many reasons not to be performance related but because of lack of emotional regulations.

With the growing awareness of mental health issues and the impact of stress in the workplace, workforce development groups should be seeking ways to support individuals in developing emotional regulation skills. Emotional regulation training aims to provide individuals with the tools and techniques to recognize, understand, and manage their emotions effectively, leading to improved communication, conflict resolution, job satisfaction and job retention.

The foundational skills team found it imperative to include emotional regulation along with foundational skills. For the purpose of this project, we have concentrated our efforts and research on integrating emotional regulation practices into foundational skills training.

Literature Review

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Victor Dulewicz & Malcolm Higgs (2004) Can Emotional Intelligence be developed?, The International Journal of Human Resource Management, 15:1, 95-111, DOI: 10.1080/0958519032000157366

Stakeholders Interviews

Brittentine, Teresa, Program Manager, Oakland County Michigan Works! Pontiac

Phillips, Kaino, President/CEO, Clarence E. Phillips Ascend Foundation

Participant Focus Groups

Focus Hope, focus group of 15 individuals between the ages of 18-25, enrolled in IT Training workforce program or new hires hired in early learning education program area.

Emerging Industries Training Institute, focus group of 8 individuals between the ages of 18-30 involved in a 22-week carpentry pre-apprenticeship program.