EQ Training for Management Cascades Value in the Field: UCB Pharma Case in Italy: A Leadership Case Study at A Multinational Pharmaceutical Company

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Abstract

In times of rapid change, how can we support managers to meet professional challenges successfully? How can each manager become an effective change agent? How can we promote professional development at all levels and improve communication skills appropriate for the different audiences with whom they must interface? This study explores emotional intelligence (EQ) as a key to unlocking managerial performance in volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) corporate environments. Through a graduated and structured process that started in 2017, UCB Pharma Spa, a multinational pharmaceutical company, decided to invest in a pilot to develop the social and emotional skills of organizational members, from senior managers to staff associates. An action learning and change management model was used to design and facilitate the program intervention. Individual EQ and artificial intelligence (AI)-driven team assessments were used to target development efforts, as well as gather pre- and post-program data. The result was significant improvement in the quality of teamwork and people engagement, demonstrated by an increase in relational efficiency in 98% of cases.

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence, Performance, Change Management, Innovation

1. Introduction

During 2017, UCB Italy asked Six Seconds, the world's largest EQ network, with the aim of developing the interpersonal skills and work quality of people in the organization (Goleman, 1995). The project, divided into two phases, started with top management and later on involved field personnel, the professionals dedicated to providing scientific information (reps) to Healthcare Professionals (HCP) and cultivating relationships with regional payers. Emotional intelligence has been examined in pharmaceutical organizations and other healthcare settings (Samanek & Morrison, 2015; Vyas & Harris, 2017). These professionals were also key communicators of UCB's value proposition for the Italian healthcare system. The project sought to enhance various professional skills in order to build system-specific expertise in EQ and improve implementation methodologies. Consultants from MGMTLAB.eu, a company dedicated to cultivating managerial performance through people analytics, were brought in to facilitate the process and administer TeamX, a state-of-the-art, dynamic tool for measuring team efficacy, and carry out creativity and management laboratory training activities. The project used the Six Seconds Change MAP, an iterative process that facilitates change management by focusing on critical emotional transitions (Freedman & Ghini, 2010). Over the years, the growth at UCB and rapid cultural transformations have prompted careful analysis of the fundamental skills needed to achieve excellent results through professional development and high levels of people engagement. This analysis led to the identification of emotional intelligence as a potential catalyst for promoting excellence within the company (Freedman & Stillman, 2016). The objective of this path was to invest in the process. The process was divided into three phases:

Engage: Create involvement

Activate: Develop and apply new skills

Reflect: Consolidate success

Structuring the program on this theoretical change model increased the effectiveness of the new learning processes by focusing on the emotions that hinder the manifestation of new, positive behaviors.

2. Method and Analysis

2.1 The Importance of EQ & Providing Concrete Tools for People Management

The engagement phase started with 15 managers meeting the consultation team for a two hour kick-off session during which they were able to ask questions about and understand the project they would participate in over the next several months, as well as get to know the key outside figures. The central message was to introduce EQ as a critical strategic competence for improving individual and organizational performance (Stillman, Freedman, & Procicchiani, 2018). Once managers were brought into the project, a people analytics feedback process based on TeamX technology was developed *(Fig. 1, below)*.

This included a decision-making system for leaders that, starting with the completion of a questionnaire by each team member, was able to analyze the skills of the participants, measure the quality of the internal dynamics of the team, and create performance forecasts based on an artificial intelligence algorithm. TeamX is based on an artificial intelligence algorithm and uses the most powerful machine learning system and expert knowledge to identify actions associated with the highest performance return. The code is in Phyton and the system relies on external libraries such as NumPy, SciPy, and scikit-learn, based on an 80,000-person international database.

This database was used to validate the TeamX model. The survey has undergone three rounds of validation testing and has been used in several significant research studies. The TeamX survey is validated through factorial analysis, with Cronbach's coefficient alpha ranges from 0.63 to 0.81. These results were based on a small number of items per component, showing satisfying reliability.

This people analytics tool, designed by MGMTLAB.eu, was used to determine which skills to focus on during the dedicated training for managers to achieve maximum effectiveness.

In agreement with UCB Italy, it was decided to focus on the development of Problem Solving, Trust, and Risk Tolerance. These reflected key words from the first day of EQ workshops and were the three most predictive skills for: a) future success of the team, with a growth forecast from the TeamX algorithm of 4.2%, and b) professional development, with expected growth of 6.7%.

The focus of the activation phase of this first project was twofold:

1. Highlight the importance of emotional intelligence at individual and team levels through a two-day workshop dedicated to the 15 participating managers. In this phase, neuroscience concepts, brain styles, and individual talents for team performance were the main topics (Freedman, 2017).

2. Undertake activities to increase the effectiveness of people management through cascaded training. Through an operational guide called Toolbox, managers put into practice what they

learned in the two- day workshop, bringing their new knowledge into action and devoting themselves to their employees.

With the Toolbox process, which is structured around the phases of the Change MAP using SEI assessment data, managers entered the heart of the project. In this approach, the traditional training room gives way to real training in which managers begin to apply EQ with their employees. Accompanied by a coach, the managers first started by themselves, exploring in one-to-one sessions their SEI Leadership Report and their Brain Talents, and then began onboarding their employees. This process was designed to have participants feel like protagonists over the following three months. The SEI assessment is a 77-item scientifically validated questionnaire used globally for the measurement of emotional intelligence. The SEI uses randomly ordered items answered through a 5-point Likert-like scale plus an optional mood question. The SEI scoring uses 28 different normative scales including hidden indices to increase objectivity and accuracy with regard to consistency index, positive impression index, time of compilation index, and answer style index. The SEI algorithm includes weighted items derived from statistical analysis plus feedback from a panel of EQ experts. The result is an accurate, meaningful picture of 8 EQ competencies across three domains of know yourself, choose yourself, and give yourself.

The reports used in the various phases of the Toolbox process included the SEI Leadership Report, the Brain Talent Profile, and the team Dashboard:

First One to One Session: SEI Leadership Report

The Manager starts from him/herself and discussed the Impact with the coach of the emotional intelligence leadership profile and defined the scheduling of the whole process (Stillman, Freedman, Jorgensen, & Stillman, 2017). This phase proved to be essential to keep all managers on time. *(Fig. 2, below - a SEI Assessment report and a Brain Talent Profile)*
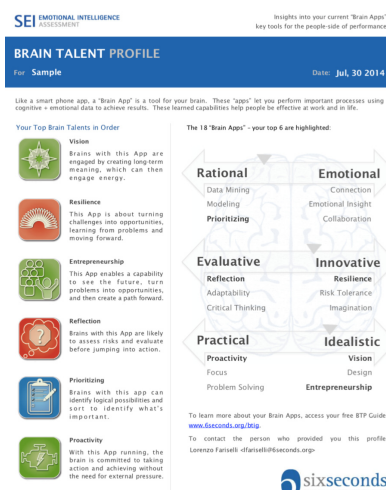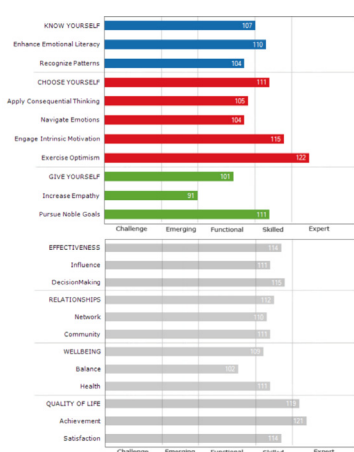
Second One to One Session: Brain Talent Profile

The manager, after having made an onboarding presentation and administered the SEI Assessment to the members of his team, discussed with the coach the Brain Talent profiles that emerged. Through this meeting, the manager was able to prepare for the next one-to-one

with each team member. The focus of the meeting was simple comparison with the aim of opening a different, deeper level of communication and understanding how the Brain Talents of the individual could be used to increase well-being and individual performance. During the individual sessions, the UCB managers were able to grasp the connections between emotional intelligence and everyday life and make it their point of strength in the one-to-one meetings with their team members. In particular, their Brain Profile reports were fundamental to talking about episodes, characteristics, and reflections with each member of the team and position the meeting at a different level of depth. This included important insights for themselves and their way of interacting and a more open and constructive way of comparison. The great effort and engagement that the managers showed during the process were amply rewarded by the satisfaction of the effective feedback received from the team.

Third One to One Session: Team Dashboard

The manager then discussed the Dashboard with the coach. The snapshot encompasses the characteristics of the team and the individual session served interpret what emerged better and prepare the manager for the presentation to the team. This presentation then had the goal of establish a team goal to work on for the following months.

The consultants followed up with the larger group after work was completed with the managers and

respective teams. A meeting was held with the 15 managers to reflect collectively on what had happened at the individual level. Each manager explained what had transpired, explained how EQ had been capitalized for people management, and reported the results achieved.

In addition to the very positive comments that emerged during the session, the results of this first project were evaluated with the short survey given to the 15 managers and their collaborators, in which they were asked the following question: Have you seen more effective relationships/exchanges in your team over the last 3 months. The results are shown above.

Almost 70% of the people involved by the managers in the Toolbox cascading training process claimed to have noticed an improvement in team dynamics. The most frequent comments identified:

• Greater team harmony.

• More effective exchanges.

• Increased teamwork effectiveness.

Paradoxically, constructive and meaningful comments also emerged from those who answered no to this question. These team members stated that their negative answers followed from the fact that:

• The new approach has only been in place for a short period of time and it is too early to talk about change.

• The road ahead is still long.

• The team has long expressed itself at very high levels from the point of view of relationships and exchange.

2.2 Using EQ Tools to Give Medical-Scientific Associates a New Approach to Create Value for Patients

After a first project dedicated to UCB managers and focused on the acquisition of EQ methodologies and tools, the goal for 2018 was to bring value to our stakeholders through field people. Phase 2 of the project started after an important internal reorganization and was structured, as in the previous year, following the Change MAP. In June 2018, a kick-off

meeting was organized with the ESLs to launch the project and plan the next phases. This meeting was followed by a second one with all the local staff, 42 people to whom the project and objectives were presented, and who were asked to fill in a survey to understand what they were currently experiencing given recent organizational changes.

The survey enabled the consultants to generate a snapshot of people's mood and provide each leader with a tool to start the motivation activity based on an understanding of the characteristics of the team. Mood was assessed through a sentiment analysis tool (TSento), developed by MGMTLAB.eu. The aim of sentiment analysis is to get people's perceptions. TSento measures the polarity of the answers, positive, negative, or neutral, to one or more questions, starting from a written text. The goal is to translate an intangible feeling into an objective score and make the discussion within the team easier and more spontaneous.

The sentiment score is based on intelligent algorithms that are able to elaborate the natural language and analyze texts and computational linguistics. For example, the analyze_sentiment api by Google, that has been implemented and modified in order to increase the reliability of the method for non-English texts. The process has been tested on a database of over 1000 comments and has a reliability percentage higher than 93%. In particular, the algorithm assigns a sentiment score to each answer in a range from -100 to +100, where -100 stands for the most unpleasant feeling and +100 represents the most pleasant emotion. TSento calculates the sentiment score for each question as the average of all the scores calculated from the answers to that particular question.

TSENTO provided the structured analysis of answers to three open-ended questions, as defined by the company:

1. In the last few months, in UCB Italy, there have been several organizational changes: what impact did they have on your work?

2. Thinking about the whole organization, what are the benefits of these changes in your opinion?

3. From an organizational point of view, what are the critical issues?

The sentiment analysis gave unanticipated results considering the recent period of major change, often associated with unpleasant emotions. In the case of UCB, on the other hand, positive results indicated a change management process that had been well managed by the company's leaders, assisted by the Six Seconds training program in 2017.

TeamX WayReport was also produced for each team, yielding the team's brain style, the level of the main collaborative dynamic, the perception of results, and suggestions for actions to be taken based on the artificial intelligence algorithm. The TeamX WayReport is recommended in the following cases:

1. During the phase following the kick-off of a team

• The purpose would be to evaluate how the team is working together after 2 months or more.

2.To assess an expert team

The focus would be on people that are working together and want to improve their performance.

Making the emotional experience real and visible allows the team to manage dynamics for situations that would otherwise be hard to understand. Discussion of emotional mindset would not need reports in theory, but seeing objective findings on a chart makes it easier and more real. The WayReport is the perfect tool to keep people engaged and bring out their perceptions. With this document, the leader can monitor the general mood and support the team, creating the right energy to move toward better performance.

3. Results and Findings

From this report, we can see that collectively the people of UCB Italy have an Operative cerebral profile, indicating what their brains prefer to do.

The Operative profile, one of 8 available archetypes, indicates:

a) a preference for managing analytical information, not surprising given the scientific nature of the work;

b) a desire to find alternatives, a feature often associated in literature with successful profiles in such roles;

c) an inclination to tackle situations pragmatically.

These preferences can be useful for leaders to understand how to communicate with their collaborators and, especially, to evaluate the possible pros and cons that each style possesses.

The main relational dynamics of Trust, Synergy (the level of collaboration), and Energy, (motivation towards the team goal), were above average, otherwise an alert would have been seen in the report. The perception of results is very positive, except for the speed of problem solving, which is the lowest, with an important gap compared to the other parameters.

The last element is related to the suggestions of the AI algorithm, which indicate the best actions to be implemented. This offers concrete help to the leader who will be able to decide the next operational step in a more effective way by first comparing with an external point of view, the expert AI system.

All this information was shared and discussed with the ESL during the training day. From design through learning philosophy, Six Seconds provided support to the ESLs to enable them to manage the emotional side of their team in relation to organizational requirements.

In the second part of the training day, the group worked on how to provide effective feedback to employees.

At the end of the training day, each leader received a custom team report + sentiment analysis + support in the form of an operational guide and then proceeded with one-on-one coaching. The purpose of the post-training coaching session was to explore the team reports with each ESL and prepare the feedback session with the various teams.

Supported by these tools, each ESL did an excellent job of enhancing the emotional experience of collaborators and bringing them into an emotional state appropriate for the Activate phase.

During a 4-day company retreat, each work team spent two days taking part in the EQ Lab, workshops built in collaboration with Otherwise, a Six Seconds Preferred Partner. The aim of the EQ Lab was to involve reps, MSLs and RAMs, the partners of the 7 Ecosystem Leads, in the creation of solutions to integrate emotional intelligence into everyday working life.

After the first phase of sharing concepts and training methods, each team, working with two trainers, designed solutions aimed at transforming the communication process to move from the product to the relationship.

In the two days of EQ Lab, the following three key concepts, which had emerged previously from a meeting with the leadership team, were explored:

1.   How can I make conversations more articulate and create dynamic relationships with insights and the ability to understand my stakeholders better?

2.   How can I continue to improve the quality of scientific communication with stakeholders I have known for some time, argue about views, pose questions that can be understood by different stakeholders, understand if I have been clear in explaining scientific data, and determine if the customer found value in my information?

3.   How can I create relationships and credibility when working with institutional stakeholders?

At the end of the two training days, each work team created their own solution and left the course with the aim of testing it in the field during the following three months, pending follow up.

The EQ Lab received very positive feedback, both in terms of general satisfaction and the involvement that the trainers and content were able to generate.

Other feedback underline how the EQ Labs were seen as engaging, stimulating, and, through a practical approach, oriented toward change.

This feedback was very important since the goal of the EQ Lab was precisely to generate a new EQ-oriented process to be implemented and disseminated in the professional newsletter. The teams, under the supervision of each Ecosystem Lead, then worked over the next several months to bring to the field what had been built collaboratively in the laboratories.

In Phase 3 Reflect Step, the process concluded with structured follow up to consolidate all that had been learned in the previous phases. A first follow up took place at UCB headquarters in Milan with the seven Ecosystem Leads to gather feedback on the experience just completed.

The goal was to share the results of the experiment from their point of view and to discuss the results of the sentiment analysis, as applied to the answers that reps gave to the question: In

the last several months, do you feel you have improved the quality of your relationships with your stakeholders, including doctors, health payers, and hospital pharmacists?

Do you feel you have improved the quality of your relationships with your stakeholders?

The results are shown in the sentiment analysis done with field personnel. The results were very positive, indicating that the training generated significant professional development of reps, MSLs, and RAMs.

The key finding was that 98% of participants, or 46 out of the 47 who took part in the final survey, responded positively to the key question.

The findings reflected an extremely positive mood, with a sentiment score of +63 out of a possible +100.

In addition, a clear change of approach in daily work was demonstrated, especially in the following dimensions:

• Audience - better relationships and the ability to observe those around you for more information.

• Listening - increasing the quantity and quality of listening.

•Questions - an increase in the number of questions and the best choice of the type of question depending on the audience**.**

The process then ended with follow up by Six Seconds with each team. Team members were able to share what they did, describing the process implemented and the results obtained.

The ESLs and their teams were able to combine their expertise with managerial rules of emotional intelligence to generate custom applications with a high impact on performance.

4. Conclusions

At the beginning of 2019, the SEI Final Assessment was resubmitted to field personnel. Forty-four people participated, the same group involved by the Eco System Leads on the project in 2017/2018 that one year later had participated in the EQ Labs. The goal was to gain a snapshot of the current EQ competences of the group.

Although the training was not focused on improving social and emotional competences, but rather on their implementation in the job, important changes were revealed. The results are summarized in the following three points:

1.   The level of EQ measured through the SEI Assessment, with a scale ranging from 65 to 135 and the average of the reference statistical sample at 100, was substantially stable even though it went from 99.7 to 102. Risk Tolerance, on the other hand, had a statistically significant increase (T-test with $p<.05$), going from 98 to 101.1. The Risk Tolerance dimension is needed to handle complexity, focusing on future potential and taking charge of their own emotional energy. In an increasingly fast and complex organizational world, Risk Tolerance is a key skill for managing the ever-more frequent phases of change. It is no

coincidence that the CEO of UCB Italia, chose Risk Tolerance as one of the key training elements for Ecosystem Leads.

The fact that this field group increased this competence successfully has a double value: 1) the Eco System Leads have facilitated an effective cascading of this expertise onto their team members and 2) a strategic competitive factor in the value creation process for the future of UCB has been improved.

2. Comparing the first and second administration of the SEI Assessment shows different distributions of people within a matrix. The Performance score emerges from the combination of four factors, as evaluated by the SEI Assessment: Well-being, Quality of Life, and Personal and Relational Efficacy. As shown in the comparisons of 2017 and 2019 on left, the number of people with EQ and Outcome scores in the high end increased from 44% to 56%. This shift of people from the high performance but low emotional intelligence area to the high performance and high emotional intelligence area has two major impacts: the link between emotional-relational skills and individual performance has been strengthened and the number of people likely to have sustainable performance over time has increased. When EQ skills support performance, performance is likely to be more sustainable over time. This is why the increase in the percentage value of the first quadrant (top right) is so important: high levels of performance correspond to equally high levels of EQ.

3. As noted, the field group under evaluation also reported an improvement in the overall level of sustainability of its performance. As mentioned in the previous point, the basic assumption is that each employee is well positioned if their performance level is adequately supported by their EQ. As a corollary of this assumption, two situations may occur:

- *As measured by the SEI Assessment, the employee's EQ scores, are higher than their performance scores. In this case, we speak of underuse of one's potential. In 2017, 11% of the people were in this category (light blue area in graph below) and in 2019 this percentage fell to 5%. EQ > Performance = underuse of potential*

- As measured by the SEI Assessment The employee's performance scores are higher than the EQ. In this case the risk is to reach a high level of stress to achieve the required performance, yet without having adequate tools to ensure it over time. In 2017, about 30% of employees were part of this group (green area), while in 2019 this percentage fell to 2%. EQ < Performance = high stress required and not possible over time.

These considerations underline the importance of the dark blue area: sustainability in the ratio between performance and EQ increased from 59% to 93% over the study period.

In conclusion, the re-administration of the SEI Assessment showed:

• an increase in the relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Performance

• an increase in the sustainability of this performance over time

• and the development of a strategic dimension, Risk Tolerance, in an increasingly complex, fast, and competitive market.

5. Acknowledgments

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