



## SOCIAL AWARENESS COMPETENCY: AN INDISPENSABILITY FOR HEALTHY WORKPLACE RELATIONSHIPS

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**Abstract :** *Human interactions are influenced by social rules such as social norms. The pattern of social interaction within a society is to some extent independent of the particular individual. A social interaction is an ever evolving sequence of social actions between individuals. A social action is an action that considers the reaction of other individuals. A social action is very contextual as it is performed relative to other individuals. Our approach to modeling social interactions focuses on the dynamics between an individual (social actor) and a target social group. Social awareness is a fundamental emotional competency and determines how individuals handle relationships. Managers need to develop their social awareness so that they can be able to get along well with their employees and make them cooperate with them. Managers with high social awareness will be highly effective than the one whose social awareness is low. Managers represent the image of the organization, and therefore the individual employee attitude to work in the team depends on the impression they perceive from their superiors and the cohesiveness of the team. This study examines in details social awareness competency as an imperative for health workplace relationship.*

**Keywords:** Social Awareness Competency, Workplace Relationships

### Introduction

One of the basic human needs is social relationship. This is why human beings are considered as social creature by their nature. They cannot live alone; away from each other. Practicing social relationships determines human success from the personal and professional levels. Moreover, the psychologist Thorndike (1920) posited that “the best mechanic in a factory may fail as a foreman for lack of social awareness”. This confirms in humans the need to feel loved, to belong, loyalty, participation, and to conduct in the various aspects of their lives and activities. Maslow (1943) had presented this idea in his theory, the pyramid of human

needs, where he explained that humans in general feel strongly the need of belonging, loyalty, and love. This need will provide them the emotional support and confidence. On the other hand, when people do not get their need efficiently, they will be more anxious, depressed, and socially isolated (Karnatovskaia, et. al. 2015). Many researchers such as Thorndike (1920), Vernon (1933), Goleman & Boyatzis (2008), Frankovsky & Birknerová (2014), and Al-Jarrah & Asleh (2016) stressed on the need of interaction between each other by having social skills, empathy and other skills which are a part of social intelligence.

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Sometimes we are faced with very difficult and challenging situations, that we have to decide how we have to handle it in an appropriate manner, without hurting any parties involved and leaving us with no regrets later on. Therefore, we are required to go through systematic the process of pondering upon the issue and analyzing it for its impacts, both positive and negative on ones' self and others, who might be affected by the decisions we arrive at . Hence, wise decisions that we are not sure about are a necessity in our daily dealings with several issues hence emotional intelligence entails all the above issues and is a paramount tool in dealing with challenging issues (Marc, Susan, and Salovey, 2011).

Human interactions are influenced by social rules such as social norms. The pattern of social interaction within a society is to some extent independent of the particular individual. A social interaction is an ever evolving sequence of social actions between individuals. A social action is an action that considers the reaction of other individuals. A social action is very contextual as it is performed relative to other individuals. Our approach to modeling social interactions focuses on the dynamics between an individual (social actor) and a target social group.

Baloch, Saleem, Zaman and Fida (2014) states that in order do some jobs, we need to feel proud of ourselves doing it, waking up and going to work with a smile in order to have the best days of our lives and come back home satisfied due to the results of what we did at work but it is only possible if our social intelligence is developed and built to the high levels and jobs such as dealing with customers, dealing with conflicts calls for the improvement of the specific domains of social awareness, therefore the need for people in such profession and the rest to take it upon themselves to learn and improve their social awareness since this competency can be learned and improved. Social Awareness domain do not mean that we are masters at handling customers or resolving conflict issues but rather we are in the process of becoming better at dealing and interacting with others.

Social awareness is a fundamental emotional competency and determines how individuals handle relationships (Goleman, 1998). Goleman (1995) defined social awareness as the ability to recognize emotions in others, or the ability to know how another feels. The purpose of this paper therefore, is to examine the self-awareness as a critical competency for managerial excellence.

## **Literature Review**

### **Theoretical Underpinning**

This research is primarily based on the theoretical foundation of Bandura's social learning theory (1977) and Goleman's theory of social intelligence (2006). Together, both theories provide adequate support for the hypothesis that a distance higher education learning environment is likely to have a different effect on social intelligence development. The direction of the effect is unclear based on the theories. Bandura's Social Learning Theory was developed over several years by Bandura, starting in the early 60s (Bandura & Walters, 1963). The theory states that people learn human behaviour through observing other people behaviors and the outcomes of those behaviors, is referred to as "modeling." According to the theory, there are four necessary conditions for effective modeling. These are (a) attention paid to the model, (b) retention of the information, (c) reproduction of the action or behaviors of the model, and (d) having the motivation to imitate. Social learning is accomplished through continuous reciprocal interaction between cognitive, behavioral, and environmental influences (Bandura, 1962, 1971). Hill, Song, and West (2009) provided an in-depth review of the research related to social learning theory and Web-based learning environments. They concluded that social learning can take place in web-based learning environments, given the right conditions: interactions, group and class size, resources, culture, community, epistemological beliefs, individual learning styles, self-efficacy, and motivation. From a social learning perspective, learning takes place when participants are engaged and interacting with other humans while receiving feedback. Newer, web-based technologies make this kind of social learning environment possible, but not necessarily ubiquitous. Hill et al. (2009) cite several studies that support the idea of social learning beginning to take place in distance environments. Social learning can be facilitated in distance environments. Hiltz, Coppola, Rotter, Toroff, and Benbunan-Fich (2000) randomly placed each of 140 students in one of four conditions: individuals in a traditional learning environment, individuals in a distance learning environment, groups in a traditional learning environment, and groups in a distance learning environment. They found that when students worked in a group online, the results of their work were as good as or better than those in the other three conditions. However, students working individually online did poorer than all other groups. Social learning theory focuses on modeling as the primary source of learning. Research has demonstrated that given



the right conditions, modeling can take place online. More modern research in the area of neuroscience might explain social learning through the activation of mirror neurons (a variety of brain cells) that sense both movement and feelings of another and prepare us to imitate the move and feel with them (Goleman, 2007). Social skills, and by extension social intelligence, are dependent upon mirror neurons, and by further extension, social learning theory. Little information exists about how social learning in a distance environment affects social intelligence. This research will provide some clarity in that area. Goleman's Social Intelligence Goleman (1990) came across an article in an academic journal by two psychologists, John Mayer and Peter Salovey, who offered the first formulation of a concept they called "emotional intelligence," which was a departure from the prevalent view of intelligence at the time, which was the idea that life success was influenced by other components besides intellectual ability. In 1995, Goleman supported the theory with updated research in his 10th anniversary edition (Goleman, 2005). Goleman explains how his view of emotional intelligence is based on a set of human capacities within us as individuals that he characterizes as crucial. His theory of social intelligence developed from the theory of emotional intelligence, as an extension beyond the individual to include interaction with others (Goleman, 2007). 30 As detailed in the section on the historical development of social intelligence, social intelligence is not a new concept, dating back to Dewey in 1909. Goleman could be seen as a researcher who stood on the shoulders of giants, modernizing and expanding upon the existing research on social intelligence as well as developing a theory of social intelligence. The key constructs of Goleman's theory of social intelligence (Goleman, 2007) are divided into two broad categories: social awareness (what we sense about others) and social facility (what we do with that awareness). Within each category, Goleman lists four "capacities." Under social awareness are primal empathy, attunement, empathic accuracy, and social cognition. Under social facility are synchrony, self-presentation, influence, and concern. Goleman's theory recognizes the difference between the unconscious, automatic, and effortless neural circuitry that operates beneath our awareness (that he refers to as the "low road") with speed and efficiency, and the conscious, deliberate, and effortful cognition (which he refers to as the "high road"). According to Goleman (2007), the full spectrum of social intelligence abilities embraces both high and low road aptitude, where the low road reacts and high road often rationalizes actions

of the low road. Goleman explains this behavior as a function of our biological system designed to conserve energy. The brain achieves efficiency by firing the same neurons (mirror neurons) while perceiving and performing an action. Perceiving someone's distress makes coming to their aid the brain's natural tendency, which is a critical part of being socially aware, and social awareness is a precursor to social facility. 31 The social brain refers to the particular set of circuitry that is used as people relate to one another. Although Goleman (2007) recognizes that there is no major zone in the brain that appears to be devoted exclusively to social life and that virtually all neural tracks in the social brain handle a range of activities, Goleman states that the Internet lacks the kind of feedback the orbital frontal cortex needs to help us stay on track socially (p. 74), suggesting that the Internet is not conducive to social intelligence development. Goleman further argues that, in previous research, distance communication was unable to contribute to the development of social intelligence based on the findings from neuroscience, and stated that face-to-face communication was necessary. Meyer and Jones (2012) challenged Goleman's conclusion by asking the question: Do students experience social intelligence, laughter, and other emotions at a distance? They used a U.S. based sample of 67 graduate students. The researchers created their own social intelligence instrument based on Goleman's two categories and eight capacities, possibly to test Goleman's doubts on social intelligence extending to the Internet using his own understanding of social intelligence. Ample evidence was found that the participants did experience emotions at a distance, contrary to Goleman's supposition. The researchers conclude, perhaps more intuitively than from the results of their research, that having prior knowledge of an individual could provide an understanding of that individual's personality, which in turn could provide a context in which text-based distance communication could be interpreted. In the time since Goleman's theory of social intelligence was published in his book, a plethora of research has been conducted in the area of distance education, web-based courses used by most universities have been technologically enhanced, and the definition of social intelligence has broadened to be more inclusive of social interactions in a distance environment. It is likely that the limitations Goleman saw on social intelligence development and distance communication while perhaps significant in 2007 no longer have as much impact as they did in 2007.

#### **Social Awareness**

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This refers to the ability to listen to others, understand fully what was not said or partially expressed thoughts and feelings; the ability of the individual to be part of a group or a team; the ability to take decisions; to recognize culture and value aspects and how these aspects influence an individual's actions and behavior; a desire to help others in order to satisfy his or her needs as well as to comprehend other people's needs before they are defined (Silvera et al., 2001; Friborg et al., 2005; Gini, 2006) in (Sudraba et al, 2014) . Being socially aware means that you understand how you react to different social situations, and effectively modify your interactions with other people so that you achieve the best results. The net result of social awareness is the ongoing development of social skills. That's the beautiful part about emotional intelligence...it's a personal continuous improvement process.

Balochet *al* (2014: 216) states that “social awareness means that one should have the capability to know what is socially acceptable in the society and how a person should act in that manner accordingly. An empathic person is the one who is socially conscious of the emotions and concerns of other people. In business environment, the communication among the people is a tough job because it requires that only those persons can interact well who are empathetic in interactions to achieve better performance in return”.

As employees we do not work alone but with others and probably even in teams on certain projects and this entails managing our relationships within the organizations and others in an appropriate manner by making it our business to know how others are feeling and making them feel better since others happiness is our business (McPheat, 2010). Victoroff and Boyatzis (2012) states that social awareness simply relates to how persons handle relationships and others feelings, needs and wants after they have gained full knowledge of them.

According to Petrides and Furnham (2006), socialawareness emphasizes social relationships and social influence. Persons with good sociability have better social interaction. They believe they have good listening skills and can communicate clearly and confidently with people from diverse background. They also believe that individuals with socialawareness empathize with others, comprehend and accept the emotions of others as well as see things from another person's point of view and therefore develop a stronger bond and understanding with other people. As employees we do not work alone but with others and probably even in teams on certain projects and this entails managing our

relationships within the organizations and others in an appropriate manner by making it our business to know how others are feeling and making them feel better since others happiness is our business (McPheat, 2010). Victoroff and Boyatzis (2012) states that social awareness simply relates to how persons handle relationships and others feelings, needs and wants after they have gained full knowledge of them.

#### **Dimensions of Social Awareness**

##### **Empathy**

As much as it is difficult to take a moment and put ourselves in others shoes to dig out the reasons or see from their point of view why they behave and react to things the way they do especially when in the middle of a heated disagreement, we have to from time to time see things from others view so that when we are taking actions or making decisions we do so after understanding our view and those of others thus objective decisions are made without any bias but rather consideration and empathy (McPheat, 2010). It takes time, experience and ability to be in touch with our very own emotions in other to perfect empathy. We are only to understand others if we have been in the same situations ourselves and this can only be possible if we have had several experiences that are bound to enable us to have empathy for others (McPheat, 2010). (McPheat, 2010) further argued that it requires a lot of techniques to recognize the emotions of others because it is never a direct thing so we are sometimes forced to either read between the lines, ask questions or read body languages like facial expression and other non-verbal expressions. Once we have recognized how others are feeling, we have to be careful not to destroy the rapport we have created so far by disagreeing with why they are feeling the way they are but rather make a responsibility to investigate further to understand why they are feeling the way they do hence we have to be sensitive to others feelings and emotions.

Doulas (2013) posits that as employees and even in the ideal world, we are bound to feel frustrated from time to time but then what keeps us going is the ability of our friends, supervisors, colleagues recognizing and understanding our frustration and guiding us on how to reach the end of this frustration instead of ignoring it. Doulas (2013) further states that as leaders we ought to be very sensitive to others needs and feelings and we can do this by recognizing their issues and values and offering to lend them a shoulder to cry on whenever they need it and even when they are not willing to talk about their issues, they know they can always come to you whenever they want to talk about something



and this improves your reliability and credibility among followers.

#### **Organizational Awareness**

Just like empathy was about understanding how others feel, organizational awareness on the other hand involves recognizing the influence on us and others by those that we work and live with and especially the culture within which our emotions operate (McPheat, 2010). McPheat (2010) further discusses that to understand the organizations we work in we ought to do our own investigations into its mission, visions, objectives and goals so as to clear gage why they are doing things the way they are, the culture of the organization is very vital for us to know so that we are not imposing our own way of doing things, the core values of the organization is also rich in information for the empowerment of our very own thus once we join an organization we need to this research so us to fit in and best understand the culture within which we will have to operate.

The knowledge of organizational structure is very paramount for our knowledge so as to guide us on how to deal with the organization and other colleagues we work for example, if we know whether the organizational structure is either simple, hierarchical, functional, product or matrix, then we will exactly know how to approach issues in the organization (Laegaard and Bindslev, 2006). The absence of such knowledge makes us only approach issues from the wrong directions, make so much unnecessary mistakes, fail to fit in the very organizations we work in and feel so demoralized each and every day and makes us increase our stress levels which basically is a result of feeling alien in our very own environment (Laegaard and Bindslev, 2006).

#### **Service Orientation**

McPheat (2010) states that this is the final stage of the social awareness skill in that after understanding how the people around us feel in a certain way and the organizational structure within which they work, it is upon us to now provide solutions, suggestions and opinions to these people on how they can tackle the issues they are facing. This could be with or without their contribution but it is advisable to include them in coming up with possible scenarios of the issues and the possible ways of tackling them so that they are able to implement it with a good effort. Victoroff and Boyatzis (2012) mentions that predicting, embracing and delivering just to the expectations of clients or customers form service orientation. It is important that whatever organization structure is in place, it important that top

management in the organization invests maximum in terms of ensuring the total inclusion of every member of the organization from the top most to the lowest person in the organization is a must so that a maximum returns and commitment is accorded by the employees and these could be by encouraging team work, proper reward systems, constant meetings with staff, creating a shared image of tasks in teams, brain storming, clear SOPs and open criticism and healthy conflicts (Laegaard and Bindslev, 2006).

#### **Social Awareness and Workplace Relationship**

In relation to workplace relationship, the impact of social awareness depends on the length of time that the people involved have for interaction in order to have better understanding of who they are dealing with, how they ought to approach specific situations or people, trend analysis and so on hence the more time spent on process orientation the better and improved employee performance otherwise relationship is bound to be task oriented (Victoroff and Boyatzis, 2012). It was argued that, when effectively leveraged, past performance can lead to greater influence over one's constituents and work environment (Treadway, Breland, Williams, Cho, Yang and Ferris, 2013).

High performance is perceived to only exist among employees or persons with very high social connections among the fellow employees of colleagues they work with as compared to the very quiet and the so called anti-social groups and this is widely believed to be due to the ability for these socially aware to seek for advice about issues concerning their jobs from knowledgeable colleagues and are also motivated and look forward to going to work every day and socialize with colleagues hence boosting their very own performance as compared to the anti-social colleagues (Treadway *et al*, 2013). It is believed that for performance enhancement among organizational employees, management must improve their ways of dealing with feedback delivery among the different staff and factors such as age, timing, mode of communication and then the content of feedback is paramount for example when giving feedback supervisors do not need to only dwell on the mistakes and gaps but also the achievements, for mistakes people need to be called aside and considerate manner of feedback delivery needs to be used for the older people and quality of feedback for the younger generation needs to be considered to improve general performance within the organization (Wang, Burlacu, Truxillo, Keith and Yao, 2015).

Wang *et al* (2015) states that supervisors can improve employee performance by encouraging moderate helping behaviors to



towards colleagues at work and by doing so they are likely to improve the working relationships amongst themselves and creating a working environment where staff are free to talk to each other and consult about work related issues amongst themselves thus boosting performance but this has to be carefully monitored to ensure that there is no over reliance by some staff on the helping staff which could kill the performance thus working against its primary purpose.

Victoroff and Boyatzis (2012) states that at the very beginning of our work or studies we bare a lot of empathy for people we deal and relate with and especially patients for the medical field but with time this empathy begins to die down and become a normal thing in our lives but it seen as a positive thing for performance enhancement because the less empathy medical doctors have the better they are able to perform their duties without any hindrances and therefore as much as social awareness has its advantages its application must be with care and only after thorough evaluation of situations

Managers need to develop their social awareness so that they can be able to get along well with their employees and make them cooperate with them. Managers with high social awareness will be highly effective than the one whose social awareness is low. Managers represent the image of the organization, and therefore the individual employee attitude to work in the team depends on the impression they perceive from their superiors and the cohesiveness of the team. Employee intention to remain committed to the goal is directly proportional to the behaviour and intelligent their managers display in the workplace.

Social awareness enables a leader-manager to detect crucial social networks and understand key power relationships and know how to use this to improve performance hence the more reason for the company to look for such employees or train the current one. Social awareness makes it possible for employees to be in better position to understand customer's or clients' needs and strive towards satisfying this needs through continuous interaction with this beneficiaries which then leads to achieving both personal and organizational goals thus the need to bring develop this aspect in the employees and invest in it by the management through trainings. Social awareness enables a leader-manager to monitor customers or client's satisfaction carefully to ensure that they get what they need leading to achieving organizational goals (Asilaza, 2016).

#### Conclusion

Socially aware individual have the ability to comprehend the general motives of the organization and the political dynamics they exist in group networking and coalition building which makes the employee to exert some influences on other people irrespective of the individual professional affiliation (Shalзад et al, 2011). Being socially aware means that you understand how you react to different social situations, and effectively modify your interactions with other people so that you achieve the best results. The net result of social awareness is the ongoing development of social skills. That's the beautiful part about emotional intelligence...it's a personal continuous improvement process.

#### Recommendations

- i. Organizations must strive to work on improving the awareness of all employees and through training the skills of dealing with colleagues, solving problems, and controlling the management of conflict within the organization.
- ii. The study recommends organizations should take the social awareness aspect of employees in the company seriously because it leads to improved employee performance.

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