

Emotional Intelligence and Leading: An Exploration towards Shakespeare's *Othello* and *Antony and Cleopatra*

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Abstract

The present paper examines the importance of emotions in managing and balancing personal and social fronts and argues that leaders or rulers require to handle their emotions and passions in an efficient manner for effective leading. We take Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* (1606) and *Othello* (1603-04) as prototypes to understand the role of emotions and passions in social representation of life. The first section discusses the role of emotions and passions in Leadership Studies. Central to the discussion of emotion and passion remain issues such as conflict of reason in personal and professional endeavor. The second section is an analysis of the characters of Antony, Cleopatra and Othello. This section argues that the fall of these leaders was inspired by their inability to control and manage passions and emotions. The paper concludes with the focus on the need of managing emotions and passions for effective leading.

Keywords: emotional intelligence, leadership, passion, emotions, leading.

Introduction

There are many attributes that a leader must possess in order to be successful like being pro-active, assertive, good character, flexibility and adaptability, conscientiousness etc and among these intelligence is the most important attribute. Successful leading and intelligence are closely related.

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The scientific studies of 1920s and 1930s proved the role of intelligence in leading and it was a common observation that “leaders were found to be more intelligent than their followers, and intelligence was consistently correlated with perceptions of leadership (Bass, 1990, and Lord, DeVader, & Alliger, 1986). One obvious limitation to this approach was that it did not take context or situational factors into account.” (1)

Intelligence is a broadly defined and conceptualized term. In the past intelligence was equated with academics i.e the traditional IQ based notions of intelligence and now with the concept of multiple intelligences (Howard Gardner, 1983) there is a shift in perception. The early leadership scholars did note that it was not necessary that intellectually smart leaders only succeeded, on the contrary leaders who were not intellectuals but who were smart in other aspects like emotional maturity, social insight, tact, social skills and competence were found to be more successful (Bass 1990). These constructs discussed by early leadership researchers parallel the multiple types of intelligences. These broader notions of intelligences are widely applied to the study of leadership, for example ‘social insight’ and ‘social skills’ are included as components of social intelligence (Marlowe, 1986; Riggio, Messamer, and Throckmorton, 1991). The notion of ‘tact’ is reflected in Sternberg and Wagner’s conceptualization of ‘practical intelligence’ (Sternberg and wagner, 1986; Wagner and Sternberg, 1985), and ‘emotional maturity’ has transformed into Salovey and Mayer’s notion of ‘emotional intelligence’. With the success of Daniel Goleman’s (1995) concept of ‘emotional intelligence’, the topic has attracted the attention of researchers in leadership studies to explore its depth and to understand its relationship to leader effectiveness.

The present study aims at exploring the concept of Emotional Intelligence, analyzing the mind and heart of two great historical figures, Othello, Antony and Cleopatra hailed as great leaders, who failed on account of being low on emotional intelligence. They are declared to be great leaders by historians with contrasting styles of leading and their failure are lessons on the importance of self control, self awareness, and how impulsive actions can be self destructive and fatal. The tragic downfall can teach the contemporary leaders lessons on the need and importance of emotional intelligence for effective leading.

Emotions in simple terms are believed to be associated with feelings. According to the Oxford English Dictionary the term emotions is defined as “strong instinctive feeling such as love or fear, hatred etc”; “A mental state that arises spontaneously rather than conscious effort and is often accompanied by physiological changes”², says an Online Dictionary. There is lot of confusion as to how to define ‘emotions’ and Hillman declares there is “a curious and overwhelming confusion” in the theory of emotion. It is an umbrella term that includes dozens of related terms and so we take up emotions as those intense feelings which a person experiences at a point of time as a reaction to some stimulus.

Though neglected in the past, emotions have once again become the focus of vigorous interest in philosophy, as well as in other branches of cognitive science in the recent years. Leading and emotions are very well connected, in-fact they are inseparable. Leading is all about having the ability to motivate. Motivation comes when you touch the emotions of the followers, thus the importance of emotions in leading cannot be ignored. History is full of leaders who have touched the heart of the followers by giving them emotional support and security. That is those leaders are successful who have appealed to people’s feelings of insecurity and fear and inspired, ignited their passions and brought out best in their followers. It is not only important for the leader to understand the emotions of the followers but equally important is to have the ability to understand their own. Here emotional intelligence comes into play.

It was Peter Salovey and Jack Mayer who suggested for the first time that individuals differ in their ability to perceive, understand, and use emotion as a source of information. They called this ability as Emotional Intelligence (Salaeditor and Mount 2006). Emotional intelligence can be defined as a set of competencies demonstrating the ability one has to recognize his or her behavior, moods, impulses, and to manage them best according to the situation. Emotional intelligence involves the ability to perceive, appraise, and express emotions accurately (Salaeditor and Mount 2006). It also involves emotional empathy; where one is not only able to understand accurately one’s emotions but also of others, and is able to manage and control those emotions intelligently.

² Ronald de Sousa. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.
<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/emotion/>.

Emotionally intelligent leaders are those who know how to inspire, arouse passion and keep people motivated and committed. They are aware of their own communication and how their style and behavior affects other people's moods and performance. They practice what they preach and are transparent and honest. They are able to generate energy and optimism and give people a sense of clarity and direction even in times of turbulence and crisis. Emotionally intelligent leaders create an emotional climate that fosters commitment, loyalty and above all trust in an organization. Thus, emotionally intelligent leaders are successful as per theory of emotional intelligence.

But the other side is that, is it always possible for leaders to be emotionally intelligent. Even the great leaders are human first with feelings, emotions, passions and personal life. Shakespeare's *Othello* and *Antony and Cleopatra* present before us the passions and emotions of true lovers but at the same time raises many questions related to the dilemmas, doubts, fear and anxieties of a leader.... bless'd are those

Whose blood and judgment are so well commingled
That they are not a pipe for Fortune's finger
To sound what stop she please. Give me that man
That is not passion's slave, and I will wear him
In my heart's core...

(*Hamlet*, 3.2.33-37)

The question of conflict between reason and passion over decision making is age-old. Plato in *Protagoras* (490 BC) was concerned with the overwhelming conflict when he asked whether pleasure and fear are ultimate motives of human action (Taylor, 1976; 58). He deliberates upon the role which men's ideals and their conceptions of the worth of things play in their lives (60). He argues that when considerations for pleasure usurp the position of reason in a man's life, he becomes destructive of the possibility of a man thinking for himself and acting on his own behalf (65). In the same way Spinoza, in *Ethics*, becomes critical of Descartes' 'voluntarism'—the view that self-control can be achieved by determining one's objectives through reason and pursuing them with determination. He believes that such a view ignores the impact of emotions in human life. David Hume in *A Treatise of Human Nature, Book I* (1739-40) denies the possibility of the conflict of reason and passion (Green and Grose, 1909; 78).

He represents will as inevitably determined by passions, with reason as their slave and thereby he gives place to emotions as supreme in the act of will. Kant in *The Critique of Judgment* (1790), *Doctrine of Virtue* (1797) and *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (1772) allows this as a possibility, but claims that will can and ought to be determined by reason, with passions subordinated to its sovereign demand. Is will, thus, inevitably determined by passions? Is it possible for reason to overcome passions? How are reasons controlled and subdued by passions and thereby act as strict internal agents of will? How do they, in combination, affect our choices, decisions and behaviour?

In *The Tragedy of Mustapha* (1609), Fulke Greville suggests that will, here taken as action, is inevitably divided between reason and passion. Shakespeare takes such a division seriously and through *Hamlet* he recognizes the possibility of reason and passion being united in people's will and purpose. Hamlet is extremely passionate about seeking revenge against his father's murderer, but each time he is controlled by reason to look for the best possible opportunity. *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Othello* dramatically present the conflict of passion and reason. Sometimes reason takes the lead and sometimes passion overpowers reason clouding the decision-making sensibility. In the context of leading, it is seen that leaders have to play multiple roles which remain complex and composite at professional and personal fronts. Peace and harmony of personal life offer motivation and energy to the leader to do well in professional fronts. Both the plays project that the problem of personal life should not cloud a leader's judgments and organizational decisions.

Antony and Cleopatra is a harmonious blend of history and tragedy, dealing with two colossal figures, one being the queen of Egypt, Cleopatra, and the other a Roman General, Antony. Derived from Thomas North's translation of Plutarch's *Lives*, Shakespeare presents the historical episode of Antony and Cleopatra highlighting weaknesses and sufferings of both the successful leaders. The alliance of Cleopatra and Antony initially exists for political reasons. After the assassination of Julius Caesar, moreover, Antony acts as one of the three major forces besides Octavius and Lepidus who take over Rome. His visit to Alexandria for maintaining law and order in the newly conquered territory acquaints him with the beauty and charm of Cleopatra, the queen of Egypt.

Though both the plays—*Julius Caesar* and *Antony and Cleopatra*—present the same character Antony centralizing his acts of leading and conquering common folks, we approach a different Antony in the play *Antony and Cleopatra*. Antony appears in *Julius Caesar* as a young and energetic general who loves sports and revelry. Brutus presents him as: “I am not gamesome. I do lack some part / Of that quick spirit that is in Antony” (1.2.28-29), and shows him as inexperienced: “Antony is but a limb of Caesar” (2.1.165)—who in fact forges “sports, to wildness, and much company” (2.1.188-89). By the closure, he is portrayed to be a politician whose inflammatory speech at Caesar’s funeral turns the public opinion in opposition to that of the conspirators. Finally, Antony shows his act of maturity by taking revenge of Caesar’s death by destroying all the conspirators at the Battle of Phillipi.

Antony as represented in *Antony and Cleopatra* is rather mellowed and experienced. He has the same spirit of enjoying games and drinking. When Antony was away, Cleopatra fondly recollects the times when they were together enjoying, “Ere the ninth hour, I drunk him to his bed; / Then put my tires and mantle on him, whilst / I wore his sword Philippan” (2.5.21-23). His close association with the Egyptian Queen, Cleopatra, raises questions related to his integrity and honour. He is blamed for losing his martial spirit. In fact Octavius Caesar expresses his extreme disapproval over Antony’s stay in Egypt:

Our great competitor. From Alexandria
 This is the news: he fishes, drinks and wastes
 The lamps of night in revel is not more manlike
 Than Cleopatra, nor the queen of Ptolemy
 More womanly than he...
 A man who is the abstract of all faults (*Antony and Cleopatra*, 1.4.3-10)

Octavius Caesar finds Antony’s behaviour rather irresponsible and immature: “As we rate boys who, being mature in knowledge, / Pawn their experience to their present pleasure, / And so rebel to judgment” (1.4.31-33). Antony is presented as immature and lascivious and Caesar complains to Lepidus about Antony’s neglecting his duties: “Amiss to tumble on the bed of Ptolemy, / To give a kingdom for mirth, to sit / And keep the turn of tippling with a slave” (1.4.17-19). This is the image of Antony in Rome. He stays with Cleopatra and embraces sensual pleasures neglecting his professional duties.

Antony's behaviour is questioned among his own followers as well. Philo, a close associate of Antony, presents before us two contrasting images of Antony in the opening scene of the play. First, Antony who proves himself as a promising soldier is compared with Mars, the God of War:

Nay, but this dotage of our General's
O'erflows the measure. Those his goodly eyes,
That o'er files and musters of the war
Have glowed like plated Mars... (*Antony and Cleopatra*, 1.1.1-4)

Philo fondly recollects the memory of this time with awe. However, with his association with Cleopatra, Antony allows himself to be a 'strumpet's fool', the one who has submitted himself to pleasures of the body. Antony is introduced to us through his comrades. Though they love and admire him, for his close association with Cleopatra and for neglecting the imperial responsibilities he is heavily criticized. His case is taken as that of a great warrior who has lost his martial spirit owing to the nature of his bodily lust:

And is become the bellows and the fan
To cool a gipsy's lust
... The triple pillar of the world transformed
Into a strumpet's fool... (*Antony and Cleopatra*. 1.1.7-10)

Leaders have to maintain an image, because that gives followers grounds to trust them. It makes leadership authentic and lasting. With the portrayal of the public image thus they set examples for followers and any deviation from the set standard or character leads to chaos and anarchy. Hence, good character is one of the important desirable traits of leaders (Bass and Stogdill, 1990). People look up to them for inspiration and guidance. Antony's image sets to decline among his own people because his passion for Cleopatra keeps him away from his responsibilities of a leader. For example in Act II, scene ii, Caesar charges Antony of breaching the contract of the triple alliance by not supplying aid when Fulvia along with Antony's brother had waged a war against Caesar: "To lend me arms and aid when I required them, / The which you both denied (2.2.93-94). This sense of evasion of responsibility makes him weak in the face of Octavius.

He freely admits his guilt of neglecting his duties and indulging in an affair with the Egyptian Queen, leaving away his wife Fulvia. He is apologetic and a sense of duty is evoked in the play.

Though the modern portrayal of *Othello* is on race, Othello is portrayed as a military general and hence a leader who is very conscious of his reputation and honour. He seems to believe in maintaining an irreproachable personal image. Though he engages himself in an action that could tarnish his image as a leader—i.e., marrying the daughter of a reputed senator, Brabantio, without his consent—he acts carefully in keeping his side clear: “I shall provulgate—I fetch my life and being / From men of royal siege (1.2.21-22). He openly admits that if he is guilty of having seduced Desdemona wrongfully, then he has no right to hold his position as a general or occupy any position in the affairs of the state. In actuality, he had not seduced Desdemona with magic power or charms, as claimed by Brabantio, rather he had won her with his merits.

The Senate turns to hear Othello and Desdemona. His account of their courtship and her statement of obedience to Othello as her freely chosen husband are testimony that love, not witchcraft, is responsible for their marriage. It cuts across age, culture and race. The Senate judges in their favour. As an authorized representative of the Senate, Othello carries royal norm to Cyprus. He takes up the liberty of marrying Desdemona in spite of racial and cultural differences because he finds himself a worthy suitor for her on account of his excellence in his professional life and claims to have been of royal lineage: “Let him do his spite; / My services which I have done the signory / Shall-out-tongue his complaints... (1.2.17-19). Besides, it is by virtue of his character and military exploits that Desdemona started loving him: “She loved me for the dangers I had passed, / And I loved her that she did pity them” (1.3.166-67).

Moreover, Othello’s tragedy was that he gave way to passions and allowed himself to be exploited by Iago. He falls prey to his passion and ignores reason. Initially, he is represented as a commanding personage, grand, self-contained and dignified: “The noble Moor whom our full senate / Call in-all-sufficient...the nature Whom passion could not shake” (4.1.275-77). This is what his character or personality has been before being corrupted by Iago. Iago’s outrage against Othello is less visible till the plot is completely revealed and the revenge taken.

The act by which Iago moves Othello to murder Desdemona and thus destroy him is essential for the understanding of Othello's passion. Iago uses intelligence and wit as a weapon to destroy Othello: "...we work by wit, and not by witchcraft" (2.3.362) and his strategy is to provoke Othello to false judgments and deplorable acts by inflaming his passions and confusing his perceptions. Throughout *Othello*, Iago uses language to distort rather than to clarify. Working with language, he manipulates people and circumstances in order to impose false meaning and coherence on what happens. For example, Iago's duplicity in reporting what he knows to Brabantio and Othello is the first way by which he arouses conflict between Brabantio and Othello. What he reports to Brabantio and Othello is factually true: Desdemona has eloped and Brabantio is hunting Othello. But those reports, though factual in substance, are so embroidered that they distort the reality they purport to describe. Iago infuses a description of his own response to Brabantio's abuse of Othello:

Nine or ten times
 I had thought to have yerk'd him here, under his ribs.
 Nay, but he prated
 And spoke such scurvy provoking terms
 Against your honour, that with the little godliness I have,
 I did full hard forbear him... (*Othello*. 1.2.4-10)

These details are pure fiction but slyly embedded in factual statement. Later, Iago plots Desdemona's fictitious adultery and presents it to Othello. He schemes to put Othello into a "jealousy so strong / That judgement cannot cure" (2.1.296-97). The cumulative consequence of his maneuvering is the corruption of Othello's mind and his reasoning capabilities leading to his downfall from a brave military general to that of a murderer. In both his greatness and weakness, Othello shows the possibilities of human nature. That a man of nobility can fall if consumed by passion to such an extent that reason is completely sidelined. The first act of the play brings out his natural leadership when he handles Brabantio tactfully in spite of being provoked by Iago: "Keep up your bright swords, for the dew will rust them. / Good signior, you shall more command with years / Than with your weapons" (1.2.59-61). It is a terrifying reminder that even the noblest of people are prone to emotional conflict and can be victims of passion. Othello, by Act IV is a transformed man. For example, when Lodovico witnesses Othello hit Desdemona, he says:

Is this the noble Moor whom our full Senate
 Call in all sufficient? Is this the nature
 Whom passion could not shake? Whose solid virtue
 The shot of accident nor dart of chance
 could neither graze nor pierce (*Othello*. 4.1.264-8)

What comes first? Is it reason? Or is it passion that comes first and sidelines reason? Is it reason that motivates one to act or do we act with the impulse of passion? According to Hume, reason is a faculty that grasps connection between facts, in weighing evidence for and against propositions, and in assessing the validity of arguments (Green and Grose, 1909; 85). As such it is eminently suited to engage the understanding, which is our capacity to grasp facts and truths. Reason sees what is to be seen, assesses what there is to be assessed. As such it is passive or inert. In order to move a man to action what is needed is an active principle, something that evokes desire or aversion. This Hume finds in passion: "Reason alone can never be a motive to any action of the will" (Dilman, 1981; 71).³ Kant criticizes Hume's view that reason cannot engage the will directly but can only guide it by serving passions.⁴

Leadership Studies establishes a lot from the tales of successful yet failed leadership. Antony's love for Cleopatra is part of his personal life but ironically a leader cannot separate himself from his followers. Antony's love for Cleopatra remains excessive.

³ In *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Book I Hume argues that for any man to act he has to be affected by what he sees or understands. He has to have likes and dislikes, and desires and aversions. What he sees or grasps would give him no reason to act unless he were already favorably or aversely disposed towards the kind of thing he comes to see or grasp. So ultimately a man's likes and dislikes, desires and aversions are determined by the constitution of his mind, the nature of his passions so that his ends are simply given in the end and as such unamenable to reason. Thus, reason can guide him towards action but not make him act alone. It is in association with passions and reason, man is motivated to action. Hume was wrong to divorce judgment from the emotions in his account of the passions and to represent emotions as inevitably blind. Some emotions blind their subject to reason and cloud his thinking. For further reading see Ilham Dilman's "Hume II: Reason and Feeling in Moral decision." *Studies in Language and Reason*. London: Macmillan, 1981. 60-79.

⁴ Kant suggests that 'will' can be determined by passion as Hume claims, but that this is only one possibility. When it is so determined the 'will' is subservient. But it can also be 'self-ruled' or autonomous, and it is so only when it is determined by reason. Like Hume, he also thinks passions are subservient to appetite or desire. The will is determined by something external to it. He notes morality and 'practical reasons' also have an impact on will. For further reading see Immanuel Kant's *Metaphysics of Ethics* (Trans. T.K. Abbot. London: Longmans, 1959).

It somehow makes him careless and licentious. It is true that leaders have a private life, but at the same time the demands of the position cannot be ignored. Antony fails because he denies his responsibilities as a leader. Self-awareness is believed to be an important trait for leaders. As represented, all the three leaders lack self-awareness. Antony decides to marry Octavia purely for political reasons and fails to realize that his passion for Cleopatra is such extreme that he can put everything at stake. In the same manner Cleopatra fails to estimate her strength and the decision to participate in the war ruins her completely. Othello too puts his faith in Iago completely without listening to his inner voice. It tells us that a leader has to sacrifice personal happiness and family for the sake of followers. History tells us Mahatma Gandhi sacrificed his personal life for the sake of his followers and the sad part is his family suffered severely, especially his eldest son Harilal.

The family was always sidelined to the margins.⁵ Thus, both the plays deal with the downfall of their principal characters; Antony, Cleopatra and Othello offering us insights into understanding the need to balance personal and professional life. Antony destroys his personal life for his extreme passion for Cleopatra, which in fact affects his governing decisions, i.e., his defeat at the battle of Actium. Othello's decision for promoting Cassio instead of Iago leads to his corruption by manipulative Iago. Iago seeks revenge by plotting seeds of doubt and suspicion against Desdemona as having an affair with Cassio. Engulfed with rage and jealousy, Othello kills Desdemona and when the truth is revealed, he is repentant and so ashamed of his deed that he commits suicide. The decision affects his personal life deeply and results in his total ruin. This however indicates that both are interlinked and the leader should be skilled in striking a balance between personal and professional life.

The plays also portray the effect of extreme passion. We have earlier discussed the roles emotions take in leaders' life and behaviour. In the context of organisations, the role emotions play in the success of organisations have long been neglected by organizational researchers. The common belief is that workers should leave their emotions behind when they walk into an organisation. They fail to realise that it is emotion that decides how we perceive the world.

⁵ This aspect of Mahatma Gandhi's life is dramatically portrayed by Ajit Dhalvi (1995) in his Marathi play *Gandhi virudh Gandhi*, where little known and highly maligned Harilal is shown as having a point of view. The same point of view appears in the film *Gandhi My Father* (2007) produced by Anil Kapoor, starring Akshay Khanna and Darshan Jariwala, directed by Feroze Khan.

That is why Monica Sjoonneby, Chief Consultant, TMI Development, emphasizes on the impact of positive emotions at workplace. It is these positive emotions that lead to better communication, more flexibility in thinking and more efficiency in our decision making. In the last two decades, however, researches and studies on Organizational Behavior have revealed that ignoring emotions completely at workplace is not possible and is not desirable (Ashkanasy and Cooper, 2008; Charmine *et al.*, 2005; Fineman, 2003, 1993; Murray *et al.*, 2006). These scholars have pointed out that the emotional dimension is an inseparable part of organizational life and can no longer be ignored in organizational researches. In fact the moods, impulses and feelings of leaders or managers affect the followers.⁶ Studies from various other academic fields such as Psychology (Dixon, 2003; Lewis *et al.*, 2008; MacCurdy, 1925), Sociology (Ollilainen, 2000; Stets and Turner, 2007), Anthropology (Levy, 1984) and Neuroscience (Lane and Nadel, 2002; Damasio, 1994) have proved the unavoidable influence of emotions on our behaviour and decision making. Hence, in what follows we explore the cases of a few renowned and successful Indian women business leaders who have managed to deal with their emotions and have been successful in balancing their professional and private lives.

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⁶ See Daniel Goleman, Richard Boyatzis and Anee McKee's *Primal Leadership: Learning to Lead with Emotional Intelligence*. Harvard: Harvard Business School Press, 2004.

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