

Finding the Balance: Navigating Challenging Workplace Environments

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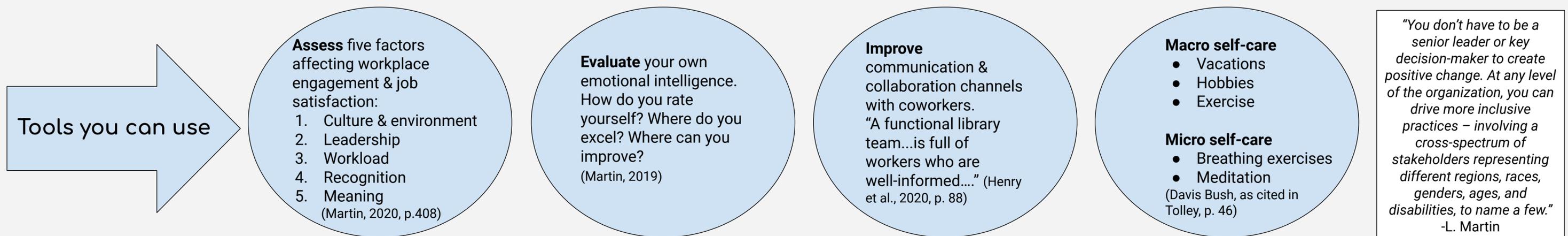
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Many library workers find themselves negotiating various roles and responsibilities that may fall under the heading "Other Duties as Assigned." For many library workers, it is the diversity of the work that appeals to them but, as library budgets and staffing continue to decrease, the number of responsibilities and roles that library workers have to assume increase. Library employees who are also faculty and on a tenure-track may also have to balance the responsibilities of their librarian position with the research and professional requirements necessary to achieve tenure.

Some are in positions of leadership, struggling to meet the demands of managerial and supervisory positions, often with minimal leadership training or guidance. Others may feel powerless to effect change in their organizations because they are not in leadership positions and then there is the pressure of the expectations of our patrons, stakeholders, administration, and even ourselves.

As Fobazi Ettarh noted, vocational awe - "the set of ideas, values, and assumptions librarians have about themselves and the profession that result in the notions that librarians as institutions are inherently good, scared notions and therefore beyond critique" - can also add to the stress and burnout many library employees experience (Ettarh, 2018). Given that challenges and stressors are part of most work environments and not likely to disappear, what tools can library employees use to successfully navigate challenges and challenging work environments?

How can developing and strengthening leadership skills help library employees find a balance between meeting the requirements of their job and maintaining boundaries between the job and one's personal life? Emotional intelligence and kind leadership skills can help empower library workers regardless of their position in the library and be foundational in helping to establish a sense of collegiality and community in our libraries.



Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence is a set of skills involving self-awareness and managing of emotions, your own and others. Psychologist and author Daniel Goleman defined emotional intelligence as "capacity for recognising our own feelings and those of others, for motivating ourselves, and for managing emotions well in ourselves and in our relationships" (Singh, 2015, p. 34). Emotional intelligence is an important component for success in the workplace. It is what enables us to have empathy for and understand others. It is useful in resolving conflicts, improving relationships, and creating healthier work environments (Singh, 2015, p. 21).

Emotional intelligence was conceived as being important for managers and leaders. "But as academic libraries diversify services and teamwork, emotional intelligence is a set of skills that can benefit professionals at all levels of an organization and have a positive impact on team and organizational effectiveness" (Gola and Martin, 2020, p. 752).

Emotional intelligence consists of four competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and social skills. In his book, *Library Leadership Your Way*, librarian Jason Martin recommends assessing one's self in the four competencies to see where one's strengths lie and which areas need more work (Martin, 2019). A person's EQ - or Emotional Quotient - is the measure of qualities such as empathy, adaptability, self-esteem, and leadership (Singh, 2015, p. 3). This term is often used interchangeably with emotional intelligence. A person's EQ or emotional intelligence can be improved by developing and strengthening these qualities. Emotional intelligence helps people manage their emotions in the workplace, leading to better decision-making and better professional relationships.

A person with high emotional intelligence is able to see things from a perspective different from their own and be aware of what others are experiencing (Martin, 2021, p. 49). It is not difficult to imagine scenarios in the library where high emotional intelligence would be useful: when interacting with an angry patron, when a coworker snaps at you, when a colleague doesn't respond to your email as fast as you would like.

Drawing upon emotional intelligence competencies help us respond with empathy and honesty in those situations. The competencies aren't skills that only people in leadership positions can use.

Emotional intelligence plays a part in most of our interactions - with our coworkers, with patrons, with our supervisors. As more people recognize the importance of well-developed emotional intelligence, our interactions become more productive and collaborative. Gola and Martin suggest that developing a community of practice around emotional intelligence is an effective way of increasing emotional intelligence both in the individual and in the workplace. "Opportunities to observe and model emotional intelligence competencies are embedded in the everyday interactions of coworkers and a community of practice becomes the embedded support structure leading to an ongoing cycle of reinforcing and valuing emotional intelligence" (Gola & Martin, 2020, p. 754).

No matter your position, you can initiate practices that are more inclusive or that demonstrate empathy.

References

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