

**Nonprofits and Emotional Intelligence: A Comparison of Position Requirements Between
Sectors**

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Abstract

Although the way in which nonprofit organizations operate resembles public and private entities, a main difference between the sectors is the reliance on emotional intelligence. The dependence on, often undercapitalized, nonprofits to work toward complex social issues creates a deep need for emotionally intelligent leaders to guide decision-making, communication, and innovation. This study seeks to understand how nonprofit sector job functions prioritize emotional intelligence in comparison to the private sector by evaluating the qualifications listed on job descriptions and analyzing key words that imply emotional intelligence skills are preferred. The literature explores the value of emotional intelligence in the workplace, and the infographic includes a comprehensible guide for employers to analyze current emotional intelligence requirements in job descriptions and best practices for employers to lead emotionally intelligent teams. By using the research results and literature, nonprofit leaders will better understand the significance of employee emotional intelligence and analyze how their organizations utilize employees' emotional intelligence to cultivate effective work environments.

Introduction

Emotional intelligence is defined by Bradberry and Greaves (2009) as, "...the ability to recognize and understand emotions in yourself and in others, and the ability to use this awareness to manage behavior and relationships." Emotional intelligence skills are classified by Bradberry and Greaves (2009) into four competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management. Within these competencies, characteristics such as emotional

awareness, self-confidence, adaptability, empathy, achievement drive, etc. help to fully develop each of the emotional intelligence competencies (Meloney, 2016).

According to Meloney (2016), the possession of emotional intelligence by both leaders and employees in the workplace is crucial for innovation and success. Workplaces where staff members have high levels of emotional intelligence tend to have higher levels of employee engagement, lower levels of turnover and burnout, higher levels of productivity, and increased harmony among employees (Meloney, 2016). Additionally, emotional intelligence skills are necessary to keep up with fluctuating workplace trends. Meloney (2016) states that diverse and inclusive environments are “virtually impossible” to create without emotional intelligence. High levels of emotional intelligence in leadership also assist in utilizing emerging technology in effective ways (Meloney, 2016).

Because Western economies are reliant on nonprofit organizations to produce and implement solutions to complex social issues, emotionally intelligent workplaces are essential within the nonprofit sector (Hess and Bacigalupo, 2013). This research seeks to understand how nonprofit organizations utilize emotional intelligence in comparison to the public and private sectors to better understand the emotional intelligence requirements of nonprofit employees and leaders. To better understand each sector’s focus on employee’s development of emotional intelligence, this research will consist of an analysis of emotional intelligence skills required in job descriptions from the nonprofit, public sector, and for-profit job listings. The infographic will help guide employers to better understand emotional intelligence in the workplace and cultivate new strategies to increase emotional intelligence within their organizations.

Literature Review

Emotional Intelligence

In the past, Western tradition has viewed emotions as disorganized interruptions of thought, with the capability of being, "...so potentially disruptive that they must be controlled," (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). In 1990, Salovey and Mayer (1990) published one of the first pieces of research regarding emotional intelligence, which emphasized the differences between models of intelligence and highlighted the difference and significance of emotional intelligence (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Since this research, the concept of emotional intelligence has gained much more popularity in both research and popular media (Salovey & Grewal, 2005).

Defined by Salovey and Mayer (1990), emotional intelligence is, "The ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and use this information to guide one's own thinking and actions." This definition of emotional intelligence has been used by numerous scholars as the guiding definition of emotional intelligence (Salovey & Grewal, 2005). Unlike social intelligence, which is the ability to understand and manage people/oneself, emotional intelligence focuses on recognition of emotional states to solve problems and regulate behavior most effectively (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Emotional intelligence includes the ability to monitor our own/others' moods and use the information to navigate social environments, guide thinking and action, and predict future behavior (Salovey & Grewal, 2005).

When establishing the concept of emotional intelligence, Salovey and Mayer (1990) created a framework of the mental processes of emotional intelligence, best known as the four-branch model of emotional intelligence. The four branches of this model include the perception and expression of emotion, assimilating emotion in thought, understanding and analyzing emotion, and reflective regulation of emotion (Mayer et. al, 2011).

The first branch of the four-branch model is the *perception and expression of emotion*. This concept includes the way that people identify and express personal emotions and physical states and identify emotions from other people, including language (verbal and body), artwork, etc. (Mayer et. al, 2011). The ability to perceive and express emotions is learned as early as infancy; children learn to cry when distressed, smile when feeling joyful, and watch for parent empathy (Mayer et. al, 2011). Perception and expression of emotion is the most basic and foundational branch of the four; without the ability to comprehend emotions, it's nearly impossible to express or utilize feelings. Individuals must be able to understand and receive emotional cues from others to perform complicated emotional tasks, such as consoling or conflict management (Mayer et. al, 2011).

The second branch of emotional intelligence, *assimilating emotion in thought*, focuses on how emotions impact and control cognitive processes including problem solving, reasoning, and decision making (Grewal & Salovey, 2006). While Western tradition has often focused on controlling emotions to not interfere with cognitive processes, research indicates that a person's ability to accept and control their emotions can have a positive impact on these processes (Grewal & Salovey, 2006). For example, it may be more effective to utilize a low-energy emotion, such as the state of being mellow or content, when focusing on a detailed project for a long period of time, but when trying to meet an important deadline in an hour, a high-energy emotion such as anxiety or exhilaration could be more beneficial.

The third branch of emotional intelligence is *understanding and analyzing emotions*, which is described in research as the ability to label emotions (including complex emotions) and understand the relationship between emotions (Grewal & Salovey, 2006). When attempting to understand and analyze emotions, people must understand that the experience of emotions is

rule-governed (Mayer et. al, 2011). Emotions arise because of the rules our mind and society has attached to them; anger tends to rise when there is a lack of justice, fear transitions to relief over time, negative low-energy emotions tend to distance us from others, etc. By understanding when and why these emotions occur, emotionally intelligent individuals can reason with and control emotions accordingly.

The fourth and final branch in the four-branch model of emotional intelligence is *reflective regulation of emotion*. This branch includes the ability to manage and regulate emotions in oneself and others (Mayer et. al, 2011). When the term ‘emotional intelligence’ comes to mind, it is often *reflective regulation of emotion* that people think of (Grewal & Salovey, 2006). Effective regulation of emotion may include knowing how to calm down after feeling frustrated or anxious and knowing how to calm and console others (Grewal & Salovey, 2006). A key aspect of this branch is the ability to stay open to both positive and negative emotions; individuals with high emotional intelligence can reflect on negative emotions and regulate these emotions in a healthy manner (Salovey & Grewal, 2005).

When studying the impact of high emotional intelligence, researchers have found significant benefits of high emotional intelligence for an individuals’ social and professional wellbeing. In 2000, researchers John Mayer, Peter Salovey, and David Caruso developed an ability-based test of emotional intelligence, the Multifactor Emotional Intelligence Scale (MEIS) (Fiori et al., 2014). This test was later revised and renamed the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT) (Fiori et al., 2014). The MSCEIT measures emotional intelligence through a series of questions to test participants' ability to perceive, use, and regulate emotion. Because of the accessibility of the MSCEIT, this test has become the most widespread measure of emotional intelligence (Fiori et al., 2014). Grewal & Salovey (2006) conducted

research in conjunction with MSCEIT results and found that high emotional intelligence correlates positively with self-reported empathy and correlates negatively with social anxiety and depression. In this study, participants with higher MSCEIT scores were less likely to exhibit violent behavior, had more positive interactions and relations with people, and were more likely to provide emotional support to others when needed (Grewal & Salovey, 2006). In another study of emotional intelligence in the workforce, researchers asked employees who worked in small, supervisor-led teams at a Fortune 500 company to complete the MSCEIT and rate each other on the qualities they displayed at work while supervisors rated their employees. The research found that employees with higher emotional intelligence were rated by their colleagues as easier to work with, more responsible for creating a positive work environment (Salovey & Grewal, 2005). Supervisors rated their high emotional intelligence employees as more interpersonally sensitive, more tolerant of stress, more sociable, and having greater leadership potential (Salovey & Grewal, 2005). Additionally, higher scores on the MSCEIT were related to higher salary and more promotions (Salovey & Grewal, 2005). The results of this study remained constant even after statistically controlling a variety of other factors including age, gender, verbal intelligence, and personality factors (Grewal & Salovey, 2006).

While the concept of emotional intelligence is a relatively new topic of research, research to date indicates that recognizing emotions and their impact on problem solving and behavior regulation can be extremely beneficial for individuals (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). The mental processes that make up the four-branch model of emotional intelligence - the expression of emotion, assimilating emotion in thought, understanding and analyzing emotion, and reflective regulation of emotion - help to divide the concept of emotional intelligence into more specific, comprehensible subsections. Current research reflects many benefits of high emotional

intelligence in social and work aspects, including positive relationships with others, positive ratings from friends, and relation to higher salary and more promotions (Salovey & Grewal, 2006). As research regarding intelligence theories continues to be conducted, the lives of many will continue to be impacted by individual and workplace progress in emotional intelligence.

Nonprofit versus Private Sector Emotional Intelligence

Because of the unique ways in which the nonprofit and private sectors operate, it is inevitable that emotional intelligence will be utilized in separate ways in each sector. This literature review aims to understand the ways in which nonprofit workplaces utilize emotional intelligence in contrast to the private sector.

Understanding the differences in emotional intelligence between the nonprofit and private sectors first requires an understanding of the purpose and scope of each of these sectors. According to the IE School of Public and Global Affairs (2018), the private sector consists of companies who are driven by revenue and profit. The purpose of organizations in the nonprofit sector is to help the public in some capacity; profit is not a governing factor in a nonprofit's success (IE School of Public and Global Affairs, 2018). Each of these sector's functions in a unique, equally important capacity, but the sectors often work in partnership to increase effectiveness (IE School of Public and Global Affairs, 2018).

Research advocates that emotional intelligence is one of the key factors workplaces must focus on, regardless of sector (Morehouse, 2006). In a study of leadership and emotional intelligence, Morehouse (2006) found that leaders ranked emotional intelligence abilities as twice as crucial for success than technical and cognitive abilities. Emotional intelligence skills were linked with customer satisfaction, quality assurance, and problem-solving ability.

Workplace teams with emotionally intelligent employees were found to have an enhanced ability to recognize and manage emotions and brace against distracting emotions, better task performance skills, and a positive influence on individual cognitive-based performance. Additionally, the research indicates a correlation between emotional intelligence skills and transformational leadership, a leadership model that has been promoted as the most effective current model of leadership (Morehouse, 2006).

In a 2005 study by Michelle O'Hara, University of Alaska Anchorage, the relationship between emotional intelligence in nonprofit and for-profit leaders was compared and analyzed. In this study 64 leaders (32 nonprofit leaders and 32 for profit leaders) were asked to take the BarOn EQ-i online emotional intelligence measurement exam. The BarOn EQ-i emotional intelligence exam analyzes an individual's overall emotional intelligence, as well as scores on emotional intelligence subcategories. These subcategories are listed as intrapersonal (self-regard, self-actualization, etc.), interpersonal (empathy, social responsibility, etc.), stress management (stress tolerance and impulse control), adaptability (reality testing, flexibility, and problem solving), and general mood scale (optimism and happiness). After comparing the scores of nonprofit and for-profit leaders, O'Hara (2005) found the overall emotional intelligence score had the largest difference between the nonprofit and for-profit leaders, with nonprofit leaders having a higher average emotional intelligence score. There were also statistically significant differences in the subcategories of stress management and adaptability, with nonprofit leaders scoring higher on average than the for-profit leaders. The research also states that there may be a significant difference between nonprofit and for-profit leaders in the intrapersonal category with nonprofit leaders indicating greater strength. No significant difference was found between the groups in the interpersonal or general mood subcategories (O'Hara, 2005).

The differences in scores between the nonprofit and for-profit leaders in the BarEQ-i emotional intelligence exam may be attributed to the significant differences in nonprofit versus for profit work responsibilities. According to Morehouse (2006), the stress that is present in nonprofit work environments to care for hundreds of people, often those who are in vulnerable life situations, as well as the constant uncertainty of funding, requires leaders and employees to have a different skill set than employees with similar careers in the private sector. Unlike public and private sector counterparts, nonprofit leaders and employees are required to create and implement solutions to complex, rapidly changing social issues (Hess & Bacigalupo, 2013). Regulatory, technological, and economic changes have forced nonprofits to adapt quickly and effectively to serve the mission, creating a desire for executive leadership that is emotionally intelligent and capable of facilitating organizational change (Hess & Bacigalupo, 2013). Nonprofit leaders are also often required to be flexible, realistic, effective at understanding problematic circumstances, and competent at creating adequate solutions; all characteristics that require emotional intelligence, specifically stress management and adaptability (Morehouse, 2006). Because nonprofit organizations rely on emotionally intelligent workplaces to navigate complex issues, organizations may act as an emotional intelligence training ground for employees and leaders (Morehouse, 2006). In her research, Morehouse (2006) found that nonprofit work cultures often include an environment where work and accomplishments are celebrated, opinions are respected, communication is open, and autonomy is given. Her research advocates that this type of environment fosters a culture where employees are encouraged to become more emotionally intelligent (Morehouse, 2006).

Unfortunately, the research regarding emotional intelligence comparisons between the nonprofit, private, and public sectors is extremely limited (O'Hara, 2005). Although current

research is limited, studies reflect that emotionally intelligent workplaces, regardless of sector, can have a positive impact on work and workplace climates. While emotional intelligence skills are still necessary in the private and public sectors, the research shows that the nonprofit sector is exceptional at utilizing emotional intelligence skills, especially those of stress management and adaptability, to create more effective and efficient workplaces.

Primary Research Analysis

Survey Overview

To best understand the differences in emotional intelligence requirements in jobs in the private versus nonprofit sector, primary research was conducted through data collected from online job listings. 100 total job openings were collected from indeed.com on December 18, 2021: 50 job openings from private companies, 50 from nonprofit organizations. All 100 openings were for positions at the equivalent level of CEO or Executive Director. These job descriptions were then analyzed using key words and phrases that indicate emotional intelligence.

Emotional Intelligence Indicators

The emotional intelligence indicators used in this research were based on Hess & Bacigalupo's (2013) research, *Applying Emotional Intelligence Skills to Leadership and Decision Making in Nonprofit Organizations*. In total, 16 of the 19 indicators from Hess & Bacigalupo's (2013) research were included; organizational awareness, initiative, and conscientiousness were excluded due to an inability to clearly identify these indicators in listings. The 16 indicators were

then classified into subcategories of the four-branch model of emotional intelligence: perception and expression of emotion, assimilating emotion into thought, understanding and analyzing emotion, and reflective regulation of emotion. Once the indicators were categorized, key words and phrases were assigned to each indicator (see below). These key words and phrases assisted in the process of analyzing job descriptions for emotional intelligence indicators. The list of indicators, their emotional intelligence categories, and key words and phrases indicating emotional intelligence are listed below:

Perception and expression of emotion:

- Self-confidence (noted in job openings by the terms “self-confidence,” “confidence,” “authenticity,” and “charisma.”)
- Empathy (noted in job openings by the term “empathetic”)

Assimilating emotion into thought:

- Trustworthiness (noted in job openings by the term “trustworthy”)
- Adaptability (noted in job openings by the terms “adaptable,” “flexible,” “open to change,” and similar terms)
- Achievement drive (noted in job openings by the term “entrepreneurial mindset”)

Understanding and analyzing emotion:

- Accurate self-assessment (noted in job openings by the terms “ability to self-reflect” and “self-ownership.”)
- Service orientation (noted in job openings by the terms “

- Change catalyst (noted in job openings by terminology related to creating a positive impact on a specific community/social issue)

Reflective regulation of emotion:

- Self-control (noted in job openings by the terms “delegation” and “work-life balance”)
- Teamwork (noted in job openings by the terms “teamwork,” “cooperation,” and requirements to work with staff members on projects.)
- Collaboration (noted in job openings by the terms “partnership,” “building relationships with stakeholders,” and requirements to work with outside agencies.
- Communication (noted in job openings by the terms “able to communicate effectively” and “strong communicator.”)
- Conflict management (noted in job openings by terminology references the ability to aide situations of conflict”)
- Influence (noted in job openings with a requirement for the applicant to be a spokesperson for the organization and have connections in various aspects of the community.)
- Developing others (noted in job openings by the term “develop staff,” “develop others,” and “develop leaders.”)
- Leadership (noted in job openings by a stated requirement to lead.

Table 1: Private Sector Job Description Analytics

There were 7 characteristics which the private sector listings required at a rate of over 25%: achievement drive, teamwork, collaboration, communication, conflict management, developing others, and leadership. There was only one characteristic which the private sector listings required at a rate of over 75%: leadership.

Characteristic	Number of Listings	Percentage of Listings /50
Self-Confidence	3	6%
Empathy	1	2%
Trustworthiness	3	6%
Adaptability	5	10%
Achievement Drive	30	60%
Accurate Self-Assessment	3	6%
Service Orientation	8	16%
Change Catalyst	2	4%
Self-Control	0	0%
Teamwork	18	36%
Collaboration	34	68%
Communication	30	60%
Conflict Management	13	26%

Influence	7	14%
Developing Others	20	40%
Leadership	46	92%

Table 2: Nonprofit Sector Job Description Analytics

There were 11 characteristics which the nonprofit sector listings required at a rate of over 25%: adaptability, achievement drive, service orientation, change catalyst, teamwork, collaboration, communication, conflict management, influence, developing others, and leadership. There were 4 characteristics which the nonprofit sector listings required at a rate of over 75%: teamwork, collaboration, communication, and leadership.

Characteristic	Number of Listings	Percentage of Listings /50
Self-Confidence	4	8%
Empathy	11	22%
Trustworthiness	7	14%
Adaptability	15	30%
Achievement Drive	25	50%
Accurate Self-Assessment	4	8%
Service Orientation	34	68%
Change Catalyst	33	66%
Self-Control	10	20%
Teamwork	39	78%

Collaboration	48	96%
Communication	41	82%
Conflict Management	15	30%
Influence	35	70%
Developing Others	33	66%
Leadership	50	100%

Table 3: Comparison between Private and Nonprofit Sector Description Analytics

Comparatively across both sectors, nonprofit listings were significantly more likely to require empathy, adaptability, service orientation, change catalyst, self-control, teamwork, collaboration, communication, influence, and developing others. Nonprofit organizations were 2%-56% more likely than private sector listings to require certain characteristics.

Characteristic	Private %	Nonprofit %
Self-Confidence	6%	8%
Empathy	2%	22%
Trustworthiness	6%	14%
Adaptability	10%	30%
Achievement Drive	60%	50%
Accurate Self-Assessment	6%	8%
Service Orientation	16%	68%
Change Catalyst	4%	66%

Self-Control	0%	20%
Teamwork	36%	78%
Collaboration	68%	96%
Communication	60%	82%
Conflict Management	26%	30%
Influence	14%	70%
Developing Others	40%	66%
Leadership	92%	100%

Table 4: Comparison of Emotional Intelligence Category Requirements between Private and Nonprofit Sector Listings

In the perception and expression of emotion category, the nonprofit job listings more often required both self-confidence and empathy. In the assimilating emotion into thought category, the nonprofit job listings more often required trustworthiness and adaptability, and the private sector job descriptions more often required achievement drive. In the category of understanding and analyzing emotion, the nonprofit job listings more often required all three indicators of emotional intelligence. In the category of reflective regulation of emotion, the nonprofit job listings more often required all 8 indicators of emotional intelligence than the private sector job listings.

Key:

- Red highlight: perception and expression of emotion
- Yellow highlight: assimilating emotion into thought
- Green highlight: understanding and analyzing emotion

- Blue highlight: reflective regulation of emotion

Category	Private %	Nonprofit %
Self-Confidence	6%	8%
Empathy	2%	22%
Trustworthiness	6%	14%
Adaptability	10%	30%
Achievement Drive	60%	50%
Accurate Self-Assessment	6%	8%
Service Orientation	16%	68%
Change Catalyst	4%	66%
Self-Control	0%	20%
Teamwork	36%	78%
Collaboration	68%	96%
Communication	60%	82%
Conflict-Management	26%	30%
Influence	14%	70%
Developing Others	40%	66%
Leadership	92%	100%

Key Findings and Implications

In all, the data collected indicates that, in reference to the 16 characteristics chosen in this primary research, nonprofit organizations are more likely to require more emotional intelligence skills in job listings than private organizations. Nonprofit leadership job listings are more likely

than private sector leadership job listings to have emotional intelligence requirements in all four branches of the four-branch emotional intelligence model. In the future, additional research could be conducted using other emotional intelligence characteristics, especially diversity and equity related indicators, as factors to determine if there is a conclusive correlation.

Moving forward, nonprofit organizations should consider the number of requirements added to job listings to attract candidates that may otherwise go to the private sector. On the other hand, private sector organizations may want to consider adding more emotional intelligence qualifications. Both sectors should consider intentionality in writing job descriptions to recruit staff that fulfill emotional intelligence gaps within their businesses and organizations. In all, organizations in both sectors should be intentional about the exact traits they wish to see in candidates, keeping in mind that the number or type of requirements may either attract or deter the most desirable candidate.

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