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Emotional Skills: an Essential Axis of Pedagogical Innovation in the Training of Buyers/Managers of External Resources

ABSTRACT

Objective: The transformation of many jobs within companies should give rise to a necessary evolution of skills used by individuals. Whether it is to improve the relevance of decisions or to preserve people's health, the development of emotional skills for the last ten years has often been presented as a necessity. Buyers, who are more and more seen as managers of ex-

ternal resources, are particularly concerned by this need. By strongly evolving, the purchasing function has become strategic and essential for achieving organizations' performances. The development of soft skills like the emotional skills of the buyers implies a significant evolution of the training intended for them. It is true if we consider initial training at the University or Business School, as well as in the field of in-company training. Based on a presentation of new needs, we propose possible changes and additions that could be brought to current training.

Methodology: The research was based on the analysis of literature review and real situations observed in companies (especially during training sessions).

Findings: Because of the evolutions of their job, buyers who become more and more managers of external resources should develop their emotional skills. These skills can be developed using adapted training sessions.

Value Added: The importance of emotional skills is pointed out and several ideas aimed at enabling the development of emotional skills are given.

Recommendations: It is recommended to use the TSP chain (Task, Skill, Pedagogy) in order to define adapted pedagogy for the development of emotional skills.

Key words: Emotions, emotional skills, manager, buyer, pedagogy

JEL codes: I20, M31

Introduction

Purchasing today is probably the function that evolves the most within companies and organizations in general. In doing so, it is also the function that contributes the most to the evolution of organizations. This is all the more true that within organizations of all types and all sectors, a major and increasingly shared feature of the purchasing function lies in its transversality. Having become a strategic function, it interacts more and more with all the other functions (commercial, production, R & D, ...). As a result of this evolution, there are strong changes in the buyer's profession. More and more, the missions given to the buyer contribute to make him become a real manager of external resources, as suppliers should more and more be seen and called (Poissonnier, 2017). While making his work richer and responding

to his strongest appetites, it causes difficulties that expose buyers and their businesses to new risks. Most of them are still largely ignored. In this article, we explain how the development of emotional skills, useful for everyone in his personal and professional life, is particularly welcome for buyers given the ongoing changes affecting their profession.

On the basis of a description of the basic emotional skills and development modalities of the latter, we propose tracks for training institutions – Universities and/or business schools or engineers – in order to allow the development of emotional skills for managers and in particular managers of external resources. New knowledge and skills, but also adapted pedagogies must be deployed.

1. From purchasing to the management of external resources

Purchasing has long been seen as a “necessary evil” within companies. Just a century ago, Henri Fayol, one of the “founding fathers of management” did not hesitate to present purchasing as a “sub-function” of the commercial function. This last one was described as a function which goal was to buy (a little) and to sale (for the main part of the activity) (Fayol, 1916). Even Michael Porter (1986), who developed so many and relevant visionary visions, presented purchasing, in his famous “value chain” as a simple “support function”. Faced with the ongoing changes in the function, he was also the first, a few years ago, to come back to this vision and to consider purchasing as a strategic function.

1.1. Innovating for creating value: an emerging and increasingly important mission for buyers

During the “Glorious Thirties” (1945–1975), most companies evolved in a production economy. This is characterized by the fact that manufactured products were very easy to sell. Mass production was associated with mass

consumption, which allowed companies to set prices in a comfortable way: costs were often considered as data, to which it was possible to add a comfortable margin to obtain a selling price that was able to satisfy many consumers.

Beyond the oil shocks, the real break in the 1970s, marking the end of the "Glorious Thirties", lies in the shift from a demand for first equipment to a demand for renewal. This concerns many products. At the same time, competition was growing, becoming truly international. Prices were falling and, above all, they were imposed on companies that had to adapt to them if they wanted to continue selling and survive. The only way to restore margins in a context of lower selling prices was to reduce costs. This was the starting time of outsourcing.

It is not surprising, then, that purchasing was seen as increasingly important, representing the main lever of cost reduction. Historically, it is therefore this potential for cost reduction that was at the origin of the recognition of the strategic nature of purchasing. Today, considering this only aspect would not be enough. We would forget the important role of purchasing in securing supplies, in the creation of value and the constitution of a sustainable competitive advantage.

The resource dependence theory (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978) or approaches based on key competencies (Hamel & Prahalad, 1990) and dynamic capacities (Teece & al., 1997), are particularly enlightening for the understanding of the new missions given to buyers and to the purchasing function.

The scarcity of many resources contributes to the development of new and numerous risks on companies. At a time when security of supply becomes an essential mission for buyers, the relationship with suppliers becomes crucial. It is the latter who hold three-quarters of the resources needed by the company (since purchasing now represents three-quarters of the turnover for a very large number of companies).

Beyond this defensive vision, which perfectly illustrates the resource dependence theory, a more ambitious vision completes the new role given to purchasing. It is built on the resource-based approaches developed in the

1990s. Purchasing has, over time, become a key factor in the development and defense of the competitive advantages of businesses. It is therefore necessary to erase the traditional distinction between internal and external resources (after all, all resources are needed), which bases the reasoning on “extended enterprise”. At the very least, it is necessary to develop a real strategic management of external resources, i.e. suppliers and their distinctive competences, since the company’s performance in the short term, as well as in the longer term, is intrinsically linked to the performance of its external resources (Tréhan, 2014).

The current research and first attempts at the recognition of intangible assets, first and foremost suppliers and supplier relationships, is a proof to the relevance of the approach.

1.2. Collaborating for innovating

Whether to secure supplies, to better innovate with suppliers, to be more responsible towards them – collaboration with suppliers is now a major evolution in the world of purchasing.

In order to benefit from all the potential positive effects associated with collaboration (improving the quality of products, reducing delays, gains in terms of image, etc.), and developing true “cooperative advantages” (Kanter, 1994), it is important to develop one’s capacity to create new relationships, but also its ability to coordinate the contributions of partners. Simonin (1997) refers to this ability speaking about “cooperation know-how”. Collaborating is only a prerequisite for successful collaboration. It is also important to collaborate well, which is important to attract the best partners and to start a virtuous circle. Lorenzoni and Lipparini (1999) emphasize the importance of these two capacities. They grouped them together under the concept of “relational capacity”.

The best way to collaborate well with suppliers lies in the internal collaboration, a great coherence existing between the operations set up internally and

outside the company, as the concept of “control chain” clearly shows (Poissonnier, 2005). To do this, the “collaborative buyer” has to develop new skills.

1.3. The three major types of collaborative skills

The development of innovation is based on the existence of an innovation process. It also requires several skills. These ones are multiple. They are specific when innovation takes the form of co-innovation and is done in collaboration with external partners, whether they are customers, suppliers or even competitors.

Developing innovation with suppliers requires the mobilization of skills that are sometimes already developed and used in purchasing organizations. Most of the time, real efforts to develop these skills are nevertheless necessary. The level of control and implementation of these skills is indeed still very perfectible.

One of the main objectives of purchasing organizations, in order to contribute optimally to innovation, is probably to build and strengthen trust with suppliers. Beyond that, it is important to transform this necessary but not sufficient trust into a fertile ground for developing innovations. It requires several important changes in the buyer’s jobs.

Developments in the buyer business can be summarized as follows:

- The classic cost-killing, consisting of considering cost reduction as the ultimate measure of the performance of buyers is no longer relevant (if considered as the only measure). It remains of course present in many contexts but is, at worst, apprehended with reference to the total cost and no longer to the simple conventional purchasing cost (the effects in terms of loss of quality, overconsumption, image and so on are now better taken into account). In the most mature companies, it is even the contribution of buyers to the creation of value (in various forms) that is now targeted.
- A significant part of the buyer’s contribution of value results from his ability to contribute to the innovation of his company. This innovation is no longer done without suppliers and is increasingly taking the form of co-innovation (having much outsourced, companies need, to continue to

innovate, skills that are found only from the supplier side). It is therefore important for the buyer to make his company the preferred customer of its suppliers (in order to benefit in a privileged way from their creative potential) (Chick and Handfield, 2015).

- Another important part of the value generated by the buyer lies in his ability to be responsible. This responsibility can enable him to correct the often degraded image of the profession in the eyes of colleagues and the general public (at a time when purchasing represents on average more than 60% of the turnover of companies, it becomes difficult to develop Company Social Responsibility without making responsible purchases.
- In addition to these recent developments, there is the current and future impact of robotization and digitization, which are already transforming (and will continue to do so) buyers' activities. More and more purely operational and administrative tasks are assigned to the machines, literally crowding out the buyer of tasks that he sometimes enjoyed doing. Other tasks remain done by buyers but in a different way, with the help of machines (the famous "cobots"). They should be redesigned. Finally, new tasks appear: those that only the human is really able to take care of. They are often associated with the need to better collaborate to innovate together and create value and rely on the increased mobilization of relational and/or emotional skills.

Such developments in his business, affecting both the nature of its missions and the means to achieve them, expose the buyer to new difficulties. Increasingly, buyers are subject to conflicting injunctions (delivering innovation and creating value while continuing to reduce costs, securing supplies while taking advantage of the economic opportunities of switching to another supplier, becoming the preferred client of his suppliers while negotiating with them good terms of payment for his company and so on). These difficulties give rise to frequent burn out. The enrichment of the profession, possibly experienced as a welcome development, quickly becomes a problem when the old goals persist and coexist with the new ones, creating "role conflicts" (Katz & Kahn, 1966). By incorporating new

criteria into his decision-making, the buyer often feels that he is losing efficiency as his decisions lose their purely economic relevance.

For the buyer, such a situation makes decision-making difficult while decision-making situations tend to multiply (gaining autonomy, the buyer becomes a real “manager”). The difficulties are further strengthened by resistance to change from colleagues who sometimes have trouble seeing buyers gain responsibility and recognition (a situation considered as being done to their detriment).

Buyers are also victims of strong criticism and accused of many problems due to a de-industrialization that they would have favored by deleterious daily choices to buy cheaper from the other side of the world than from their local historical suppliers. Although very broadly based, this criticism should not make us forget that the function is all the more important for pacifying inter-company relations. Buyers hold the keys to the implementation of much more balanced and fertile relations in terms of economic value creation.

To carry out these new missions, three main types of skills deserve to be distinguished (Poissonnier et al., 2012). Individual skills, those of buyers essentially; organizational skills mobilized by purchasing organizations; and inter-organizational skills.

In the rest of this article, we choose to focus on the individual skills that are emotional skills.

2. Emotional Skills: An Increasingly Essential Need for Buyers

The evolutions described in the previous section explain why buyers have a real interest in developing their emotional skills in order to build more collaborative (and therefore innovation-generating and value-creating) relationships with their suppliers and colleagues.

The development of his emotional skills must allow the buyer to:

- Better live the role conflicts he has to deal with and, more generally, the context of profound change that he is experiencing today;
- Make better decisions, informed by a better knowledge of his needs and those of his interlocutors;
- Better contribute to the (sustainable) performance of his company by integrating the best knowledge of these needs into his decisions;
- Develop employability at a time when robotization can be considered as a threat;
- And especially to better contribute to innovation by becoming, as it is often already the case, the first innovator of the company.

2.1. Emotions and management: a place more and more recognized

Two major paths are developing in parallel in terms of recognizing the role of emotions at work (Lhuillier, 2006). The first focuses on the management of emotional skills in the service of work performance. The second focuses more on the issue of mental health at work and examines the difficulties associated with a lack of emotional work.

Fredrickson (2003) has shown how cultivating pleasant emotions (joy, contentment, pride etc.) can develop important resources. These can be categorized into three broad categories: physical resources (strengthening and preservation of health, increased energy levels), psychological resources (resilience development and optimism, sense of priorities etc.) and intellectual resources (development of problem solving skills, creativity etc.). Each of these resources tends, in turn, to develop the ability to feel pleasurable emotions, generating a virtuous circle.

Beyond pleasant or positive emotions, it seems important to cultivate emotional diversity. Unpleasant emotions are also very valuable because of the fact that they provide information on unmet needs. Without entering here into a very

detailed analysis, it is possible to account for origins (triggers), manifestations (particularly physiological) and the effects of basic emotions. Table 1, proposed by Kotsou (2016) provides an excellent synthesis of the elements mentioned.

Table 1. The dynamics of basic emotions

Emotion	Physiological manifestation	Driver	Tendency to action	Effect/Goal
Anger	Increased heart rate, muscle tone (especially in the arms)	Obstacle, injustice	Attack	Mobilize energy to change a situation that does not fit
Fear	Acceleration of breathing, increase of heart rate, contraction of muscles, tremors of the body	Danger	Flight	Protection
Disgust	Unpleasant sensations, nausea, vomiting	Harmful element	Reject	Take distance from what is perceived as bad for oneself
Sadness	Tears, decreased skin tone and temperature, muscle tightness	Loss	Withdrawal	Withdrawing from the action to reflect on mistakes, informing other group members in order to receive support
Joy	Smile, laugh, tears, hopping	Success, positive or important element, adequacy with our values, self-actualization	Approach, opening	Positive effect on immunity, self-confidence, action, sharing with others, vitality, altruism, creativity
Surprise	Bursts, abrupt gestures, twitching of certain muscles	Unexpected situation	Withdrawal	Vigilance

Source: translated by the author from Kotsou, 2016.

These basic emotions are of course very important in a professional context. Such contexts are also conducive to the emergence of more social emotions, felt, as their name indicates, when human relations are at stake. Table 2 presents some characteristics of the main social emotions observable in a professional context.

Table 2. The main characteristics of social emotions in a professional context

Emotion	Driver	Tendency to action	Effect/Goal
Shame	Perception of a standard deviation	Correcting the deviation	Conforming to the standards of the group
Guilt	Damage caused to others	Repair	Preserve the social order
Jealousy	Competition/Rivalry	Control	Keep the exclusivity of the relationship
Pride	Success of valued behavior	Make it remarked	Strengthen one's place in the group

Source: translated by the author from Kotsou, 2016.

Since emotions are intrinsically linked to lived experiences and are the result of a process of natural selection of the most appropriate responses (because they allow survival at the origin) in these different contexts, it is illusory to imagine, as it is sometimes suggested in some companies, letting the emotions on the doorstep. Of course, strategies for neutralizing emotions exist. They do not change the lived experience of individuals and such strategies always fail. Beyond the public health issue, the development of emotional skills also has a real interest in the relevance of the decisions that individuals will be able to make or the quality of the relationships they can develop. A quality essential to trust, collaboration and the success of co-innovation and value creation.

2.2. The five basic emotional skills

Table 3, also proposed by Kotsou (2016), presents the five basic emotional skills and clarifies their role at the personal and interpersonal level.

Table 3. The Five Essential Emotional Skills

	On a personal level, it refers to the ability to ...	On an inter-personal level, it refers to the ability to ...
Identify	Identify one's emotional experience	Identify emotional processes in others
Express	Express emotions in a context-sensitive way	Allow others to express their feelings and facilitate this expression
Understand	Understanding one's emotional experience in the context	Understand the experiences and reactions of your interlocutors
Regulate	Manage and regulate unpleasant emotions according to the context and its objectives Regulate your positive emotions and make your emotions a strong point: use your emotions to be more creative, make better decisions	Regulate and manage unpleasant emotions in their relational dimension, for example in the context of a conflict Regulate the positive emotions in the relationship, for example to create motivation, install a creative atmosphere
Use	Use your emotions positively to cultivate our resources	Use emotions positively to enrich our relationships

Source: Translated by the author from Kotsou, 2016.

The first and third skills (Identify and Understand) are sometimes presented as analytical skills. They allow to analyze finely what is happening in a given situation. The second, fourth and fifth skills (Express, Regulate and Use) are further described as strategic skills. They make it possible to really choose what one will do with his emotion.

These few paragraphs make it possible to understand the issues and interest of the development of emotional skills. Nevertheless, our ambition is of course not to provide all the keys that would be particularly useful to a buyer who wants to collaborate better to better contribute to the innovation

of his company. However, we propose here to highlight what Ilios Kotsou calls the eight stages of emotional hygiene.

2.3. Develop your emotional skills

Like any other skill, emotional skills can develop. The eight steps described in Table 4 seem to us an excellent first guide.

Table 4. The eight stages of emotional hygiene

1st part: Recognize and welcome the emotion

Identify and name emotions	Identification requires an increased sensitivity to the signals our body transmits about our experience: "What do I feel? Where does emotion manifest in my body? ... " Trying to put in words our emotions is a way to better observe them and give them meaning.
Welcome emotions	Recognize and welcome emotion. Recognize it by giving it a space, give it your attention. To welcome it is to look at it without condemnation or judgement. Emotion-induced behaviors are negative or positive, not the emotion itself.

2nd part: Take care of our needs

Identify our needs	What is the message of my emotion? What is its intention? What needs or values do these emotions speak to me about? What is really important to me?
Differentiate	Distinguish between needs and means. Apart from the current situation, are there other ways to take care of the identified need? How can I be less active in the future?
Act	To behave concretely to take care of my needs. Apply a solution and test its effectiveness

3rd part: Manage our thoughts

Question our beliefs	Check if our beliefs are appropriate or limiting. Where are they from? Do they seem adapted to me? Are they still useful today? What are they related to?
Change the dysfunctional rules	What does it take for our needs to be met? Do our rules make us depend on others or ourselves? What is the result of the rules I have adopted?
Reframe difficulties in a positive way	What is interesting about this situation? What can it teach me? What is the benefit today of this difficulty?

Source: Translated by the author from Kotsou, 2016.

Finally, there are many studies that confirm the direct or indirect influence of emotional skills on the parameters involved in the life of organizations (quality of interpersonal relationships, job satisfaction, absenteeism, level of stress, leadership, performance and commitment of the teams etc.). Such findings argue for the development of emotional skills in the training of future managers, and especially for future buyers.

3. Educational innovations likely to foster the development of the emotional skills of future buyers

In terms of emotional skills, knowledge, useful as it may be, is rapidly becoming insufficient. It is indeed true know-how and know-how to be that should be developed. In this section, we propose the TSP (Tasks-Skills-Pedagogy) chain, which aims to identify the most appropriate pedagogies according to the tasks that the learners will have to perform and the skills they will have to deploy.

3.1. Knowledge to transmit

In recent years, researches in psychology of emotions and neuroscience has produced very interesting results. They remind us of the role of emo-

tions in professional activities (Cahour & Lancry, 2011). Kotsou (2016) cites numerous studies showing the role of emotions and emotional skills on the relevance of decisions made and the quality of life at work. This knowledge undoubtedly deserves to be integrated into the training of future (or current) managers and engineers (at least).

Presenting the basic emotions, as we did in the second part of this article, emphasizing the role (and usefulness) of each of them seems both essential and time-consuming. This constraint should of course be integrated in the reflection and the change brought.

Of course, the question of emotions is not, in existing formations, totally evaded. Buyers and prospective buyers often approach the latter in sessions specifically dedicated to negotiation. The generally favored approaches, integrating only a limited focus on emotions, are essentially characterized by their utilitarian purpose. It is a question of using at best an emotion felt to reach the best negotiation possible. The point is often also to hide the emotions that one feels (anger, fear and so on) not to be in a position of weakness. This vision is of course partial and insufficient. Better knowing the emotions, their role and their functioning should help to better understand its own functioning and that of the others.

Insisting on the virtues of all emotions must also facilitate emodiversity: accepting, even sharing, emotions felt without judgment. Emotional racket (replacing a socially non-accepted emotion with a more "acceptable" emotion) prevents one from knowing better about its own way of functioning and often generates inefficiencies and tensions.

3.2. The development of know-how and know-how to be

Beyond the theoretical knowledge to give concerning emotions and their true value, the emotional skills should be developed. The five skills and the eight stages of emotional hygiene, presented in the previous section, prove to be

very valuable in order to develop know-how and well-being. To really develop these skills, it is important to provide practice time as part of the lessons.

If the role of individual practice, which can take the form of mindfulness meditation (Henry, 2014, Peillod-Book & Shankland, 2016) is essential, Universities and Schools need to further encourage this practice by developing specific lessons.

3.3. A pedagogy based on the TSP chain

In the context of strong business development, under the effect of many technological developments (digitization, robotization etc.), fears of seeing many jobs or activities disappear are becoming stronger. Numerous recent books point out the dangers of the rise of digital technologies and the entry of robots into our environments and in particular into companies. Many scholars are worried about this, basing their pessimism on philosophical analyzes (the dangers linked to a possible domination of machines over men) or more economical approaches (end of the “creative destruction” well defined by Schumpeter (1942) who saw new sectors and jobs take over from those made obsolete by technical progress). Some researchers, however, are optimistic, reminding us that the consequences of robotization will not be determined by the technologies themselves, but rather by the choices that come back to us in terms of the use of these technologies. Figures from well-documented studies are also dissonant. Carl Benedikt Frey and Michael Osborne, two researchers at the Oxford Martin School concluded in 2013 that 47% of American jobs were threatened by automation. More recently, a study by the OECD put the figure of 9%, relativizing, while confirming (it is not nothing) the threat. Anyway, the phenomenon, accelerating, will quickly become a structuring element of the economy in the years to come. Some experts no longer hesitate to describe the consequences of what Andrew McAfee and Erik Brynjolfsson (2014) call “The second age of the machine” linked to the “fourth industrial revolution” or “robolution”.

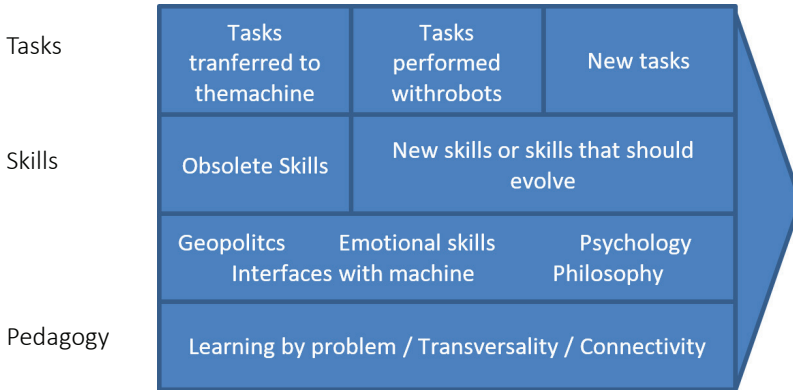
Beyond the management of a legitimate fear, training is the only activity that can allow a development of technical skills on the basis of which new professions could really emerge. Chief digital officers, developers, community managers, cybersecurity analysts, data scientists (freshly chosen to be the sexiest job of the 21st century by the Harvard Business Review) and their likes – all appear to become new business opportunities and require skills that are still largely lacking in the labor market.

Beyond the technical skills, a need for specifically human skills also emerges (O'Brien, 2017): emotional skills, relational skills – all these that are not currently mastered by robots and which development will undoubtedly become the essential condition for the many job creations to come.

The diagram below is based on the recognition of three types of tasks that will be affected by the technologies associated with robotization or digitization:

- Certain tasks, including those that current buyers are happy to complete, may no longer be made by these buyers since the machines can do them by being cheaper, faster and more reliable (essentially administrative tasks.);
- Some tasks will always be made by buyers but will be exercised with the technology (for example with cobots, or collaborative robots), which is already largely the case today (search for suppliers, selection of the latter, ...)
- Other tasks, still not supported by buyers, will be more made by them thanks to the time gained on old tasks now less time consuming. They are more value-creating tasks, including innovation, which is also consistent with the evolution of buyers' missions described in the first part of the article.

Diagram 1. Three types of tasks that will be affected by the technologies associated with robotization or digitization



Source: own elaboration.

With these three types of tasks correspond specific skills:

- Some become obsolete (those which allowed to perform the tasks transferred to the machines);
- Others must evolve and must be developed (those which make it possible to accomplish old tasks differently and those which make it possible to take on new tasks).

The development of these new skills must be based on new pedagogies, both in substance and in form. Besides the technical skills (hard skills) to better exploit the possible interfaces with the machine, more social skills (soft skills) deserve to be developed. Emotional skills are one of them, but so are relational skills based on psychology, philosophy and even geopolitics. Teachings of these skills are likely to give an indispensable complementary perspective. On form, learning by problem, the development of transversality and connectivity also prove to be teaching methods already mobilized and which first results are more than encouraging.

Conclusion

The development of emotional skills is an important issue in terms of employability and quality of life for many people given the evolution of their missions. This is especially true for buyers. Training institutions such as Universities and Schools need to upgrade training in relation to relevant skills. In this article, we propose some possible evolutions concerning knowledge, know-how and know-how to be, as well as pedagogic evolutions, on the substance and on the form likely to accompany them. The TSP (Tasks-Skills-Pedagogy) chain offers a coherent and systemic vision of these evolutions.

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