

# What Constitutes a Healthy Localization Department?

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**Just like a physically-fit person, a department or organization functions best when it is healthy from within: Happy and confident staff with a strong sense of belonging and unity forms the strong core of any successful project team. So how can we boost the health of our localization departments?**

It recently dawned on me that the health of a localization department is just like the health of a person: A healthy person brings up the right level of energy to function, has the ability to carry out the tasks at hand as well as a clear mind that knows the purpose and goals of every action taken to follow the right path to success.

Thinking more closely of the keywords, “healthy”, “localization” and “department”, I defined them in the following way:

**Healthy** = Strong inner core of the department

which is primarily made up of people

**Localization** = The purpose and support structure of the department

**Department** = Team working together as one body

## **Strengthening the Inner Core of the Localization Department**

The inner core of a department is primarily made up of people. Therefore, social and emotional intelligence has a major impact on departments. The Consortium for Research on Emotional Intelligence in Organizations has published a comprehensive list of the components of social and emotional intelligence quotients, which I would like to share with you for illustration purposes (see Table 1).

### **Bar-On Model of Emotional-Social Intelligence**

**INTRAPERSONAL** (self-awareness and self-expression):

**Self-Regard:** To accurately perceive, understand and accept oneself

**Emotional Self-Awareness:** To be aware of and understand one’s emotions

**Assertiveness:** To effectively and constructively express one’s emotions and oneself

**Independence:** To be self-reliant and free of emotional dependency on others

**Self-Actualization:** To strive to achieve personal goals and actualize one’s potential

**INTERPERSONAL** (social awareness and interpersonal relationship)

**Empathy:** To be aware of and understand how others feel

**Social Responsibility:** To identify with one’s social group and cooperate with others

**Interpersonal Relationship:** To establish mutually satisfying relationships and relate well with others

**ADAPTABILITY** (change management)

**Reality-Testing:** To objectively validate one’s feelings and thinking with external reality

**Flexibility:** To adapt and adjust one’s feelings and thinking to new situations

**Problem-Solving:** To effectively solve problems of a personal and interpersonal nature

**GENERAL MOOD** (self-motivation)

**Optimism:** To be positive and look at the brighter side of life

**Happiness:** To feel content with oneself, others and life in general

Table 1: “The Bar-On Model of Emotional-Social Intelligence (ESI), R. Bar-On, 2006, Psicothema, 18, supl., p. 21.

Source: [www.eiconsortium.org/measures/eqi.html](http://www.eiconsortium.org/measures/eqi.html)

I have found the above-stated attributes of intrapersonal, interpersonal, adaptability and general mood of a person to be applicable to department managers in the working place. Many times, we are swamped with busy schedules of meetings that need to be planned, follow-ups that are pending, projects that have to be executed and monitored, rescue plans that have to be developed for unexpected events as well as managing our clients’ change requirements. The workload can easily occupy our minds both during our work hours as well as in our free time – some of us even still process these issues during our sleep.

In such overly busy times, our self-awareness may numb away and our social awareness and interpersonal relationships start to take a backseat. We focus our entire energy on the task at hand and thus become purely task-oriented. When finishing the task at hand and meeting the project deadline becomes the single ‘force of nature’, we struggle to keep a healthy focus on interpersonal relationships and each team member gets caught up in their own personal battles. However, cooperation between team members and among teams calls

for an interpersonal relationship-building effort, which takes time.

And what happens to our adaptability in such busy times? How do we cope with change when a new or better way of doing things is introduced? Some of us may just be so jaded by the daily workload that we have no time to welcome change. Why now? Why not wait until later? This affects our general mood and others. A once excited, ready-to-conquer-the-world person is now buried under the loads of endless work and demands from a fast-paced work environment.

As localization department managers, we have two options here:

First, we can leave it to the individual to improve his or her social and emotional intelligence. However, we know that today’s busy work schedules leave little time, and thus only a few individuals might be determined enough to strengthen and enhance social skills on their own.

Second, we as localization managers look at the improvement of our staff’s social and

emotional intelligence as a valuable investment. We can contribute to it by working with the human resource team and by providing relevant webinars, talks and activities. If interpersonal skills can be enhanced, each staff member works with a stronger commitment to do well for others in the team. Such a wholesome working environment would make each staff willing to stay on to contribute their best. This helps to build a strong core with which your localization department will be able to function more efficiently.

## **The Support Structure of the Localization Department**

For some organizations, a typical operational support structure is to have a project manager (PM) as the main contact person for the account managers and their clients. At the same time, however, the PM is in charge of providing client information and requirements to the other supporting pillars such as the translation unit, the quality assurance (QA) unit, the desktop publishing (DTP) unit, the engineering unit, and the finance unit.

This means that there is a tremendous workload and responsibility upon the shoulders of a PM. Every single bit of information that comes to the PM has to be verified, clarified and approved. On top of that, the PM is responsible for overseeing the whole production cycle of the localization projects.

Therefore, the project-oriented type of support structure will sooner or later create a bottleneck at the project management level. This will hinder the flow of projects and may lead to delays in project delivery and in disseminating important information regarding clients' requirements down to the supporting

pillars.

Then, there is an alternative form of operational support structure in organizations: In a client-oriented type of operation mode, the clients' information and requirements are readily available to the different supporting pillars without the need to receive this information from the PM. This is achieved with the support of an underlying system to govern the clients' information and project requirements along with the language assets (TM, terminology, style guides), and all business transactions' documents (invoices, purchase orders). This is a system of automated project management workflow with business management intelligence.

In my organization, we have developed such a system called TBMS (Translation Business Management System™), which we use internally as well as externally, thus enabling our clients to govern their localization process and business transactions. The system greatly relieves our PM and the client's PM from being the bottleneck, and he or she is now able to focus on what they do best: to ensure the delivery of the projects on time, on schedule and on budget. TBMS has become the 'handyman' who fetches the information that the PM and others need.

Whatever tool or system we may decide to use in each of our localization departments, we have to think about how we can achieve a workload balance for each role that we define in our localization department. No one in our team should be overloaded with responsibilities so that it affects their performance.

When we design a role for anyone in the department, we begin with the outcome we

would like the person in this role to produce. This should be the beacon of light guiding us as managers as we design each role and its responsibilities. In this way, we are conscious of creating a work profile for each of our staff, which is in line with the outcome designed for the role. This will prevent any confusion or frustration for our team members, who are looking to excel in their area and want to achieve the clearly defined outcome. As we know, happy employees make happy clients – and thus healthy localization departments!

## **Team Working Together As One Body**

As different units of the department strive to work together towards a common goal – success implementation and delivery of projects to the clients – we need to walk together in unity. Imagine different parts of a human body that are out of sync: The person would not be able to walk steadily. To walk together in unity means to be able to move in the same momentum, not one part of the body faster or slower than the other. In reality, ensuring that everyone in a localization department throughout all supporting pillars or units is working at the same pace is the biggest challenge of today.

The demands of work flowing in from clients to the different supporting pillars are not necessarily well-paced. This is due to a fast-paced work environment in which demands change quicker than lightning sometimes and without warning. Well-planned project schedules may need to be altered overnight and supporting units may struggle to fit in all the demands. As time goes by, the notion of giving one's best may become diluted and

reduced to “Oh, let's just get this done and over with. Next!” I may be dramatizing the situation but it is certainly one that we, as managers of localization departments, would like to avoid if we can.

The core values of a localization department become highly essential at this point. I personally have created the following values for my organization:

1. Build a belonging and identity, a community of trust and respect for one another in the department.
  2. Each person is a localization department ambassador!
  3. GIVE our best in serving others
- Grateful**  
**Intuitive and inquisitive**  
**Virtuous and very careful**  
**Enthusiasm and empathy**

This article may not be stating something new, but I hope it serves as a reminder to all managers of localization departments, that it is up to us to build a healthy department, and that it takes a conscious effort and commitment from our part.



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