

UNDERSTANDING EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE IN A DIVERSE SOCIETY

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—Abstract—

This study examines the relationship between emotional intelligence and job performance among the Malay, Chinese, and Indian management employees in Malaysia. The study thus extends and adapts the existing literature regarding these variables, mainly developed for Western cases, to a major and successful non-Western economy. Since this represented a pioneer study in the context of Malaysia's main ethnic groups, data collection was conducted on Nestlé in Malaysia, one of the major multinational organizations in Malaysia. During that time 156 management employees were surveyed. The measurements used for the survey were adopted from the Trait Meta Mood Scale (TMMS) (Salovey et al., 1995) while performance ratings were taken from Nestlé in Malaysia's internal database. The findings of this study primarily extend the literature by partially confirming relationships between emotional intelligence and job performance and highlighting the effect of race on emotional intelligence.

Key Words: emotional intelligence, performance, race, Malaysia

JEL Classification: M14 - Corporate Culture; Social Responsibility

1. INTRODUCTION

This particular paper discusses partial findings from a larger study on the areas of culture, competency and performance.

Malaysia is always known as a multiracial country consisting of people from different faiths and backgrounds. It has several unique features and includes some of the oldest cultures in the world. The population of Malaysia, which consists of the Malays (47%), Chinese (24%), Indians (7%), and Others (22%), is reported to be 22,202,614 according to the latest Population and Housing

Census of Malaysia, 2000 (Dept. of Statistics, 2004). Bahasa Malaysia (Malay language) is the national and official language of the country although one can also hear a diversity of over 15 different dialects and tribal languages spoken. Malaysia's multi-racial population practices various religions such as Islam, Buddhism, Taoism, Hinduism and Christianity. Therefore, in a country like Malaysia, the need to study the differences between various sub-cultures often deemed here by the races are always in demand as it is impossible to deny that cultural differences exist and indeed are entrenched in the way of lives of these ethnic groups and it would be even more risky to simply ignore these differences entirely in organizations' day-to-day operations.

The rich information found on performance left no doubt that the variable is generally regarded as important. Studies on performance have been conducted in various settings. In many situations, the strength of the relationships differs from one research to another. In addition, considerable interest has also been shown towards identifying the competencies associated with successful managerial performance (e.g. Boyatzis, 1982, Dulewicz, 1989, Boam and Sparrow, 1992). Among the many constructs that is associated with the concept of competency is emotional intelligence (EI) (Dulewicz and Higgs, 2000). Emotional intelligence is inferred as one of the more recent competencies, often being related to the skill of managing people through the handling of emotions which brings a competitive advantage to organizations. Understanding the relationships between emotional intelligence and job performance in a country with a diverse identity like Malaysia was intended to add more knowledge to the academic world, and assist organizations in further understanding their employees, particularly those situated in other similar multicultural nations.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The term performance is often used to describe everything from efficiency and effectiveness to improvement (Stannack, 1996). Studies on performance usually focus around the level of the individual (e.g. personality, motivation, ability, values), group (e.g. cohesiveness, composition, heterogeneity, familiarity) and organization (e.g. strategy, HRM practices). In terms of individual variables, suggested determinants of performance are in the form of ability and motivation (e.g. Vroom, 1964, Guzzo et al., 1993, Sheppard, 1993, Yaakub and Elias, 1999); individuals' effort, abilities and traits and role perceptions (Porter and Lawler, 1968); and just ability (e.g. Landy and Farr, 1983, Evans, 1986, Waldman and Spangler, 1989).

Emotional intelligence (EI) is often said to be a relatively new concept that treats emotional awareness and understanding as key abilities (Ogilvie and Carsky, 2002: p.381). However, a few authors such as Petrides, Fredrickson and Furnham (2004) have commented that the distal roots of the emotional intelligence concept can actually be traced back to the idea of 'social intelligence' proposed by E.L. Thorndike (1920), with its proximal roots related to the concept of intrapersonal and interpersonal intelligence proposed by Gardner (1983). Although the present form of emotional intelligence started to emerge around the year 1990 (Salovey and Mayer, 1990), the term emotional intelligence is predicted to be around longer than that (Greenspan, 1989). The concept can be conceptualized as the ability to grasp and reason correctly with emotional abstractions (emotional concepts) and solve emotional problems (Cote and Miners, 2006, p.3).

Claims have been made that the higher up a person goes in the organization, the more important emotional intelligence becomes, compared to intelligence quotient (IQ), and technical skills

(Goleman, Boyatzis and McKee, 2002). The appeal of emotional intelligence is, therefore, due to the idea that success is not simply determined by well-known abilities, such as verbal and quantitative, but also by abilities pertaining to emotions (Cote and Miners, 2006).

The concepts of both competency and emotional intelligence have been tested with a performance variable. The ability of competencies to be applied to a variety of performance improvement purposes stimulates the interests of many researchers. Garman and Johnson summaries competencies as related to both individual and organizational levels. For instance, competencies can be used to clarify individual roles, performance expectations, and development plans. At the same time, competencies are also important in determining organizations, strategic visions, and planning (Garman and Johnson, 2006). However, proponents of emotional intelligence are said to over-predict its impact on various work-related outcomes (Day and Carroll, 2004). Goleman also claims that employees with high emotional intelligence tend to rise as 'star performers,' This led to his belief that emotional intelligence is also able to predict life and work success (1995, 1998). However, past research has portrayed mixed results. Some studies suggest that emotional intelligence and performance are positively related. Emotional intelligence was found to be able to predict the performance of undergraduate students (e.g. Lam and Kirby, 2002), the performance of account officers (e.g. Bachman et al., 2000), and sales performance (e.g. Wong, Law and Wong, 2004). On the other hand, other studies have suggested no relation or inconsistent relations between emotional intelligence and performance (e.g. Austin, 2004, Day and Carroll, 2004, Petrides, Frederickson and Furnham, 2004, Law et al., 2008, Janovics and Christiansen, April 2001).

In addition, only a small number of studies have been conducted specifically on emotional intelligence and culture, although a few have been carried out which look at emotions and culture (e.g. Levine et al., 1995, Suh et al., 1998, Kitayama, Markus and Kurokawa, 2000, Mesquita, 2001). Although efforts were made by several researchers in trying to understand the complex relationship between emotional intelligence and culture (e.g. Shipper et al., 2003, Van Rooy, Alonso and Viswesvaran, 2005), the total number of these studies is still considered small. However, the predicted associations found between the variables of emotions and culture along with emotional intelligence and culture, and also the link identified between culture and values could provide the needed motivation for researchers to explore the potential relationship between emotional intelligence and employees' races.

3. METHODOLOGY

The larger research incorporated both quantitative and qualitative methods to increase the strengths and reduce the weaknesses of the data collection processes. However, in this paper, only the quantitative results are highlighted.

3.1. Sample of the Study

Nestlé in Malaysia is the subsidiary of a Swedish company servicing on the food market in Malaysia. It has eight manufacturing facilities in Malaysia, producing 90 per cent of the products it sells locally. The reason a multinational organization was chosen relates to the need of the research to study the three main races in Malaysia and the limited time available to do it. Nestlé in Malaysia, employed people from various races in Malaysia allowing the research to be completed

in the expected period. A total of 470 management employees were e-mailed with the survey and 156 returned the completed questionnaires resulting in about 33.2 per cent response rate.

3.2. Instruments of the Study

The questionnaires applied for emotional intelligence in this study was Trait Meta-Mood Scale (TMMS) (Salovey et.al.). Some studies reflect that the basic idea of emotional intelligence comes from a similar construct defined as alexithymia. The definitions of both emotional intelligence and alexithymia infer the relevance between both constructs (Parker, Taylor and Bagby, 2001). Generally, alexithymia is a diagnostic category thought to describe individuals who have poor access to emotional words (Mayer, DiPaolo and Salovey, 1990: p.779). Since the study intended only to touch the concept of emotional intelligence in general, the adoption of the TMMS seemed to be the most appropriate of all. The TMMS was conducted to assess self-reported emotional intelligence cross-culturally as an input (attention to emotions), process (clarity of emotions) and output (repair of emotions)(Ghorbani et al., 2002). The TMMS started off with forty-eight items; twenty-one defined the first scale (Attention to Feelings), fifteen the second (Clarity of Feelings) and twelve the third (Mood Repair).

Job performance questionnaire was adopted from the one used by Nestlé in Malaysia. The questionnaire was divided into nine specific dimensions so as to enhance the findings more. These dimensions were: managing for results; being effective on technical basis (professionalism); being effective on an individual basis; adaptability/flexibility; leading people; developing people; analyzing and applying judgement; problem solving/decision making; and planning and organization.

3.3. Data analysis

The data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) and Linear Structural Relation (LISREL). The selection of techniques to analyze the result of this study was based on the research objectives of the study. Cronbach's Alpha was used to test the reliability of the instruments respectively. Chi-square Test of Independence and Post Hoc analyses were used to test the hypotheses.

3.4. Reliability and Validity

The Trait Meta-Mood Scale (TMMS) consists of three different domains: Attention, Clarity, and Repair. The number of questions that contribute to each domain range from six to thirteen questions. Reliability analysis scores on two of the domains, Attention and Clarity, shown in Table 6.6 were originally 0.730 and 0.702 respectively. However, based on the validity scores, a few items were deleted. For the Attention domain, Questions 7, 10, 12, and 24 were deleted while for the Clarity domain Questions 6, 25, 28, and 30 were deleted to improve the questions' ability to relate to the Malaysian sample. As a result, the reliability scores were changed to 0.843 for Attention and 0.756 for Clarity. On the other hand, the reliability score for Repair was indicated as 0.438 which was very low compared to the accepted value of 0.70. Question 19 was deleted to upgrade the score to 0.560 which is still acceptable due to the reasonable scores of the validity analysis discussed later.

Table 1: Reliability Analysis for Emotional Intelligence

Emotional Intelligence	Alpha (α) (With all items)	Alpha (α) (With deleted items)
Repair	0.438	0.560
Attention	0.730	0.843
Clarity	0.702	0.756

Overall, the validity analysis for all the domains showed acceptable results although several variations exist when compared to the proposed threshold values. The deletion of several items from each of the emotional intelligence domains highlighted in the reliability section increased the GFI scores to above 0.80 with the highest number of 0.98 for Repair. In addition, the RMSEA was not below 0.10 in all cases. However, these numbers were still accepted when all factors were taken into consideration. The RMSEA for Repair, Attention and Clarity were 0.035, 0.130 and 0.129 respectively as stated in Table 2.

Table 2: Validity Analysis for Emotional Intelligence

Emotional Intelligence	GFI (With all items)	GFI (With deleted items)	RMSEA (With all items)	RMSEA (With deleted items)
Repair	0.92	0.98	0.144	0.035
Attention	0.76	0.88	0.157	0.130
Clarity	0.60	0.92	0.277	0.129

4. DATA ANALYSIS

The 156 respondents consisted of 110 males and 46 females with 43 respondents aged 45 years old and above. The respondents came from various sections of the company and were almost equally distributed in their job classifications, in which 81 were executives and another 75 were managers. The executives in Nestlé in Malaysia included any individuals with a qualification of a diploma or higher and whose job title and job description was 'executive' or the equivalent. On the contrary, the managers included individuals with a qualification of a degree or higher and whose job title and job description was 'manager' or the equivalent. One hundred twenty three respondents had obtained either diploma, bachelor or master degrees which were consistent with their job classifications with more than 50 per cent actually worked for the company more than 10 years. Out of the total 156 respondents, 38.5 per cent were Malays; 47.4 per cent were Chinese; 8.3 per cent were Indians; and 5.8 per cent were Others. Data on religion indicated that 40.4 per cent of the respondents were Islam; 30.8 per cent Buddha; 4.5 per cent Hindu; 19.2 per cent Christian while 5.1 per cent Others, mainly free thinkers. Finally, from the total amount, only 23 respondents were single and another 133 respondents were reported to be married. None of them were widowed or divorced. (Refer Table 3).

Table 3: Socio-Demographic Profile of the Respondents

	Frequency	Per cent	Cumulative %
Gender			
Male	110	70.5	70.5
Female	46	29.5	100.0
Total	156	100.0	
Age			
Below 45 years old	113	72.4	72.4
45 years old and above	43	27.6	100.0
Total	156	100.0	
Sub-areas			
Headquarters	90	57.7	57.7
Branches	21	13.5	71.2
Factories	36	23.1	94.2
NDC	9	5.8	100.0
Total	156	100.0	
Job Classifications			
Executives	81	51.9	51.9
Managers	75	48.1	100.0
Total	156	100.0	
Work Duration			
< 1 year	11	7.1	7.1
1 to <3 years	28	17.9	25.0
3 to <5 years	6	3.8	28.8
5 to <10 years	31	19.9	48.7
10 to <20 years	46	29.5	78.2
>= 20 years	34	21.8	100.0
Total	156	100.0	
Education Level			
Diploma	25	16.0	16.0
Bachelor	76	48.7	64.7
Master	22	14.1	78.8
Professional Qualifications	9	5.8	84.6
Doctorate	2	1.3	85.9
Others	22	14.1	100.0
Total	156	100.0	
Race			
Malays	60	38.5	38.5
Chinese	74	47.4	85.9
Indians	13	8.3	94.2
Others	9	5.8	100.0
Total	156	100.0	
Religion			
Islam	63	40.4	40.4
Buddha	48	30.8	71.2
Hindu	7	4.5	75.6
Christian	30	19.2	94.9
Others	8	5.1	100.0
Total	156	100.0	
Marital Status			
Single	23	14.7	14.7
Married	133	85.3	100.0
Total	156	100.0	

4.1. Hypotheses Testing

The first hypothesis involved the intention to study the salient impact between the relationship of emotional intelligence and job performance.

Hypothesis 1: The existence of emotional intelligence among the management employees of Nestlé in Malaysia has a salient impact on their levels of job performance.

In order to test the relationship between the two variables, a Chi-square test of independence was applied. The results showed that a relationship was found between emotional intelligence and only one of the job performance dimensions - Problem Solving/Decision Making ($\chi^2 = 6.394$, $p = 0.041$) – suggesting that both rows and columns were viewed as dependent. From the evidence, it could be said that Hypothesis 1 was supported for that particular dimension of job performance only. A significant relationship between emotional intelligence and Problem Solving/Decision Making is revealed in Table 4 and Table 5. Other job performance dimensions did not have any significant relationship with emotional intelligence.

Table 4: Emotional Intelligence and Job Performance Dimension (Problem Solving/Decision Making) Cross Tabulation

Job Performance		Emotional Intelligence			
		Repair	Attention	Clarity	Total
Problem Solving/ Decision Making (Low)	Count	19	40	21	80
	% within Problem Solving/Decision Making				
	% within Emotional Intelligence				
	% of Total	23.8%	50.0%	26.3%	100.0%
Problem Solving/ Decision Making (High)	Count	30	24	22	76
	% within Problem Solving/Decision Making				
	% within Emotional Intelligence				
	% of Total	39.5%	31.6%	28.9%	100.0%
Total	Count	49	64	43	156
	% within Problem Solving/Decision Making				
	% within Emotional Intelligence				
	% of Total	31.4%	41.0%	27.6%	100.0%
		100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		31.4%	41.0%	27.6%	100.0%

Table 5: Chi-square Test of Independence for Emotional Intelligence and Job Performance Dimensions (Problem Solving/Decision Making).

	χ^2 Value	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-square	6.394	0.041*

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Despite the higher number shown by the respondents in the Attention domain (64 respondents), only one of the percentages exceeded the overall percentages for high versus low Problem Solving/ Decision Making (51.3 per cent versus 48.7 per cent). Therefore, those with low Problem Solving/Decision Making abilities were noted to have Attention as their primary emotional intelligence domain, while those who possessed the ability of Repair tended to have high Problem Solving/Decision Making abilities (61.2 per cent).

In addition, Hypothesis 2 looked at the differences due to race on emotional intelligence.

Hypothesis 2: There are differences between the races of the management employees in Nestlé in Malaysia in terms of their emotional intelligence.

The results also showed a statistically significant relationship between race and emotional intelligence ($\chi^2 = 13.342$, $p = 0.038$). This resulted in Hypothesis 2 being supported on the basis that there was a direct association between both variables as shown in Table 6 and Table 7:

Table 6: Race and Emotional Intelligence Cross Tabulation

Emotional Intelligence		Race				Total
		Malay	Chinese	Indian	Others	
Repair	Count	20	26	2	1	49
	% within Emotional Intelligence					
	% within Race	40.8%	53.1%	4.1%	2.0%	100.0%
	% of Total	33.3%	35.1%	15.4%	11.1%	31.4%
Attention	Count	21	35	6	2	64
	% within Emotional Intelligence					
	% within Race	32.8%	54.7%	9.4%	3.1%	100.0%
	% of Total	35.0%	47.3%	46.2%	22.2%	41.0%
Clarity	Count	19	13	5	6	43
	% within Emotional Intelligence					
	% within Race	44.2%	30.2%	11.6%	14.0%	100.0%
	% of Total	31.7%	17.6%	38.5%	66.7%	27.6%
Total	Count	60	74	13	9	156
	% within Emotional Intelligence					
	% within Race	38.5%	47.4%	8.3%	5.8%	100.0%
	% of Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		38.5%	47.4%	8.3%	5.8%	100.0%

Table 7: Chi-square Test of Independence for Race and Emotional Intelligence

	χ^2 Value	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-square	13.342	0.038*

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Although the frequency data analysing the relationship between emotional intelligence and race produced their highest number in the Attention domain (64 respondents), not all the ethnic groups recorded their highest percentage in this category. In contrast, the Malays, Indians, and Others seemed to be more inclined to be in the Clarity domain (44.2 per cent, 11.6 per cent, and 14.0 per cent respectively). Only the Chinese would be most likely to be in the Attention domain (54.7 per cent).

5. DISCUSSION

Hypothesis 1 of the research intended to look at the relationship between emotional intelligence and job performance. A significant link was found between emotional intelligence and Problem Solving/Decision Making, one of the dimensions of job performance. The relationship between emotional intelligence and performance has long been suggested by prominent authors (e.g. Goleman, 1996, Watkin, 2000). Other studies have reported negative or mixed results between the two (e.g. Bachman et al., 2000, Dulewicz and Higgs, 2000, Slaski, 2001, Cote and Miners, 2006, Janovics and Christiansen, April 2001).

The findings of this survey seem to provide answers for both positive and negative results. In this case, although significant with job performance, emotional intelligence only reacted to one out of the total nine job performance dimensions of Nestle Malaysia, which was Problem Solving/Decision Making. In addition, individuals in the Attention domain seemed to show low performance in Problem Solving/Decision Making abilities, while individuals in the Repair domain tended to show high performance in Problem Solving/Decision Making abilities. It was deduced here that the ability to change and maintain moods surpassed the ability to recognize feelings when solving problems and making decisions. Through the survey findings, it is therefore possible to assume at this stage that emotional intelligence may not impact job performance as a whole. Instead, it only affects specific job performance criteria from time to time. In this case, diplomatic ways of handling issues may be needed most in the area of solving problems and making decisions due to the need to protect the feelings of the employees.

The second hypothesis involved looking at the impact of race on emotional intelligence. The results showed race to be significantly correlated with emotional intelligence. The Malays, Indians, and Others were found to be focused on the Clarity domain where the main ability was to distinguish feelings. In contrast, the Chinese focused more on the Attention domain, concentrating more on the degree to which they noticed and thought about their feelings. One can infer from the findings of this survey that people from different races varied in their ability to deal with emotions. Although no studies have been conducted on emotional intelligence and race per se, cross cultural studies of emotion have provided evidence for both similarities and differences between cultures (Fischer, Manstead and Mosquera, 1999).

6. CONCLUSION

An important contribution of this paper is a more specified understanding between job performance and its link to emotional intelligence; and the impact of race on emotional intelligence. The findings of the studies is also able to provide valuable information to the business organizations and practitioners to further understand Malaysia's situation for them to better succeed within their respective businesses. However several limitations in the data collection, sample size, data analysis, and generalization of the findings are noted for future improvements.

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