

Relationship between Empathy Skill Levels and Job Selection: A Study on Business Administration Students

Ceren Deniz TATARLAR¹, A.Güldem CERİT²

¹Ege University, Faculty of Administrative Sciences, Department of Business Administration, Bornova, Izmir

²Dokuz Eylul University, Faculty of Maritime, Department of Maritime Business Administration, Tinaztepe, Izmir

ABSTRACT

Every person needs to earn money and take care of themselves in order to obtain and maintain their standards of living by finding a job that suits their needs and qualifications. Since their first educational period, each person has chosen different paths in their professional/educational life. In professional life, different jobs have different requirements. For example some jobs require more social and people skills than others. Empathy, which is our concern in this paper, is one of these people skills. As Lamont and Lundstrom (1977) define, empathy is the intellectual or imaginative apprehension of another's condition or state of mind without actually experiencing that person's feelings. This kind of skill may be required in certain types of jobs and when choosing the right job for right person or vice versa, people's empathy levels must be considered both by the person himself and the human resource departments. This way, both the companies will have more productive employees and potential employees of a certain position will be more satisfied and successful. In this study we aim to search whether people are aware of their empathy levels and the relevancy of their people and social skills for the job that they choose. This study was held in Izmir University of Economics with survey method. Empathy skills and career choices of students were measured in order to research both managerial and academic implications.

Keywords: Empathy, Job, Human Resources, Job Characteristics.

I. INTRODUCTION

Every person has an obligation to continue their lives somehow. To obtain and maintain their standards of living, people need to earn money and take care of themselves. The main way to earn life and maintain a standard of living is to have a qualified job and continue working. This brings people to a point which they need to study, work hard and make the right choices. Since their childhood period, every individual plans his or her career or future. This planning procedure is highly important in an individual's life in terms of being able to know what one can do or achieve. Choosing a right career path or profession is a huge step for individuals in order to provide life satisfaction. This procedure might show differences through people and jobs. As known, different job characteristics require different skills, competencies, individual characteristics and etc [1]. As Alssid et al. [2] stated individuals need some form of higher education and training in order to be financially self-efficient and to be able to have enough skills. Today, in many countries including Turkey, universities and higher education institutions are

helping individuals/students to find their interests, develop their skills, gain new information and know which career path they might choose. On the other hand, when individual characteristics are considered, one can mention intellectual level, emotional intelligence, empathy, psychological conditions, and personality and so on. Different jobs might require different individual characteristics in **different levels. While some jobs are empathy** focused, the others might be emotional intelligence focused. At this point, in order to choose the right job and the career path, one should be aware of him and try to fulfill his demands according to this point.

When it comes to college students, they might be too demanding about the job market and their future career. The reason for this might be mentioned as their very little knowledge about the job markets and their strong expectations about post-graduation. As we mentioned before, planning a career starts from childhood and continues until one thinks he/she reached the top level, or maybe in some cases, it never ends. At this point, besides developing and providing

professional skills, colleges may also help students shaping their future demands. While selecting a career, students should be aware of their abilities and personal characteristics and should choose their jobs suitable with those. For example, a person who is afraid of insects shouldn't consider being a zoologist or a person who is effective in communication and has verbal skills should think about sales career. A person's characteristics and abilities should match the job's requirements and characteristics. Thinking of these skills, abilities and characteristics; empathy is another dimension for successful job/career selection. Here in this paper, we aim to research empathy skills among students.

In this study, we aim to understand whether the tendency of students' career selections is related to their empathy skill levels. As known, some careers need more empathy skills than others and empathy can be vital to survive in specific sectors and positions. With this relation, we also aim to contribute managerial implications for school managements (might guide their students according to their assessments on individual and psychological characteristics) and human resource management departments for future practices towards college students.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

II.1. Choice of profession and career selection

As mentioned before, during the process of choice of profession many dimensions are effective. For example, Carpenter and Foster [3] proposed a three-dimensional model for choice of career. Accordingly, choice of career is based on 'intrinsic' (e.g., personal characteristics, work that is personally satisfying, etc.), 'extrinsic' (e.g., availability of jobs, amount of salary), or 'interpersonal' (i.e., influence of parents and significant others). Empathy seems to belong in intrinsic model and it influences personal issues about career selection.

Over the past years, career selection of young people was studied among cultural contexts in Turkey by Aycan and Fikret-Pasa [4] and they stated that fulfilling one's own desires and expectations has become as important as fulfilling other's (families) wishes and expectations and personal values was an important result. On the contrary of general consideration of collectivistic culture of Turkey, young people tend to be more individualistic when it comes to their career choices.

On the other hand, Holland [5] argued that personal characteristics could be linked with career choice. People

who know their own interests and skills would actively search an appropriate career. Personal characteristics and emotional state influence people's interests. When it comes to skills, according to Portland Business Journal, there are different types (i.e., soft skills, labor skills, people skills, hard skills etc.). The term 'people skills' is lexically defined as "the ability to communicate effectively with people in a friendly way, especially in business" (Macmillan Dictionary). Also according to Portland Business Journal, it is also defined as "understanding ourselves and moderating our responses, talking effectively and empathizing accurately, building relationships of trust, respect and productive interactions." This definition brings us to our main concern in this research; empathy.

II.2. Empathy

Empathy is called ability and it has many different meanings through decades and in different literatures. Empathy was first explored by philosopher Theodor Lipps [6] and named as "*Einfühlungsvermögen*". After, it has been translated as "feeling into" [7] or "feeling together with" [8]. Looking at prior studies in business researches, empathy was defines as "the ability to predict representative behaviors of normative individuals" [9], "the intellectual or imaginative apprehension of another's condition or state of mind without actually experiencing that person's feelings" [10], and also "ability to feel as the other fellow does" [11].

On the other hand, Stein [12] argues empathy as our ability to "fill in" and "project ourselves into the lives of others". In psychology literature, Mead [13] defines empathy as a cognitive skill that develops with social experience. As Spiro [14] stated empathy requires living and knowing. Baron-Cohen [15] argues empathy in two components, one is cognitive the other is affective. In affective component, empathy is defined as "an observer's appropriate emotional response to another person's emotional state".

"The state of empathy, or being empathic, is to perceive the internal frame of reference of another with accuracy and with the emotional components and meanings which pertain thereto as if one were the person, but without ever losing the 'as if' condition. Thus it means to sense the hurt or the pleasure of another as he senses it and to perceive the causes thereof as he perceives them, but without ever losing the recognition that it is as if I were hurt or pleased and so forth. If this 'as if' quality is lost, then the state is one of identification." [16].

The list of some important definitions of empathy can be found in Table 1.

Table 1. Definitions of empathy through years

Author	Year	Definition
Tobolski and Kerr	1952	“the ability to predict representative behaviors of normative individuals”
Freud	1955	“mechanism by means of which we are enabled to take up any attitude at all towards another mental life”
Rogers	1959	“the state of empathy, or being empathic, is to perceive the internal frame of reference of another with accuracy and with the emotional components and meanings which pertain thereto as if one were the person, but without ever losing the ‘as if’ condition”
Schafer	1959	“empathy involves the inner experience of sharing in and comprehending the momentary psychological state of another person”
Mayer and Greenberg	1964	“ability to feel as the other fellow does”
Harries	1973	“a feeling of being at home with the object contemplated”
Lamond and Lundstrom	1977	“the intellectual or imaginative apprehension of another’s condition or state of mind without actually experiencing that person’s feelings”
Hoffman	1984	“the awareness of another person’s thoughts, feelings, and intentions and the ability or tendency to be vicariously aroused by the affective state of another person”
Kohut, Goldberg and Stepanksy	1984	“empathy is the capacity to think and feel oneself into the inner life of another person”
Batson, Schultz and Schoenrade	1987	“as motivation oriented towards the other”
Berger	1987	“the capacity to know emotionally what another is experiencing from within the frame of reference of that other person, the capacity to sample the feelings of another or to put one’s self in another’s shoes”
Stein	1989	“empathy is the experience of foreign consciousness in general”
Eisenberg and Fabes	1990	“an effective response that stems from the apprehension or comprehension of another’s emotional state or condition, and that is similar to what the other person is feeling or would be expected to feel”
Goldman	1993	“the ability to put oneself into the mental shoes of another person to understand her emotions and feelings”
McCrae & Costa	1997	“as an ability that combines thinking and feeling, empathy is distinguished from personality traits”
Baron-Cohen	2003	“empathy is about spontaneously and naturally tuning into the other person’s thoughts and feelings, whatever these might be”
Lampert	2005	“empathy is what happens to us when we leave our own bodies...and find ourselves either momentarily or for a longer period of time in the mind of the other. we observe reality through her eyes, feel her emotions, share in her pain”
Rosenberg	2005	“empathic connection is an understanding of the heart in which we see the beauty in the other person, the divine energy in the other person, the life that’s alive in them”
Decety and Meyer	2008	“a sense of similarity in feelings experienced by the self and the other, without confusion between the two individuals”
de Waal	2008	“the capacity to be affected by and share the emotional state of another, assess the reasons for the other’s state, and identify with the other, adopting his or her perspective”

II.3. Empathy and job characteristics

Different jobs require different levels of social and interpersonal skills. Some professions require higher level of ability to communicate with others effectively, understand others’ needs efficiently and empathize. George Anders from Forbes Magazine and LinkedIn once stated in one of his articles that empathy will emerge as a “must-

have” job skill by 2020 [17]. For example medical and dental professions generally require caring manner. When one works with patients, one should consider their anxiety, fear and demands carefully. Physicians, dentists, dental assistants and nurses are all professionals who do better in their careers if they are empathetic.

When it comes to business area, it can be said that

Customer Services and Sales & Marketing departments require people skills most. People with the ability to feel the emotions of others are very well suited to be customer service representatives. They are able to calm down customers who are angry because they feel the products or services they purchased were misrepresented. Being able to identify with their distress makes it easier for them to find a solution that will help resolve the problem. On the other hand Dawson et al. [18] argued that empathy skills are highly effective on people who work in sales area. McBane's [19] study has shown that all sales managers should be aware of the complex nature of empathy as they perform their recruiting, selection, and training responsibilities.

The objective of this research is, with all of these information, in our exploratory research, we aim to understand whether the students from Business Administration Faculty is aware of what their empathy skills are and if they are showing tendency to the careers which they might succeed through the empathy lens.

III. METHODOLOGY

In this study, since we are concerned about the relationship between empathy skills of students and their job selection decisions, quantitative research methods are used.

III.1. Sample and procedures

As seen on descriptive statistics, surveys were distributed to 110 students from Izmir University of Economics, Faculty of Business Administration. Only 103 of the surveys provided useable data. 7 of the surveys were eliminated due to missing information on empathy scale. 54,4% of the participants were female and 45,6% were male. 75,7% of the students were bachelor students, 14,6% were masters and 9,7% were PhD students.

Surveys were delivered by hand and explanations were made to clarify questions. The cover letter indicated that the study was being conducted for term project purposes with the goal of better understanding some of the issues that affect job and career selection of students and their level of empathy skills. Participants were assured of the confidentiality of their responses. The survey instrument was divided into two parts. First part was to collect demographical data and students' career choices. In this part, demographical questions (gender, age, college, faculty, department) and job/career choice ("Which job would you like to have", "If you are currently working, which job do you have/which sector are you in") were asked in order to

understand the general conditions of these students. Second part was to measure students' empathy skills. In this part, "Empathy Skills Scale – B Form" which was developed by Dokmen was used [20]. This part aimed to understand the level of students' empathy skill levels in order to interpret their job choices. All the analyses were made by using SPSS 18.0.0.

III.2. Measures

III.2.1. Demographics

Demographic questions were developed by author and was asked in both open-ended (age, education) and close-ended (gender) styles.

III.2.2. Work experience

Students were asked whether they had a work experience before or not. This was measured with one item. ("Do you have an internship experience?")

III.2.3. Job/Career choices

Two different questions were asked to measure this dimension. One question was for students who are unemployed, and the other one was for students who are already employed. Questions had several answer choices (different sectors) and the last one was open-ended ("Other" choice). With that open-ended answer, students were asked to indicate their selection. When analyzing, these choices were grouped into two; managerial and mathematical. Managerial jobs are defined as social and people jobs and contained departments such as human resources, sales and marketing. Mathematical jobs are defined as more quantitative ones which will not need higher levels of empathy skills. This group contained departments such as operations management and finance.

III.2.4. Empathy skills

Empathy Skill Scale (EBO-B) which was developed by Dokmen was used. This scale's validity and reliability were tested for Turkey. In this scale there are 6 different cases (problems) with 12 different answers and participants are asked to choose 4 answers for each case. The highest score that a participant can get is 219 and the lowest score is 62. All the answers have its own points and this scale has a different evaluation style. Higher point a participant gets higher empathy skills he/she has.

IV. RESULTS

First of all, the results of Empathy Skill Scale (EBO-B) were evaluated using its own scoring system. After evaluations, statistical histogram was applied in order to gather values in

the range of 0 and 100. All the values are converted. Second, descriptive statistics and frequencies analysis were made in order to summarize the sample (from Table 2 to Table 5).

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
gender	,54	,501	103
score	43,491312	12,6896088	103
gpa	2,8777	,63794	99
job	1,77	,425	103
class	2,96	,848	69

Table 3. Educational Level

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid BA	78	33,1	75,7	75,7
MA	15	6,4	14,6	90,3
PhD	10	4,2	9,7	100,0
Total	103	43,6	100,0	
Missing System	133	56,4		
Total	236	100,0		

Table 4. Job Selection

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Mathematical	24	10,2	23,3	23,3
Managerial	79	33,5	76,7	100,0
Total	103	43,6	100,0	
Missing System	133	56,4		
Total	236	100,0		

Table 5. Gender

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Male	47	19,9	45,6	45,6
Female	56	23,7	54,4	100,0
Total	103	43,6	100,0	
Missing System	133	56,4		
Total	236	100,0		

After frequencies and descriptive statistics, the relationship between variables was tested. Correlation statistics were used in order to evaluate the relationships. First of all, we examined the relationship between gender and empathy skill levels.

Table 6. Correlation Between Gender And Empathy

		gender	score
gender	Pearson Correlation	1	,228*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		,020
	N	103	103
score	Pearson Correlation	,228*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,020	
	N	103	103

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

As seen in Table 6, there is a positive correlation ($r=.23$, $p<0.05$) between gender and empathy skill scores. As expected, female students got higher scores of empathy comparing to male students.

Another test was made for understanding the relationship between empathy scores and job selection.

Table 7. Correlation between empathy and job

		score	job
score	Pearson Correlation	1	,427**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		,000
	N	103	103
job	Pearson Correlation	,427**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	
	N	103	103

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

As also seen, in Table7, a positive correlation ($r=.43$, $p<0.01$) between job selection and empathy skill scores has been found as expected. Students who tend to choose managerial jobs got higher scores on EBO-B test. Other variables (age, class, GPA, educational level) were also tested for correlation but no significant correlation has been found.

V. DISCUSSION

As seen on the results, there is a relationship between existing empathy skill level and job selection. Students who scored higher (both male and female) on EBO-B test made their choices on managerial jobs, and generally in sales and marketing field. Managerial jobs are defined as the ones which require high people skills including empathy. In these fields, people need to communicate more and understand each other more. Students with lower empathy skills made their choices on mathematical jobs which require minimum

level of people skills. These students chose to work in operations, finance and accounting fields. As known, these fields do not require high levels of communication; people do not have to work with other people all the time.

Thinking of sales and marketing, customer relations or human resources departments, it can be said that people who will choose to work in these departments have to acquire high levels of empathy skills. Thinking on the organizational side, human resources departments of companies may think of assessing their candidates or potential employees about their empathy skill levels in addition to their usual recruiting routines.

VI. LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

This research is made in a foundation university and the sample size is not that large due to scheduling conflicts. For further research, a broader study may be held and sample can be widened to more universities and more different departments of universities.

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