

DO EMOTIONALLY INTELLIGENT PEOPLE DO WELL IN ALL JOBS? EXPLORING THE MODERATING ROLE OF INTER-PERSONAL INTERACTION

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This paper studies the impact of Emotional Intelligence (EI) on job performance on a sample of 101 working executives in a pharmaceutical company in Mumbai, India. The impact of EI on job performance is studied while controlling for General Mental Ability (GMA) and the personality factor of conscientiousness. The paper also investigates the moderating effect of job characteristics (specifically, the extent of interpersonal interaction required on the job) on the relationship between EI and job performance. Analysis of the data showed that EI did not show significant impact on job performance for the entire sample. However, for individuals having high interpersonal interaction on their jobs, EI was significantly related to job performance. On the other hand, for individuals having low interpersonal interaction on their jobs, EI was not related to job performance.

Key Words: *Emotional Intelligence, Job Characteristics, Job Performance, Personality, Intelligence, Interpersonal Interaction*

PREDICTORS OF JOB PERFORMANCE

The search for the predictors of job performance has occupied scholars in organisational behaviour for a long time. The most commonly accepted predictors of job performance are General Mental Ability (GMA) and the personality factor- conscientiousness (Behling, 1998). Rigorous research and meta-analyses have validated the role of GMA and conscientiousness in predicting job performance in various jobs (Barrick and Mount, 1991; Schmidt and Hunter, 2004). However, a large portion of the research on the impact of GMA and conscientiousness on job performance focused on performance in traditional jobs that were more individual oriented. As organisations increasingly rely on cross-functional teams and interdependent work relationships, it is likely that the conventional predictors of job performance will also have to be questioned (Behling, 1998) and one has to look for other predictors of job performance more suited to the current work context.

According to Rokeach (1968), human personality consists of three distinct domains—behavioural, cognitive, and affective. The behavioural domain consists of observable behaviours, the cognitive domain consists of the intellect which reasons and evaluates, and the affective domain consists of feelings, emotions, and attitudes. The constructs of GMA and conscientiousness capture the cognitive and behavioural aspects of human personality in predicting job performance, while the affective domain of human personality is assessed through Emotional Intelligence (EI) (Salovey and Mayer, 1990). The impacts of the behavioural and cognitive aspects of human personality on job performance have been thoroughly explored (Barrick and Mount, 1991; Schmidt and Hunter, 2004). Hence, in this paper we study the impact of affective aspects (specifically, EI) on job performance.

The impact of individual characteristics on job performance is moderated by job characteristics. Specifically, the impact of GMA on job performance is moderated by job complexity (Schmidt and Hunter, 2004)

while the impact of conscientiousness on job performance is moderated by job autonomy (Barrick and Mount, 1991). Similarly, it is expected that the impact of EI on job performance will be contingent on the extent of interpersonal interaction required on the job. Hence, in this paper we study the impact of interpersonal interaction on the relationship between EI and job performance.

Emotional Intelligence

The term "emotional intelligence" was first used in 1990 by Peter Salovey and John D. Mayer. Salovey and Mayer (1990) defined EI as a subset of social intelligence and involving "the ability to monitor one's own feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them, and use this information to guide one's thinking and actions" (p.189).

There is hardly any concept in the study of human behaviour, which is as controversial as that of emotional intelligence. Typically, it is defined as the ability to recognise and regulate emotion in oneself and others (Spector, 2005). Criticism from the academic community was largely spurred by the immense popularity of Goleman's (1995) book and the subsequent proliferation of models and scales for emotional intelligence, which claimed that emotional intelligence could guarantee success in almost any area of one's life (Mayer, 1999). Some academicians have criticised the concept of emotional intelligence as suspect because most of its conclusions are based on data from proprietary databases, which are not available for scientific scrutiny (Landy, 2005). Others have questioned the very basis of the construct because emotion and cognition are distinct, and whatever is being claimed as emotional intelligence is merely an assortment of habits, skills, and choices (Locke, 2005).

Perhaps the strongest criticism of these models has been their measurement. Following the popularisation of the concept of emotional intelligence there has been a proliferation of measurement attempts, most of which are self-report. A significant part of the controversy surrounding the concept is due to confusion in the different measures of emotional intelligence. The measures vary widely in their content as well as their measurement using a self-report, an informant approach, or an ability-based assessment.

Defenders of emotional intelligence concede that the criticisms are justified for some models of emotional intelligence (Ashkanasy and Daus, 2005), however they maintain that emotional intelligence is indeed a useful

construct because of its use in understanding emotional labour and its ability to predict outcomes in the areas of leadership and job performance (Daus and Ashkanasy, 2005).

Models of Emotional Intelligence

Studies on emotional intelligence have followed one of the two predominant models viz. the ability approach that views emotional intelligence as a set of cognitive abilities and the mixed or dispositional approach which combines abilities and a broad range of personality traits (Caruso, Mayer, and Salovey, 2002; Tett, Fox, and Wang, 2005). As an ability or skill, emotional intelligence is a capacity to engage in the valued behaviour, entails a degree of mutability (e.g. through training), and calls for measurement in the context of correctness (i.e. right/wrong answers). As a disposition, emotional intelligence is a relatively stable inclination or tendency amenable to self-description. The ability model of emotional intelligence was developed by Mayer, Salovey and their associates, while the mixed model of emotional intelligence was popularised through the works of Daniel Goleman (1995, 1998).

Mayer, Salovey, and Caruso (2004) describe the ability model as a four-branch model of emotional intelligence. According to this model, emotional intelligence is the ability to perceive emotions, to access and generate emotions to assist thought, to understand emotions and emotional knowledge, and to regulate emotions reflectively to promote emotional and intellectual growth. According to this model, emotional intelligence is conceived of as an ability that can be measured by using objective, ability-based measures. The model does not focus on personality traits or dispositions per se, except as an outcome of having the underlying skills (Caruso, Mayer, and Salovey, 2002).

Sensing the need for a short, practical, and empirically valid measure of emotional intelligence, Wong and Law (2002) developed a 16-item scale based on the ability model of emotional intelligence proposed by Salovey and Mayer (1990). The scale, called the Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS) was developed and validated using samples of managers, employees, and students in Hong Kong. In this study, we followed the ability model of EI and used the WLEIS.

Popularity of Emotional Intelligence

After the initial studies on EI, it has attracted a lot of attention, and a number of claims have been made about EI predicting success (Cooper, 1997). A little after the

academic work on EI started gaining momentum, a popular book on the subject appeared (Goleman, 1995: 1998), which emphasised how people with EI might be more socially effective than others. EI was said to contribute to the individual and social success. Thus, the notion of EI became quite popular, appearing in many magazines and newspaper articles. However, the real excitement about EI comes when discussing how closely it is related with success, and its ability to predict success.

Emotional Intelligence and Job Performance

There have been numerous claims that EI accounts for predicting success at work, home, and even school. High EI has been linked with less rudeness in youths, improved learning, and better decisions. At work, it has been associated with "team work and cooperation" (Goleman, 1995:163). However, the rising interest in EI partly has to do with claims on its positive effect on the aspects of job performance such as reduced deviant behaviour, greater pro-social and positive behaviour, and leadership (Goleman, 1998; Mayer, Salovey, Caruso, 2004).

EI is conceptualised as a set of mental processes including appraising and expressing emotions in self and others, regulating emotion in self and others, and using emotions in adaptive ways (Salovey and Mayer, 1990:6). Appraising emotions in oneself is a part of EI because individuals who are high on EI can quickly perceive and respond to their own emotions and hence better express those emotions. In addition, the ability to recognise emotions of others enables individuals high on EI to make empathetic responses to them. These skills enable individuals to understand responses in others and thereby choose appropriate behaviour. Finally, regulation of emotion is an important construct in EI as it would make one more adaptive. In addition, emotionally intelligent individuals are at an advantage as they approach life situations with the ability to solve interpersonal issues more adaptively. As compared to others, individuals who are high on EI are likely to identify, frame, and address problems based on their emotional experiences (Salovey and Mayer, 1990).

Mechanisms by which High Emotional Intelligence Leads to Better Job Performance

Emotional intelligence concerns expertise at identifying and understanding the emotions of other individuals. In most, if not all jobs, organisation members interact with supervisors, coworkers, support staff, and outsiders such as customers, clients, or patients. These individuals

publicly display their emotions through facial, vocal, and bodily signals that provide important information about their goals, attitudes, and intentions (Rafaeli and Sutton, 1987; Sutton, 1991). This information may be converted into high task performance by individuals with high emotional intelligence.

A second mechanism by which emotional intelligence may enhance job performance of individuals concerns how regulating emotion influences the quality of social relationships. Employees displaying genuine concern about their coworkers' problems should build stronger relationships than the employees whose concern seems less genuine. Individuals with high emotional intelligence may employ their abilities to manage emotions to develop good social relationships that may in turn enhance task performance via advice and social support.

A third mechanism by which emotional intelligence may enhance job performance of individuals concerns the effects of emotions on how people think and act. Emotionally intelligent individuals may achieve high levels of task performance and Organisation Citizenship Behaviour (OCB) in most, if not all, jobs by managing their emotions in ways that enhance their motivation and the quality of decisions. A manager who understands that anger tends to lead people to underestimate the degree of risk in situations may suppress anger before making an important financial decision and, in turn, exhibit good task performance (Cote and Miners, 2000). The Cote and Miners study reveal that emotional intelligence and cognitive intelligence are compensatory with respect to task performance and OCB directed at the organisation. Thus, employees with low cognitive intelligence perform tasks correctly and engage in OCB more frequently if they are emotionally intelligent. The authors state that, emotional intelligence is an important predictor of task performance and OCB because of its interactive effect with cognitive intelligence.

Deeter-Schmelz and Sojka (2003) attempted to find out whether certain elements of EI lead to increased performance among sales personnel. In this study different skills associated with EI were measured which included empathy, perceiving others' emotions, self-awareness, self-regulation and self-motivation. The results of that research highlighted evidence of a possible link between EI and sales performance. In general, each salesperson interviewed was considered successful in sales by their own standards, company standards and each exhibited aspects of EI. Empathy for example, was exhibited by most respondents who specifically

mentioned the importance of putting themselves in their customers' shoes. Perceiving others emotions, which represents another dimension of EI, was also reported by the respondents as having the ability to read their customers mood.

A study of 100 MBA students in India showed that EI was related to self-reported managerial performance even after controlling for the impact of GMA and the personality factor of conscientiousness (Mathew and Mulla, 2009).

Thus, based on the definition of EI, the changing nature of jobs, and some past empirical evidences suggesting that an individual's EI is related to superior performance on the job, we state our first hypothesis.

Hypothesis 1: *Individuals who are high on EI will also be high on job performance*

The Moderating Role of Interpersonal Interaction

Job characteristics moderate the role of individual characteristics on job performance (Behling, 1998). Thus, GMA is more strongly related to job performance for jobs, which are higher in problem-solving requirements (Schmidt and Hunter, 2004). Similarly, conscientiousness is more strongly related to job performance for jobs, which allow greater autonomy to the individual (Barrick and Mount, 1991). Job characteristics enhance the impact of an individual's personality by enabling greater or lesser expression of individual differences in the job context. The ability to understand emotions and respond to situations taking into account one's own and others' emotions is best harnessed in a job involving a lot of interpersonal interaction. Deeter-Schmelz and Sojka (2003) found that EI was related to job performance for sales related jobs. Sales related jobs involve high amount of interpersonal interaction, which is likely to enhance the effect of an individual's EI on job performance. Similarly, Wong and Law (2002) found that EI was strongly related to job performance only for jobs which were high on emotional labour. Hence, based on past research on the impact of job characteristics on the relationship between individual differences and job performance, we hypothesise that the extent of interpersonal interaction required on a job will moderate the relationship between EI and job performance.

Hypothesis 2: *The relationship between EI and job performance will be stronger for individuals whose job involves greater amount of interpersonal interaction*

Method

Sample

The participants were 101 executives who were full-time employees working in the manufacturing unit of a large pharmaceutical company in Mumbai, India. This company is one of the top five pharmaceutical companies in India with an annual turnover of about \$ 516 million. It has offices all over the country and is currently expanding its base across the world. The participants, called in three batches in the training room, were asked to give their responses to the questionnaire after which they were informed about the study.

The sample consisted of 90 males and 9 females (2 undisclosed) of ages from 22 years to 58 years (Median = 34 years) and having work experience ranging from 1 month to 33 years (Median = 11 years). The work experience of the respondents with their current organisation ranged from 1 month to 17 years (Median = 3 years).

Control Variables

Research on the impact of individual differences on job performance has revealed the importance of two variables, viz., GMA and conscientiousness on job performance (Behling, 1997). GMA has been shown to have an impact on job performance across job categories and across different levels of work experience (Schmidt and Hunter, 2004). Similarly, the personality factor of conscientiousness has been shown to have an impact on job performance across a wide range of jobs (Barrick and Mount, 1991). In order to establish the validity of EI in predicting job performance it is important to consider the impact of GMA and conscientiousness on job performance (Mayer, Salovey, and Caruso, 2004). Hence, GMA and conscientiousness have been used as the primary control variables for this study. Additionally, age, gender, department, work experience, and tenure with the organisation were also measured and controlled.

Measures

Emotional Intelligence

To measure EI, each subject was provided with Wong and Law's Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS; Wong and Law, 2002). The WLEIS is a self-report EI measure developed for Chinese respondents and is based on the four ability dimensions described in the domain of EI, viz., (i) appraisal and expression of emotion in the self; (ii) appraisal and recognition of emotion in others; (iii) regulation of emotion in the self; and (iv) use of emotion

to facilitate performance. This scale has been used in the Indian context and has shown good reliability (Mulla, Premarajan, and Shukla, 2008).

Job performance

The previous year's performance ratings were collected from past company records. Each employee was provided one of the following ratings: outstanding, exceeding, fully achieved, mostly achieved, and not achieved. These ratings were coded as: 1 = not achieved; 2 = mostly achieved; 3 = fully achieved; 4 = exceeding; and 5 = outstanding.

Extent of Interpersonal Interaction

This variable was measured by asking respondents, how many individuals they interacted with from their department, other departments, customers, suppliers and other agencies. The participants were also asked to specify their mode of communication with each of them (i.e., phone, in-person, or both).

Conscientiousness

The personality trait of conscientiousness was measured using a 20-item scale for each facet based on the Revised NEO Personality Inventory (NEO-PI-R) prepared by P. T. Costa, Jr. and R. R. McCrae (1995) and items for the scale were taken from an internet website, International Personality Item Pool (2001).

General Mental Ability

GMA was measured using academic grades. Even though school grades do not perfectly predict GMA, the relationship between school grades and GMA is strong (Behling, 1998) and hence these were used as a proxy measure of GMA. For this study we used the school grades in the tenth and the twelfth year of education. In India, these two examinations are common for most individuals within a region (irrespective of schools attended) and are conducted by the State Board of Secondary and Higher Secondary Education. The marks for the tenth year and twelfth year of education are denoted henceforth as SSC and HSC scores respectively. In addition to this, we used the marks obtained by the individuals during graduation as a proxy for GMA. The year of graduating was also recorded as a control variable.

Results

The reliability estimates for the four dimensions of self-emotion appraisal, others'-emotion appraisal, regulation of emotion and uses of emotion were low (Cronbach alphas .48, .65, .34, and .49, respectively), however the overall reliability of the scale was adequate (Cronbach alpha = .73). Hence, the consolidated score on EI was used for all further analyses. The reliability of the scale for conscientiousness was adequate (Cronbach alpha = .77). The correlations amongst all the variables of interest are reported in Table 1.

Table 1: Means, Standard Deviations, and Inter-item Correlations

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Job perf.	3.56	.66								
2. EI	1.87	.30	.08	(.73)						
3. GMA 1 (SSC)	63.91	9.11	-.20 [†]	-.12						
4. GMA 2 (HSC)	59.59	8.84	-.02	-.12	.38**					
5. GMA 3 (Grad.)	63.22	8.22	-.11	-.24*	.35**	.57**				
6. Cons.	1.92	.29	-.10	.33*	.02	-.04	-.24	(.77)		
7. Age	34.29	7.47	.02	-.06	-.05	-.15	-.23 [†]	-.09		
8. Gender	1.09	.28	.15	-.07	.02	.09	-.00	-.15	-.20 [†]	
9. Work exp.	11.19	7.50	-.04	-.05	-.11	-.16	-.28**	-.06	.91**	-.22*

Note: Coefficients alphas are in parenthesis along the diagonal. N ranges from 91 to 101. Cons. = Conscientiousness; Work exp. = Work experience in years; Gender: Male = 1 and Female = 2. [†] $p < .05$. * $p < .01$.

Hypothesis 1 was tested by regression analysis. The dependent variable was job performance and the independent variables were EI and the other control variables. However, none of the independent or control variables were found to be significant in this regression. Hence, Hypothesis 1 was not supported.

In order to test the moderating effect of the variable "interpersonal interaction," the overall interpersonal interaction was calculated for each individual. This was done by coding the responses to the question, "How many people do you interact with from your own department, other departments, and customers?" The responses were coded as follows: 1 for less than 5; 2 for 5 to 10; 3 for 10 to 15; 4 for 15 to 20; and 5 for 20 and above. The entire sample was split into three parts based on the extent of interpersonal interaction on the job. The top one third of the respondents was those who had highest interpersonal interaction on their jobs and the bottom one third of the respondents were those who had the lowest interpersonal interaction on their jobs. Separate regressions were performed to study the impact of EI on job performance for these two groups of executives. The regression for the sample of high interaction executives is shown in Table 2. The regression for the sample of low interaction executives did not show any significant relationships.

Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	B	SE B	β
Job Performance	EI	.98	.39	.51*
	Conscientiousness	.21	.52	.11
	GMA 1 (SSC scores, %)	-.02	.01	-.39 [†]
	GMA 2 (HSC scores, %)	.01	.01	.20
	GMA 3 (Graduation scores, %)	.01	.02	.20
	Age (years)	.06	.03	.71 [†]
	Gender (Male = 1, Female = 2)	.45	.67	.13
	Work experience (years)	-.10	.04	-1.08*
	Tenure (years)	.05	.04	.45

Note. N = 33. Adjusted $R^2 = .30$. $F = 2.26^{\dagger}$
[†] $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

As seen in Table 2 for high interaction executives, EI is significantly related to job performance ($\beta = .51$, $p = .02$). This means that for executives whose job requires them to have a large number of interpersonal interactions, EI is a significant predictor of job performance. On the other hand, for executives whose job required few interpersonal interactions, EI was not related to job performance ($\beta = -.10$, $p = .58$).

DISCUSSION

The objective of this study was to study the impact of EI on job performance and the moderating role of job characteristics (i.e., interpersonal interaction) on the relationship between EI and job performance. In order to control for the effects of GMA and conscientiousness on job performance we measured these characteristics through using school grades of respondents and a self-report personality questionnaire respectively.

Our analysis of the data collected from 101 executives showed no significant relationship between EI and job performance. Hence, Hypothesis 1 suggesting that EI would be related to job performance was not supported. In addition, we did not find any significant relationship between our measures of GMA and conscientiousness and job performance. The impact of these two individual variables (viz. GMA and conscientiousness) on job performance has been well established in prior research (Barrick and Mount, 1991; Schmidt and Hunter, 2004), however these relationships were not found to be significant in this study. One reason for this could be limited variability in GMA and conscientiousness across the sample of 101 executives studied. Another reason for this finding could be the limited variability in job performance measures for the sample studied. Out of the 101 executives studied 51 executives were rated "fully achieved" and 40 executives were rated "exceeding."

Hypothesis 2 suggesting that the extent of interpersonal interaction required on the job would moderate the relationship between EI and job performance was supported. We split our sample of 101 executives into three parts and performed separate regressions on executives with high interpersonal interaction in their jobs (known as "high interaction executives") and executives having low interpersonal interactions in their jobs (known as "low interaction executives"). We found that the relationship between EI and job performance was significant only for the high interaction executives. Thus, Hypothesis 2 was supported.

Limitations of this Study

The most significant limitation of this study is the choice of instruments for the measurement of individual differences. First, GMA was measured using SSC, HSC, and graduation scores, which are indirect measures of cognitive ability. Secondly, EI and conscientiousness were measured using self-report scales, which are prone to biases. Even the measurement of job performance

which was done using the company records (of supervisor ratings) was not accurate since it did not show a large variation in the performance and more than 90% performance ratings were clustered around the two middle values in the range. Using more objective measures of individual differences and multiple measures of job performance may provide stronger findings for the EI-job performance relationship. Third, we measured the extent of interpersonal interaction simply by measuring the number of interactions. A relevant factor, which should be included in further studies, is the nature and the depth of interaction. It is expected that EI would have a stronger impact on the performance for interactions which involved mutual problem-solving and reciprocal independence rather than merely superficial interactions (such as greetings and information exchange).

Another limitation of this study was the small size of the sample. Executives in a firm are likely to be too less differentiated in their characteristics (such as GMA, conscientiousness, and EI) to show significant differences in performance. Further studies should look at larger samples across a wider range of respondents. Similarly, research on a more heterogeneous sample, incorporating participants from marketing, sales backgrounds would throw some more light on the relationship between emotional intelligence and performance as moderated by the degree of interaction.

CONCLUSIONS

EI primarily gained popularity by the claims of its ability to predict success, however in spite of such claims; there has not been much research on the linkage of EI with the success at workplace (Cote and Miners, 2006). This study can be seen as an attempt to bridge the gap by studying the impact of EI on job performance while controlling for other well-known determinants of job performance i.e., GMA and conscientiousness. Though our analyses did not show a strong relationship between EI and job performance, we suggest that future researches must study all three dimensions of human personality (i.e., cognitive, behavioural, and affective) together in order to get a true picture of the determinants of job performance. This is especially relevant because studies have shown some overlap between the measures of EI and GMA as well as the measures of EI and personality factors (Mayer, Salovey, and Caruso, 2004).

Research studying the impact of GMA and personality has started looking at the contextual determinants (moderators) of relationship. However, few

studies (e.g., Wong and Law, 2002) have studied the moderators of the EI-job performance relationship. In this study, we found that the EI-job performance relationship was significant only when the job involved high interpersonal interactions. Future research in EI must investigate other moderators of this relationship such as extent of autonomy, extent of job complexity, etc.

Several organisations have incorporated emotional intelligence into their employee development programmes and some business schools have added the training of emotional competencies to their curricula (Boyatzis, Stubbs, and Taylor, 2002). However, despite the popular interest, there is paucity of studies on how emotional intelligence is related to job performance. In such a situation organisations may either completely avoid using EI to make selection and promotion decisions or they may fall prey to the lofty claims made by the popular literature and overestimate the impact of EI. A more prudent and balanced approach would be to look closely at the nature of the job and based on that decide the importance to be attached to EI.

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