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Chapter 9: Emotional Intelligence and the Workplace

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Abstract

The issue of emotional intelligence and the workplace has caught the attention of researchers around the world. The following chapter looks at some of this research including EI and leadership, job performance, team working, job satisfaction and work engagement. It also considers research which suggests it is possible to provide training that helps people to improve their levels of EI.

Keywords

Emotional intelligence, organizations, leadership, job performance, team working, job satisfaction, work engagement, organizational citizenship, EI training

Introduction

Most organizations are emotionally charged places and anyone with work experience will be able to describe times at work when they have felt and witnessed happiness, sadness, anger, pride, disappointment, elation and many other emotions – sometimes all in one day! So it is no real surprise that there is a growing interest in the topic of Emotional Intelligence (EI) within organizations. According to Zeidner, Matthews and Roberts (2009), “Companies are now scouting for people who are passionate, reliable on the job, productive team-workers and care both about their co-workers and their job (i.e., emotionally intelligent individuals)” p253. However, this has not always been the case. Until more recent times, emotions had been viewed as generally unhelpful, with logic and rationality the only essentials, for effective decision-making and workplace functioning. In many organizations, leaders and managers in particular were supposed to ‘leave their emotions at the door’ when they entered the workplace (Nafukho, Muyia, Farnia, Kacirek & Lynham, 2016). But it is now known from work in the field of neuroscience that emotions are an

essential component of effective decision making (e.g. Damasio, 1994). A good deal of research from around the world has studied EI and the workplace from the ability EI (AEI) and trait EI (TEI) perspectives and this chapter looks at some of these studies. It considers the research evidence for the importance of EI in relation to leadership, job performance, team working, conflict management, job satisfaction and work engagement. Finally, it looks at the topic of EI training in the workplace.

EI and Leadership

Consider two managers in the same organization. Manager One is having a meeting with her team about an urgent task that needs to be completed that day. She lets her anxiety about the consequences of the task not being completed get the better of her, ignores the clear signals from her team members that they are also anxious about the situation and launches into an angry tirade, making threats about possible dismissals if the task isn't completed. One essential member of the team leaves the meeting feeling even more anxious and upset and seeks advice from his union representative about taking action against the manager concerned. Manager Two is in the same situation but recognizes that she is feeling anxious and that she needs to remain calm but firm when dealing with her team about the issue. She successfully manages her emotions during the meeting, clearly setting out what needs to be done and encouraging her team to work together to deal with this challenging situation. She also responds in a supportive way to one member of staff she sees is clearly anxious about the situation but knows will do their best to achieve the required result by the end of the day. Which manager is more likely to have the task completed and retain the trust and support of their team?

It would make complete sense to assume that a successful leader within an organization would need to have a high level of EI in addition to high levels of cognitive ability. This would mean that not only

would they be able to plan and organize effectively but they would also be able to nurture effective relationships both within and outside of the organization, often the key to achieving the desired outcomes. Great leaders have the ability to evoke positive emotions such as passion and determination in their followers and inspire them to be the best they can be. They need to be aware of their own feelings so they can decide if they are in the best frame of mind for whatever task they are dealing with and maintain or modify these feelings if necessary. They should also be attuned to the emotions of their followers so they can empathise when needed and respond in the most appropriate and effective way. They also need a good understanding of emotions so they are able to predict how situations are likely to develop and intervene if necessary to keep their workers engaged and on track. Additionally, they should be able to manage emotions well, both in themselves and in others, to ensure that they and their followers maintain their wellbeing, develop positive relationships with each other, and remain committed to the organizational goals and values.

A number of researchers agree with these assumptions. It appears that intuitively EI should influence effective leadership (McCleskey, 2014). According to George (2000), effective leadership includes five essential factors, all of which may be aided by a good level of EI:

“the development of a collective sense of goals and objectives and how to go about achieving them; instilling in others knowledge and appreciation of the importance of work activities and behaviors; generating and maintaining excitement, enthusiasm, confidence, and optimism in an organization as well as cooperation and trust; encouraging flexibility in decision making and change; establishing and maintaining a meaningful identity for an organization” p1039.

George (2000) provides some persuasive arguments of how EI may positively contribute to effective leadership but acknowledges the need for empirical research to provide evidence of these arguments.

In their critique of EI and leadership literature, Fambrough and Hart (2008) suggest that a leader's ability to understand and express their own emotions effectively and to interpret and deal with the emotions of others, using empathy and non-threatening communication skills, will increase their interpersonal effectiveness. But they also acknowledge that improving these skills can take time and that there is no quick-fix solution to developing an emotionally adept leader. Rajah, Song and Arvey (2011) in their review of the literature conclude that there may be beneficial outcomes for organizations that recruit leaders with high EI but they also acknowledge some of the conceptual and measurement issues that still exist within the field (see Chapters 1, 2, 3 and 4 for detailed discussion of theoretical and measurement issues surrounding EI).

Not everyone agrees with the argument that EI is essential for effective leadership. The topic is a controversial one and has been the subject of some heated debate within the academic community. For those interested in this debate, a series of letters published as an article by Antonakis, Ashkanasy and Dasborough (2009) in the journal *The Leadership Quarterly* is well worth a read. The article includes the following comment from Antonakis, "EI has captivated the public and some well-meaning researchers ... Unfortunately, practice and voodoo science is running way ahead of rigorous research" (p 257) which is firmly rebutted by Ashkanasy and Dasborough who take issue with peer-reviewed work being described as voodoo science! They go on to draw attention to the "accumulating bulk of research in the most highly regarded peer-reviewed journals in our field that is supportive of emotional intelligence in general, and its role in leadership in particular" (p258). An empirical study carried out by Weinberger (2009) into Ability Emotional Intelligence (AEI) measured using the MSCEIT (Mayer, Salovey & Caruso, 2002), leadership style and leader effectiveness, found no relationship between the three concepts. The study involved 151 managers (133 included in the

statistical analysis) from one manufacturing organization in the United States and included executives, directors, managers and supervisors. As the author points out, as this study relates to employees in just one organization, the results may not be generalizable. It should also be noted that of the original 151 employees included, only 27 were female. As females generally score higher than males on EI tests, this gender imbalance may also have had an impact on the results of this particular study.

It might be helpful to look at some of the evidence we have for the importance of EI in relation to leadership. A study by Rubin, Munz and Bommer (2005) looked at the relationship between transformational leadership style and emotion recognition, which relates to the first of the Mayer and Salovey (1997) branches. Transformational leadership behaviour is generally considered to be an effective style of leadership, whereby leaders encourage their followers to learn, achieve and develop. They act as role mentors, role models and foster a climate of trust (Harms & Credé, 2010). A manager who uses a transformational leadership style tends to motivate his or her followers to perform beyond expectations as opposed to a transactional style where followers purely exchange effort and services for reward (Bass, 1999). In the Rubin et al study, 145 managers (62% male) from a biotechnology/agricultural company in the United States were rated on their transformational leadership skills by their direct reports. Emotional recognition was measured using a **performance-based test** (as opposed to a **self-report test**) called the Diagnostic Analysis of Nonverbal Accuracy (DANVA) developed by Nowicki and Duke (2001). The test involves participants identifying emotion from photographs of adult facial expressions and is widely used in psychological studies. This ability is sometimes referred to as empathic accuracy (Côté, 2014). The study found that leaders who accurately identified emotions from facial expressions were also more likely to demonstrate transformational leadership behaviours, providing some empirical evidence for the importance of this aspect of EI in relation to effective leadership. A study by Clarke (2010a) also found that the 'using emotion' branch of AEI was significantly associated with two of the dimensions of transformational leadership.

Other studies which used AEI measures include one by Rosete and Ciarrochi (2005) which was carried out in an Australian public service organization. The sample size was modest with 41 managers (57% male) and measures included ability EI (using the MSCEIT), leadership effectiveness (using the organization's performance management system to rate how well the individual had achieved business goals over the financial year) and a 360° assessment completed by the manager, their direct manager and their direct reports. The results showed a significant positive relationship between EI and a manager's ability to build effective working relationships, with the ability to perceive emotion the strongest predictor. There were also significant positive associations between EI and two of the five 360° assessment factors; cultivating productive working relationships and exemplifying personal drive and integrity. This study is a notable one as the participants were all in actual leadership positions in the workplace (as opposed to students taking the part of leaders) and the authors **statistically controlled** for other variables that may have had an influence on the research findings, including cognitive ability and personality of the participants. However, no relationship was found between EI and the manager's actual performance (what they achieved) from which one could conclude that EI is related to leadership style rather than leadership effectiveness (Zeidner et al 2009).

Côté, Lopes, Salovey and Miners (2010) looked at the issue of leadership emergence which represents "the degree to which a person who is not in a formal position of authority influences the other members of a group" (Côté et al, 2010, p496). The two studies were carried out with undergraduate students (138 in the first study and 165 in the second) with leadership emergence in small groups measured using peer ratings on items such as whether 'the person had vision and often brought up ideas about possibilities for the future'. The items were taken from the Conger-Kanugo leadership scale (Conger & Kanugo, 1994). AEI, as measured by the MSCEIT, was positively related to leadership emergence over and above other variables including gender, personality and cognitive intelligence, with the ability to understand emotions as the most consistent predictor.

A **meta-analysis** which included all possible sources of data from research examining EI and transformational leadership was carried out by Harms and Credé (2010). The data were used from 106 articles, dissertations and technical reports, including published and unpublished work. For AEI a correlation of .24 was found for the ten studies in which the participants assessed their own transformational leadership and .05 for the four studies where direct reports or peers provided the assessments. The relationships were stronger for the Trait Emotional Intelligence (TEI) measures (**WLEIS, BOEQI, SUEIT and EIA**) with correlations of .66 from studies where the individual rated themselves and .13 for the multi-source ratings. These results suggest caution should be exercised when using EI tests in organizational settings and a recommendation from the authors that they be limited to situations where managers are encouraged to develop their self-awareness and self-reflection in relation to EI, rather than being used for making decisions concerning selection or promotion. However, with this caveat, the study did provide some evidence for the contribution of EI at some level to successful leadership.

In a rare qualitative study of EI and leadership, Smollan and Parry (2011) were interested in exploring how followers perceive the EI ability of their leaders and the potential impact this can have on whether the followers engage with or resist organizational change. The study, which was carried out in New Zealand, included interviews with 24 participants (13 men and 11 women) who had all been involved in different types of organizational change including redundancy, restructuring, relocations, job redesign, mergers and acquisitions. They were from a number of different companies, industries, departments and hierarchical levels and were asked to describe the change that had taken place together with their emotional reactions to it. They were also asked about whether they were expected to show or hide their emotions in the implementation of the change, whether they thought their leaders had perceived and responded appropriately to their emotions, how they managed their emotions and whether or not their thoughts, feelings and behaviours had been affected by the leadership ability of their managers. From a detailed analysis of the interview data the authors concluded that when the managers were perceived as being emotionally

responsive, in particular when they acknowledged that the employee was facing difficulties and provided sufficient support, this helped the employees to deal with the change. Some of the employees also commented on a lack of emotion management in their leaders, with a number commenting on incidents where anger was not managed appropriately which had an influence on their perceptions of the leader's effectiveness. Additionally, employees who felt that they had to hide their emotions or that their emotions were ignored experienced more negative emotions. The authors conclude that followers react better to change when they perceive their leaders to have higher levels of EI.

The conclusion drawn by Walter, Cole and Humphrey (2011) was that the evidence so far does suggest EI has the potential to help us better understand leadership emergence, leadership effectiveness and leadership behaviours. However, there are still a number of important issues that need clarification before we can be confident in the relevance of EI for this aspect of organizational life. Perhaps this current lack of stronger evidence is as a result of measurement issues (please see Chapter 4 for a detailed discussion) and an effective way of capturing some of the evidence has just not been found yet. Hopefully future research will help to further illuminate the link between EI and effective leadership.

EI and Job Performance

Another area of interest is the question of whether or not EI has an impact on job performance. Do people with higher levels of EI perform better in the workplace? A study carried out in Romania (Iliescu, Ilie, Ispas & Ion, 2012) looked at AEI (measured using the MSCEIT) and the job performance of three different samples of workers; sales people, front desk customer service people (public sector) and hospital CEOs. The first sample of 141 sales people (37% male) were drawn from four different organizations; insurance, automotive, banking and beauty products, and each completed the MSCEIT. They were also rated on both subjective and objective job performance criteria (subjective performance involved the participants being rated on their customer orientation and

persuasive abilities – objective performance was taken from sales data in the previous twelve months). Statistical analysis revealed that higher levels of EI were related to better sales performance and to persuasive abilities but were not related to client orientation. Age, gender, cognitive ability and personality were not controlled for in the analyses for the sample of sales people but they were included in the analyses of the front desk workers and hospital CEOs. The 223 front desk workers (37% male) were rated by their direct supervisors on whether or not they had met their objectives for the previous year (objective performance) and on six competencies (subjective performance); professional competence, activism and initiative, efficiency, quality of work, team-work, and communication. Results indicated that EI did not predict objective performance over and above the other demographic variables but it did predict subjective performance. The 61 hospital CEOs (77% male) were rated on both subjective indicators (by their staff and patients) and objective indicators (such as financial indicators and successful medical interventions). These ratings are carried out as part of a government assessment required every year and are weighted in a single composite score for each CEO. The analyses indicated that ability EI predicted performance over and above the demographic variables. This study involved employees at different levels within their organizations and in a diverse range of job roles and provides some empirical evidence for the importance of EI in relation to job performance.

Another study carried out in the United States involved 145 police staff (both serving officers and civilians) from a municipal police department and a college campus police department (Gooty, Gavin, Ashkanasy & Thomas, 2014). The researchers found differences in the coping strategies of people with higher or lower AEI (measured with the MSCEIT) when faced with emotional events. They studied four types of emotional events regarded as critical by the participants – those that evoked anger, guilt, joy and pride, details of which were recorded in diaries. The researchers found that the law enforcement staff with higher levels of EI were more likely to use emotion-focused coping (EFC) in contrast to problem-focused coping (PFC) which is generally considered to be a better strategy for the longer term. However, in these emotion-laden work related situations, EFC is

likely to be a helpful strategy which enables individuals to detach themselves from the emotional event and frees up cognitive resources resulting in better task performance following an emotional event.

Joseph and Newman (2010) found in their meta-analytical study that EI (all types) positively predicted job performance in occupations that involved high levels of emotional labor. Jobs that include a good deal of customer interaction, where emotional regulation is often required, would be classed as involving high emotional labor. Hochschild (1983) first used this term to describe the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display or in other words, having to 'put on' a professional, positive approach when you are clearly feeling something quite different! This might be done through a surface acting approach where the person may fake a smile to a customer, or through a deep acting approach, where a person may try to reappraise a situation so they actually change the way they feel. Kluemper, DeGroot and Choi (2013) extended this work and were particularly interested in whether emotion management ability (measured with the MSCEIT) would predict various job performance outcomes in people whose jobs involve a high level of emotional labor. They did indeed find that people with higher levels of emotion management ability did better on a number of job performance outcomes, including specific task performance, more **organizational citizenship behaviors** (OCBs) and less unacceptable behaviors to other individuals. This study also controlled for cognitive ability and personality traits. A more recent meta-analysis which included the different conceptualisations of EI (trait and ability), found that they were all positively related to OCBs, with the authors concluding emotionally intelligent people are more likely to be good employees, who are prosocial, helpful and less likely to engage in activities that would be harmful to the organization concerned (Miao, Humphrey & Qian, 2017).

A study by Côté and Miners (2006) tested a compensatory model and found that higher levels of AEI (as measured with the MSCEIT) could compensate for lower levels of cognitive ability in relation to job performance. The study was carried out with 175 university managerial, administrative and

professional staff with job performance rated by the employees' supervisors. The authors suggest that although organizations commonly believe that in order to be successful they need to attract and retain the 'smartest' workers, this study provides support for organizations also attracting and retaining employees who are 'emotionally smart'.

Other researchers have examined EI in relation to other job performance outcomes. Parke, Seo and Sherf (2015) were interested in the role played by EI in employee creativity. Using a research design that measured EI using the MSCEIT (facilitation and management branches) and creativity using supervisors' rating of performance with items such as 'this person comes up with new and practical ideas to improve performance', they found that EI did have a role to play in facilitating employee creativity. Specifically, they found that employees use their EI ability to maintain their levels of positive affect (a state of high energy, focus and pleasurable engagement) which they use to enhance their creativity in the workplace. Based on these findings the authors propose that EI be considered an important contributor to employee creativity in the workplace.

It has been suggested that studies that utilise TEI measures find a considerably stronger relationship between EI and job performance than studies that use AEI measures (Joseph & Newman, 2010; O'Boyle et al., 2011). A detailed meta-analytical study carried out by Joseph, Jin, Newman and O'Boyle (2015) looked to establish some possible reasons for these findings. They found that TEI measures appear to look at an assorted mix of traits that have long been known to predict job performance, including the personality traits Conscientiousness and Extraversion, general self-efficacy, self-rated performance, AEI, Emotional Stability and cognitive ability. However, they conclude that as TEI measures do seem to tap into traits and abilities that predict job performance, using them as part of a selection process could be seen as a practical, less time consuming option for measuring some of the knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics that an applicant needs in order to perform successfully in the job in question.

EI and Team working

Another area of organizational activity that should be enhanced through higher levels of EI in the workforce is team working. It would make sense to assume that if colleagues are able to read each other accurately, they are also more likely to respond to each other more appropriately.

Additionally, higher levels of emotional understanding and management should lead to a more conducive working environment and better team dynamics. For example, if a team member with high EI sees that other members of the team are becoming frustrated or angry because of disagreement over tasks, they may try to restore calm to the team and guide them towards effective problem solving. There is some evidence to suggest that higher levels of EI being helpful for team effectiveness is a reasonable assumption.

A study carried out by Chien Farh, Seo and Tesluk (2012) found that AEI (as measured by the MSCEIT) was related to teamwork effectiveness but only in situations where the jobs had high managerial work demands. This is work that involves managing diverse groups of people, functions and lines of business and it is suggested that this type of work provides more opportunities for high EI individuals to act in emotionally intelligent ways. As hypothesised by the researchers, the study also found that the ability to perceive emotions was the most important factor. This is possibly because we need to perceive emotion first before we can try to understand it and manage it. An example given by the authors is a situation where someone with a high level of emotion perception ability recognises that a colleague is under significant stress (by reading the emotional cues) and then offers to help in some way, such as by taking on some of the responsibilities if appropriate.

The importance of AEI (as measured by the MSCEIT) for team working effectiveness was also looked at by Clarke (2010a). In his study which involved 67 UK project managers Clarke investigated the importance of AEI on a number of project management competencies including teamwork. This was measured with self-report items such as whether the manager 'encouraged teamwork consistently' and 'maintained good working relationships with others involved on the project.' He found that

after controlling for both cognitive ability and personality, the 'using emotion' factor of EI was significantly associated with the competency teamwork.

EI in teams has also been investigated using TEI methodology. For example, one study by Chang, Sy and Choi (2012) involved 91 teams and used the average of the team members' EI scores as a measure of EI at the team level. The study used an abbreviated version of the Emotional Intelligence Scale (Schutte, 1998) which is a self-report measure originally based on the Mayer and Salovey (1997) four branch model. Measures of personality and cognitive ability were not included in the study making it difficult to be confident that team member EI had an impact over and above these constructs. However, the study did find that higher levels of EI in the team helped to shape trust between the team members and this had a positive impact on the performance of the team.

EI and Conflict Management

It would also be expected that employees with higher levels of EI should be able to deal more effectively with the types of conflict that often arise within the workplace. The abilities to understand and manage emotion are particularly pertinent here as an employee with these strengths will be able to see things from the different perspectives of the people involved and then regulate their own emotion and that of others to try to reach a successful resolution to the conflict. The study carried out by Clarke (2010a) mentioned earlier in this chapter, found that project managers with higher levels of AEI (MSCEIT) reported higher levels of conflict management ability.

There has also been a small meta-analysis (20 studies) on the subject of EI and constructive conflict management carried out by Schlaerth, Ensari and Christian (2013). The researchers included studies that had measures of managing own emotions and managing emotion in others (both AEI and TEI), together with age and leadership position. The results suggested that employees with higher levels of EI manage conflict more effectively. The relationship was stronger for non-leaders than it was for those in leadership positions but age did not have a significant role to play. The authors suggest that

EI is a more critical skill in non-leaders who have probably not had the training or experience that has allowed them to develop their conflict management skills in the same way as those in leadership positions. As such they may be more reliant on their EI ability for constructive conflict resolution. The analysis also revealed that the biggest effects of EI on conflict resolution were found in the studies that had utilised TEI measures with the AEI studies demonstrating the smallest effects.

EI and Job Satisfaction/Work Engagement

There is some evidence that TEI can influence feelings of job satisfaction and **work engagement**. An Australian study carried out with police officers (Brunetto, Teo, Shacklock & Farr-Wharton, 2012), found that EI predicted their perceptions of well-being and job satisfaction, which influenced their work engagement and commitment, leading to lower levels of turnover intentions. The authors suggest that it may be just as important for a modern day police officer to be emotionally aware as it is for them to be physically fit and knowledgeable about the law.

A further study of work engagement examined a number of possible predictors including TEI together with various other personality traits (Akhtar, Boustani, Tsivrikos & Chamorro-Premuzic, 2015). The strongest predictor of work engagement was TEI with the authors concluding that employees with higher levels of EI are more likely to be engaged at work whatever their age, gender or other personality traits. Higher levels of TEI were also found to be related to work engagement in a study that examined connections between EI and workplace flourishing (Schutte & Loi, 2014).

As yet there is not a great deal of evidence that links EI to job satisfaction and work engagement but hopefully future studies, including some that utilise AEI measures, will provide further insight into this important area.

EI Training in the Workplace

In recent years EI training in the workplace has grown into quite a substantial business. A quick online search returns details of any number of possible training courses but unfortunately many are not based on valid research and have not been subjected to a rigorous evaluation process.

However, there is some good empirical research in the literature which does provide evidence of the effectiveness of well-designed EI workplace interventions. Clarke (2010b) provided participants in his study with a one day EI awareness training session, based on the Four Branch Model of EI (Mayer & Salovey, 1997) which started with the completion of an AEI measure (MSCEIT). For some of the participants, this was then followed by a team-based learning intervention. This involved the participants working together in teams of four to six members, over a fourteen-week period, where the task was to complete a written report. The participants were also asked to include reflections and discussions on how the team was working together as well as focusing on the task itself. At the end of the task the team members completed the MSCEIT again and were also asked how often they had attended team meetings. This allowed the participants to be categorised into three groups: those who received just the one-day EI training session; those who received the training session, followed by the team task but who only attended team meetings less than once a week (low participation); and those who received the training session, followed by the team task but who attended meetings once a week or more (high participation). Analyses of the data revealed a significant improvement in EI but only for one of the EI branches (using emotion) and only for the group classified as having high participation. This suggests that a one-day training session alone is not sufficient for people to improve their AEI but that combining raising awareness of EI with opportunities for the participants to work together on a team-based task may help people to develop their AEI. However, the intensity of participation in the team-based task does seem to have a role to play in the success of the intervention. It seems as with so many other things in life, the more you are prepared to put into an activity, the more you are likely to benefit from it.

Interestingly, a study carried out in Spain with 688 adults between the ages of 18 and 73 years, looked at whether or not people's implicit beliefs about EI influenced their levels of AEI as measured by the MSCEIT (Cabello & Fernández-Berrocal, 2015). The research examined whether or not people's implicit beliefs about the malleability of EI, in other words, whether or not EI is something that can be improved over time and with effort, would have an influence on AEI. They found that people who believe that EI ability can change and be developed did have higher EI scores. This was consistent with other studies which have found that such individuals tend to use effective strategies to deal with emotions such as **cognitive reappraisal** and experience fewer negative emotions than people who believe EI to be fixed and difficult to change (e.g. Burnette et al, 2013). These findings could have important implications for EI training programmes with the suggestion that it would be helpful to include some activities that help the participants to understand about the malleability of EI. This should result in more successful outcomes for the training intervention including longer-lasting effects (Cabello & Fernández-Berrocal, 2015).

Some work has also been carried out with trainee teachers in Canada who took part in a five-week programme designed to improve their EI, resiliency, efficacy, wellbeing and reduce levels of self-reported stress and anxiety (Vesely, Saklofske & Nordstokke, 2014). The study included a small number of participants (23 in the training group and 26 in the control group) who all completed appropriate measures pre and post intervention. The EI training programme lasted five weeks, with workshop sessions lasting one and a half hours each week, group discussions, completion of workbook exercises and home assignments (including practising skills learnt in the workshops). The authors describe the results as encouraging, with the EI programme participants showing significant improvements in their self-reported EI scores as measured by the WLEIS. The analysis also indicated a trend toward increasing teacher efficacy and resilience. The authors report working on a refined programme with a more specific focus on EI.

An interesting and potentially important study was carried out in Spain and investigated whether an EI training programme would help improve self-perceived employability and actual reemployment in a group of unemployed adults (Hodzic, Ripoll, Lira & Zenasni, 2015). The group consisted of 73 adults, randomly assigned to either the intervention group or a control group. The intervention group of 40 adults were then divided into four smaller groups of between eight and twelve participants who underwent a 15-hour intervention, taught over three days. The training programme was designed around the Mayer and Salovey four branch model of EI and included some explanation of key theory, group exercises, group discussions, skills practice, video clips, role play, case studies and physical emotion regulation techniques including breathing exercises and muscle relaxation. The participants also learnt about how positive emotions can influence physical and psychological wellbeing. There was a significant increase in the self-reported employability of the intervention participants with individuals from this group feeling more employable than the control group participants after taking part in the activities. By engaging with activities that focused on emotional abilities related to perceiving, using, understanding and managing emotions the unemployed adults felt more positive about gaining employment in the future. Importantly, not only did they believe this, but the intervention appeared to have a positive effect on actual reemployment with more people from the experimental group being in work one year after the intervention. They also found employment faster than the control group participants (on average ten months compared to sixteen months).

The research would suggest that any training interventions should be based on sound research findings and empirically tested models of EI, include some regular group-based activities over a period of time if possible and include some teaching about the malleability of EI, if they are to stand the best chances of success in improving levels of EI. A recent meta-analysis of EI training interventions for adults provides support for these conclusions (Hodzic, Scharfen, Ripoll, Holling & Zanasni, 2017). There is also one other issue that potential trainers in this area may need to

consider, which is that people who have low levels of EI often do not appear to have much insight into how deficient their performance is and are more reluctant to make improvements than people with higher levels of EI (Sheldon, Dunning & Ames, 2014). Persuading people who really need the training to take part may be quite a challenging endeavour.

Conclusion

Having a good level of EI can potentially help us to work in challenging organizational conditions and develop effective relationships with the wide range of people that form part of our everyday working lives. Progress is being made that helps us to understand the role played by EI in the workplace but there is still a lot we do not know (Côté, 2014). Hopefully future research will help to fill the current gaps in our knowledge and provide further empirical evidence for the importance of EI in organizations.

Reader Questions

Do you think a high level of EI is more important for some roles than others? Are there some roles where it would not be of value?

An organization has recently gone through a period of major change, which has resulted in some anger and anxiety in the workforce. If an employee has a high level of EI, how might this help them to remain calm, focused and able to continue successfully in their role?

If you were tasked with designing an intervention to help improve EI in a workplace, how might you do this? What type of activities would you include? How could you evaluate its effectiveness?

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Sidebars

Performance based test. Test takers are required to respond to various items with an answer that is scored for correctness (e.g. identifying the level of a particular emotion when presented with a facial expression).

Self-report test. Test takers rate themselves on various items (e.g. how much they agree with a particular statement such as 'I am good at identifying emotions in facial expressions.')

Statistically controlled. When a researcher attempts to reduce the effects of possible confounding variables when looking at the effects of an independent variable on the dependent variable (e.g. controlling for IQ and personality when looking for the effects of an EI intervention on levels of EI.)

Meta-analysis. Combining the results of multiple individual research studies and integrating the findings, leading to stronger conclusions being drawn (e.g. combining the data from all studies that have looked at the relationship between EI and job performance).

WLEIS. Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale.

BOEQI. Bar-On Emotional Quotient Inventory.

SUEIT. Swinburne University Emotional Intelligence Test.

EIA. Emotional Intelligence Appraisal.

Organizational Citizenship Behaviors. Positive individual behaviors that support work colleagues and/or the organisation, that workers carry out of their own accord (they are often not part of a person's job description, for example, staying late to help a colleague finish a report that they need to submit the next day).

Work engagement. A feeling of fulfilment in relation to work, demonstrated by an employee's enthusiasm and commitment to their organization.

Cognitive reappraisal. Reinterpreting an emotional situation to see it in a different way and change the way you feel about it (e.g. when somebody in front of you lets a door slam in your face and you feel angry, changing the way you view this situation to think perhaps this wasn't a deliberate act but just somebody in a hurry who genuinely didn't realise you were behind them.)

Biographical Note

Lorraine Dacre Pool is a Chartered Psychologist, Principal Lecturer at the University of Central Lancashire and a Principal Fellow of the Higher Education Academy. She holds a BA in Social Psychology from the University of Sussex, an MSc in Occupational/Organisational Psychology from the University of Manchester and a PhD in Psychology from the University of Central Lancashire. Her work in the field of graduate employability, including the development of the CareerEDGE model, is widely known and she has a particular interest in the role played by Emotional Intelligence. This was the subject of her PhD research, which included the successful design, delivery and evaluation of a taught module of Emotional Intelligence for students in Higher Education, details of which have been published in the journal *Learning and Individual Differences*. She delivers workshops on EI for both staff and students and is often invited to speak on the subject at universities throughout the UK.