

Role of Emotional Intelligence on Employee Engagement: A Study among Indian Professionals

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Abstract

Business firms across the globe have always endeavoured to identify and strengthen drivers of employee engagement at the individual, group and organizational level. Drivers at the individual level have been less researched and tested in previous studies. This study attempts to examine the role of emotional intelligence as an individual antecedent of employee engagement. This is hypothesized drawing from literature that emotional intelligence plays an important role in shaping positive workplace feelings, attitudes and behaviour. Responses captured and analyzed from randomly selected sample of 182 professionals working in Indian organizations revealed that emotional intelligence especially mood repair augments high levels of employee engagement manifested through higher vigor, dedication and absorption in employees. These findings have significant implications for both research and practice.

Keywords: attention, mood repair, clarity, employee engagement

1. Introduction

Employee engagement has been viewed as the keystone of talent management and recipe for organizational success. Kahn (1992) advocated that engagement is instrumental for outcomes at individual (i.e. quality of people's work and their own experiences of doing that work), and organizational-level (i.e. the growth and productivity of organization). Research evidences suggest that engaged employees contribute to increased customer orientation (Chalofsky, 2010), productivity (Saks, 2006) and less turnover (Maslach, Schaufeli & Leiter, 2001; Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes, 2002; Saks, 2006; Shuck, Reio, & Rocco, 2011). Engaged employees are assets to the organization as they deliver stellar performances on account of their affective commitment and discretionary efforts (Shuck, 2010). Engaged employees on an average have been found to show less alienation and absenteeism (Wagner & Harter, 2006) than their peers, saving organizations an average of 86.5 million days per year in lost productivity (The Gallup Organization, 2001). Engaged employees are credited for ensuring financial success and profits (Czarnowsky, 2008; Xanthopoulou, Bakker, & Schaufeli, 2009). Owing to its manifold benefits and advantages, employee engagement has been attracting attention of practitioners and consulting groups alike.

Research and practice have both unravelled that focusing on drivers of employee engagement can reap rich dividends. Antecedents of engagement were identified at the individual and organizational level (Wollard & Shuck, 2011). Individual and personality variables are related to burnout (Maslach et al., 2001) and seem to be predicting engagement (Saks, 2006). Previous researches suggest that emotionally intelligent behaviours and abilities are instrumental in shaping socially and organizationally desirable behaviour (Petrides & Furnham, 2006). Research gap surfaced since few individual drivers especially those having emotional connotations were empirically tested in previous studies.

1.1 Objective

The present study was carried out with the objective of examining the role and impact of emotional intelligence as an individual antecedent of employee engagement.

1.2 Employee Engagement

Employee Engagement has been differently viewed and defined ever since it was coined by Kahn (1990), who had opined that engagement manifested when individuals expressed themselves physically, cognitively, and

emotionally through their performances in the job. Its nature (Little & Little, 2006; Macey & Schneider, 2008; Shuck, & Wollard, 2010), measurement (Schaufeli, Bakker, & Salanova, 2006; for Work Engagement Scale; Harter, Schmidt & Hayes, 2002; for the Gallup Workplace Audit; Maslach & Leiter, 2008; for Burnout Inventory), antecedents and consequences (Saks, 2006) and best practices (Macey Schneider, Barbera & Young, 2009) have shaped the construct of employee engagement.

1.3 Emotional Connotations of Employee Engagement

The importance of personal characteristics and attributes are seen as being significantly influencing an individual's behavior at his workplace (Judge, Locke, & Durham, 1997; Hobfoll 1989; Handa & Gulati, 2014). These personality traits are generally consistent over a period of time and impact an individual's response to various circumstances at work (Mc Crae, Costa, Ostendorf, Angleitner, Hrebickova, & Avia, 2000).

Neurotic people have irrational ideas, unable to control impulses and are stressed due to the negative emotions that depart them from adjusting to surrounding including organization (Costa & McCrae, 1992; Handa & Gulati, 2014). Positive affect regulates direction, type and speed of cognition (Schwarz & Bless, 1991; Carver & White, 1994; Kazan & Kuhl, 2005). An increase in positive affect, leads to behavioral control and desirable outcomes (Fredrickson, 2005; Bledow, Rosing, & Frese, 2013).

Emotional connotation of employee engagement concerns the feelings and beliefs of employees (Baumruk, 2004; Shaw, 2005; Richman, 2006; Macey & Schneider, 2008). Affective commitment emphasizes the emotional connection employees have with their work and is analogous to the emotive qualities of engagement (Macey & Schneider, 2008; Saks, 2006; Shuck, 2011). Employee's emotional attachment with the organization is viewed as an indispensable factor in shaping commitment and loyalty (Rhoades, Eisenberger, & Armeli, 2001) which are outcomes of employee engagement. Woodruffe (2006) described engagement as a positive, emotional state which can stimulate employees to willingly engage in behavior directed towards desired organizational outcomes, emphasizing the emotional fulfillment employees experience as a result of being engaged (Shuck & Wollard, 2010). Even psychological engagement refers to existence of long period of desirable emotions (Albrecht, 2010; Baum & Mitchell, 2012). Macey and Schneider (2008) make a proposition that an employee who is engaged is within a positive 'state', is attentive, alert, strong, enthusiastic, inspired, proud, determined and active is akin to Alfe's (2010) affective engagement. Emotional make up and positive feelings of employees have an impact on their work and their levels of engagement.

2. Emotional Intelligence

Emotional Intelligence coined by Salovey and Mayer (1990) describes abilities like understanding one's own feelings, using emotions to shape judgement and behavior, showing empathy for others' feelings and regulating one's emotions in a way that enhances living (Gibbs, 1995).

Goleman (1995) opined that business success was ensured due to emotional and not cognitive intelligence. It was conceptualized as an ability (Salovey & Mayer, 1990; Mayer, Salovey & Caruso, 2002), as a competency (Goleman, 1995), as emotional literacy (Cooper & Sawaf, 1997), emotional quotient (Cooper, 1997), and personal intelligences (Gardner, 1983), social intelligence (Thorndike, 1920) and interpersonal intelligence (Gardner & Hatch, 1989).

Emotions influence a range of behaviors that promote both emotional and intellectual growth (Mayer and Salovey, 1997) and are instrumental for self-regulation and positive organizational order (Fineman, 2000). They affect actions, motivations, behavior and practices (Stanley & Burrows, 2005). Previous research reflects that emotional control, balance and intelligence drive productivity gains, innovations, and accomplishments of individuals, teams and organizations (Cooper, 1997).

Emotional intelligence facilitates flexible planning, improvement in decision-making, creative thinking punctuality and persistence regarding challenging tasks (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Individuals with high emotional intelligence are more successful in leading and managing others and developing the right kind of job attitudes amongst other employees (George, 2000). It positively affects job satisfaction, well-being and engagement and, employee perceptions of affective commitment and their turnover intentions (Brunetto, Teo Shacklock, & Wharton, 2012).

2.1 Relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Employee Engagement

Affective engagement has been perceived as the degree to which an individual experiences state of positive affect relating to one's work role (Schaufeli, Salanova et al., 2002; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004; May, Gilson, & Harter, 2004; Truss et al., 2006; Rich, LePine, & Crawford, 2010; Soane et al., 2012). Affect has been defined as consciously accessible feelings (Fredrickson, 1998). Affect theory distinguishes affective states using two

dimensions (Warr 1990)-valence (the extent to which an emotion is positive or negative) and activation (the extent to which an emotion is active or passive).

Employee engagement encompasses the positive, activated range of the affect spectrum (Macey & Schneider, 2008). It is an integral part of employee engagement and plays a pivotal role in motivating individuals for realization of both their individual and organizational goals (Judge & Illies, 2002; Soane et al., 2012). Appropriate emotions and feelings have strategic value and impact for the organization and the individual (Landen, 2002).

Several studies in the past suggest that emotional intelligence is viewed as an important predictor of organizational outcomes and positive job attitudes including job satisfaction (Grandey, 2000; Abraham, 2000; Carmeli, 2003; Barsade & Gibson, 2007; Ghoniem, Khouly, Mohsen, & Ibrahim, 2011; Shooshtarian, Ameli, & Lari, 2013). Employees having high emotional intelligence have higher levels of job satisfaction due to their ability to identify and regulate their feelings (Sy et al., 2006). This positive relationship has been reported in a nursing study (Guleryuz et al., 2008) and in a study conducted in police services (Brunetto, Teo, Shacklock, & Wharton, 2012).

Thus, Emotional Intelligence is hypothesized as augmenting higher levels of Employee Engagement.

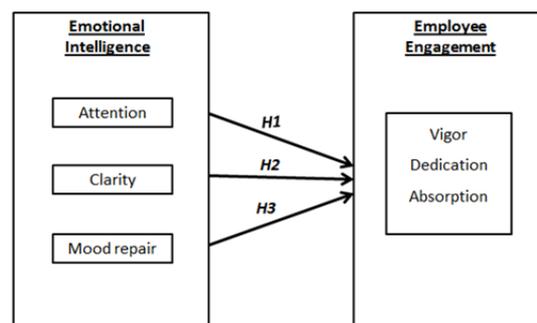


Figure 1. Proposed research model

This research model was used to test the impact of Emotional Intelligence on Employee Engagement.

The dimensions of the construct of **Emotional Intelligence** have been operationalized as follows:

Attention: It is defined as the degree to which individuals notice and think about their feelings.

Clarity: It refers to the extent to which individuals reported feelings clearly.

Mood Repair: It is the attempt to repair unpleasant moods and maintain positive ones.

The dimensions of **Employee Engagement** have been operationalized as follows:

Vigor: It is defined by the eagerness and the extent of enthusiasm seen in the employees at the workplaces.

Dedication: It refers to the employees being engrossed and persevering till they achieve their targets, without being perturbed by the external disturbances.

Absorption: It includes complete immersion and involvement in one's work is the definition of absorption.

2.2 Formulation of Hypotheses

The following hypotheses are being formulated:

H1 proposes the influence of emotional intelligence on vigor dimension of employee engagement.

H1a. Attention to feelings leads to increased vigor in employees.

H1b. Clarity of feelings is leads to increased vigor in employees.

H1c. Mood Repair leads to increased vigor in employees.

H2 proposes the influence of emotional intelligence on dedication dimension of employee engagement.

H2a. Attention positively impacts dedication of employees.

H2b. Clarity of feelings positively impacts dedication of employees.

H2c. Mood Repair positively impacts dedication of employees.

H3 proposes the influence of emotional intelligence on absorption dimension of employee engagement.

H3a. Attention leads to increased absorption in employees.

H3b. Clarity of feelings leads to increased absorption in employees.

H3c. Mood Repair leads to increased absorption in employees.

2.3 Sampling Design

The population of this study comprised of young working professionals in the managerial cadre working in Indian organizations. The sample size was 182 respondents of which 34% of were female and 66% were male respondents. The respondent's average age was around 25-30 years. They have 5-10 years average organizational tenure.

3. Instruments and Methods

Validated and popular instruments were used to measure both the constructs of Emotional Intelligence and Employee Engagement. Meta-Mood Scale (MMS) developed by Salovey, Mayer et al. (1995) comprising of 40 items on a five-point Likert scale comprising of three dimensions of Attention to feelings, Clarity of feelings and Mood Repair was used to measure Emotional intelligence.

The internal consistency of these three scales was evaluated by computing Cronbach's coefficient alpha for each sub scale (Attention: $\alpha = 0.86$; Clarity: $\alpha = 0.87$; Repair: $\alpha = 0.82$). Overall scale tested high reliability of 0.85. For measuring Employee Engagement, scale developed by Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez-Roma and Bakker (2002) comprising of 14 items on a five-point Likert scale comprising of three dimensions of Vigor, Dedication and Absorption was used. The scale reported internal consistency for each sub scale (Vigor $\alpha = 0.83$, Dedication $\alpha = 0.88$ and Absorption $\alpha = 0.86$). All the scales demonstrated good internal reliability, with each of the alpha coefficients above the minimum desirable value of 0.70 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). Overall scales tested high reliability of 0.86. Correlation and Regression analysis were used to analyse the data and test the hypotheses.

3.1 Results

Correlations between the variables of the study are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Inter correlations among the components of EE and EI

Components	Mean	Standard deviation	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Attention	3.115	0.352	-	0.519**	0.461**	0.246**	0.224**	0.287**
2. Repair	3.270	0.408		-	0.415**	0.331**	0.345**	0.31**
3. Clarity	3.178	0.380			-	0.123**	0.2**	0.253**
4. Dedication	3.593	0.703				-	0.697**	0.6**
5. Vigor	3.397	0.768					-	0.577**
6. Absorption	3.488	0.610						-

Note. **Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed), N=182.

As seen in Table 1, all dimensions of emotional intelligence are positively correlated with dimensions of employee engagement. The dimension of Mood Repair is showing relatively stronger correlation with Dedication (0.331), Vigor (0.345) and Absorption (0.31) compared to Attention and Clarity. The correlation results provide preliminary support for Hypotheses.

Table 2. Regression results

Dimensions	Regression Coefficient	Std. error	t - statistic	Sig.	Standard Coefficient
Vigor					
Attention	0.116	0.191	0.607	0.000	0.054
Clarity	0.068	0.168	0.404	0.000	0.033
Repair	0.55	0.161	3.411	0.000	0.291
Intercept					
R² = 0.114, adj.R² = 0.099, **p <0.01					
Dedication					
Attention	0.286	0.175	1.637	0.000	0.145
Clarity	-0.165	0.152	-1.083	0.000	-0.089
Repair	0.459	0.147	3.133	0.000	0.268
Intercept					
R² = 0.111, adj.R² = 0.095, **p <0.01					
Absorption					
Attention	0.250	0.153	1.635	0.000	0.143
Clarity	0.169	0.134	1.257	0.000	0.103
Repair	0.286	0.129	2.218	0.000	0.188
Intercept					
R² = 0.123, adj.R² = 0.108, **p <0.01					

Note. N=182.

4.2 Regression Analysis

The influence of emotional intelligence on employee engagement was done using multiple regressions. Attention, Clarity and Mood Repair dimensions of Emotional Intelligence were taken as independent predictors for Vigor, Dedication and Absorption dimensions of Employee engagement.

The regression results reveal that R-square value is 0.114 and Emotional Intelligence explains 11% variance in vigor of employees. As indicated in Table 2, Attention brings about significant changes in vigor (Standardized $\beta=0.116$ $t=0.607$, $p<0.01$) providing support for *H1a*.

It implies that when people attend to their feelings and are conscious of their emotional state, they act from their heart and are likely to be energetic. Further, Clarity (Standardized $\beta=0.068$, $t=0.404$, $p<0.01$), is significantly related to vigor and provides support for *H1b* but again it is not emerging as a significant predictor. It was hypothesized that individuals who express their feelings clearly should feel positive and energetic and experience vigor. But this could be attributed to clarity of negative feelings and depressions acting as an impediment to vigor. Results of this study revealed that Mood Repair is emerging as a more significant predictor for vigor (Standardized $\beta=0.459$, $t=3.411$, $p<0.01$) compared to Attention and Clarity dimensions and even providing support for *H1c*. When employees are able to overcome negativity and maintain positive emotions, they bounce back from negative moods and hence experience positive energy and enthusiasm characterized as vigor.

For the dimension of dedication, R-square value is 0.111 and Emotional Intelligence explains 11% variance in dedication of employees. The results of the study revealed that Attention is significantly related to Dedication dimension (Standardized $\beta=0.250$, $t=1.63$, $p<0.01$) and provides support for *H2a*. This is possible because when employees give attention to their feelings and consider them imperative for their life and happiness, they are focusing more on their affect and likely to persevere for meeting demands of their job. An interesting revelation was that dimension Clarity is negatively related to Dedication (Standardized $\beta=-0.165$, $t=-1.083$, $p<0.01$) and does not provide support for *H2b*.

This implies that when employees are clear about their positive and negative feelings both, they are less likely to see meaning in their job, be proud of it and persevere for meeting targets. Mood Repair were found to be significantly associated (Standardized $\beta=0.459$, $t=3.133$, $p<0.01$) and provide support for Hypothesis 2c. This implies that when employees are able to repair their negative moods and likely to bounce to positive emotional states they are likely to be dedicated, find meaning and reasons to be proud of their job

Results reveal that for the dimension of absorption, R-square value is 0.123 and Emotional Intelligence explains 12% variance in absorption of employees. With reference to the dimension of Absorption, results revealed that

Attention was found to be significantly related (Standardized $\beta = 0.250$, $t = 1.635$, $p < 0.01$) and provides support for *H3a*. Employees are more absorbed and engrossed in their jobs when they give attention to their feelings. Clarity is significantly related to Absorption (Standardized $\beta = 0.169$, $t = 1.257$, $p < 0.01$) and provide support for *H3b*. When employees are clear about their feelings, they are less likely to be disturbed and depressed and hence more likely to be positively absorbed in their jobs. Mood Repair is significantly related to Absorption (Standardized $\beta = 0.286$, $t = 2.218$, $p < 0.01$) and provide support for *H3c*. Therefore, when employees have optimistic outlook and can repair moods focusing on pleasant experiences and good thoughts even while feeling bad are the ones who are likely to be absorbed and engaged as they experience happiness while working intensely forgetting trappings of time and pressure.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

The study revealed the positive relationship between emotional intelligence and employee engagement. However, the role of emotional intelligence on employee engagement is not as direct as hypothesized on the basis of literature. The study revealed that clarity of feelings is negatively related to dedication dimension of employee engagement. In general, however the study establishes role of emotionally intelligent individuals as capable of showing more vigor, dedication and absorption. These findings are in line with earlier studies where emotional intelligence positively impacted job satisfaction organizational commitment and job attitudes (Carmeli, 2003, Petrides & Furham, 2006; Li, Ahlstrom & Ashkanasy, 2010; Brunetto, Teo, Shacklock, & Wharton, 2012; Shooshtarian, Ameli, Aminilari, 2013; Seyal & Afzaal, 2013). The results echo that frequently experienced chaotic emotions have been seen as reducing an individual's well-being and generating job burnout (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001).

Impetus to experience positive emotions in greater frequency and negative emotions in less frequency (Larsen, Diener, & Emmons, 1986; Diener, Sandvik, & Pavot, 1991; Schimmack & Diener, 1997) as well as a personal experience of joy, contentment, or positive well-being combined with a sense that one's life is worthwhile (Lyubomirsky, 2001; Lyubomirsky, Tkach, & DiMatteo, 2006) lead to positive job attitudes in previous studies. Emotionally intelligent individuals have been projected assuccessful in communicating their ideas, in interesting and forceful ways (Goleman, 1998; Zeidner et al., 2004), which benefit them and the organization.

The study reveals Mood Repair dimension of emotional intelligence as the most significant predictor of employee engagement. In previous researches, emotionally intelligent individuals have been viewed as those who avoid dysfunctional emotions and use them in adaptive ways to combat feelings of frustration. They display involvement and perseverance in their job as they are emotionally competent (Carmelli, 2000). Mood repair is hierarchically the most difficult and important among the three components of meta-mood experience, followed by emotional clarity and emotional attention. This finding resonates with the premise that emotionally intelligent individuals focus on the resolution of issues faced at work rather than merely reasoning and complaining about the same. They do not criticize the organization for every feeling of frustration (Abraham, 1999), as they are capable of thriving in positive affective states (Carmelli, 2000). Managing distressing moods will enable employees to control impulses, remain hopeful during setbacks, enhance empathy and even develop desirable social skills in organizational settings (Mishra & Mohapatra, 2009). Wittmer and Martin (2010) opined that emotional exhaustion is a component of burnout where lack of energy is accompanied by feelings of frustration and anxiety. Emotionally exhausted people feel that all their energy is lost and lack vitality (Schaufeli & Enzmann, 1998). This will surely trigger positive vigor, dedication and absorption in employees.

6. Recommendations/Managerial Implications

A contribution of this study has been to throw light on the extent of impact of emotional intelligence on employee engagement. Emotional intelligence should find a place in selection criteria while hiring employees in organizations. It should also be given attention in defining appraisal criteria and considering employees for promotion especially for leadership roles. For enhancing employee engagement organizations can also focus on learning and development interventions to enhance emotional intelligence. Even institutionalizing channels and mechanisms that counter negative emotions can prove beneficial. More specifically, engagement initiatives and programmes can be designed to facilitate mood repair of employees. Emotional intelligence can thrive by promoting and sustaining a healthy work culture and facilitating high levels of employee engagement. Even counseling can help to counter negative emotions and channelize positive emotions that will trigger vigor, dedication and absorption of employees.

7. Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Future studies may capture sectoral differences. Even searching and ascertaining the role of mediating and moderating variables in this relationship can be explored in future research endeavors. The same research

question can be tested through multiple sources like employees and their supervisors.

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