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ROLE OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE IN EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT OF IT PROFESSIONALS

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ABSTRACT

The study intends to observe the role of emotional intelligence on employee engagement. It was assumed that IT professionals with high emotional intelligence would have higher employee engagement level as compared to IT professionals with low emotional intelligence. For the purpose an emotional intelligence scale and employee engagement scale were administered on 4000 professionals employed in the Indian IT sector. Out of these, on the basis of Q₁ and Q₃ statistics on the obtained EI scores, 160 subjects with high emotional intelligence and 160 subjects with low emotional intelligence were selected randomly. Average employee engagement score of IT professionals with high emotional intelligence was found to be higher than that of IT professionals with low emotional intelligence. The higher employee engagement of high EI group may be attributed to emotional intelligence competencies.

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INTRODUCTION

Gallup organization can be credited for coining the term 'employee engagement' somewhere in the 1990s by Buckingham & Coffman (1999). The academic approach to engagement can be traced to Kahn (1990) who coined the term and developed the concept to a large extent. According to him engagement means, "to be psychologically as well as physically present when occupying and performing an organisational role." Employees are the key differentiator in today's business environment and for any company engaged employees are the ultimate goal as they provide the real competitive edge to any organization (Carnegie, 2012). Furthermore, in order to engage external customers, companies first need to engage their internal customers (Bahreini, 2015). Employee engagement is extremely vital for the information technology sector which faces the constant challenge of employee turnover and struggles to keep employees motivated, productive and happy in a challenging work environment (Carnegie, 2012). Furthermore, if organizations can identify and enhance certain intrinsic factors such as emotional intelligence of an employee, they can improve the overall engagement level of employees. Emotional Quotient (EQ) has been popularized as a learned skill that is a better predictor of

life success than intellectual attainment or technical ability (Goleman, 1995). According to Mayer and Salovey (1997), "Emotional intelligence involves the ability to perceive accurately, appraise, and express emotion; the ability to access and generate feelings when they facilitate thought; the ability to understand emotion and emotional knowledge; and the ability to regulate emotions to promote emotional and intellectual growth." Bar-On (1997, 2013) describes emotional-social intelligence as, "an array of interrelated emotional and social competencies, skills and behaviours that determine how well we understand and express ourselves, understand others and relate with them, and cope with daily demands, challenges and pressures." Bar-On's model is composed of five realms – intrapersonal realm, interpersonal realm, adaptability realm, stress management realm, and mood management realm. These realms can be further sub-divided into fifteen components. The fifteen components are: (i) Emotional Self-Awareness, (ii) Assertiveness, (iii) Self-Regard, (iv) Self-Actualization, (v) Independence, (vi) Empathy, (vii) Interpersonal Relationship, (viii) Social Responsibility, (ix) Reality Testing, (x) Problem Solving, (xi) Flexibility, (xii) Stress Tolerance, (xiii) Impulse Control, (xiv) Happiness, and (xv) Optimism. The importance of emotional intelligence for IT professionals has been proven in various researches (Gulati and Bhal, 2004; Singh, 2007; Chirayath and George, 2008; Dasgupta, 2010; Marcos *et al.*, 2012; Sankar and Rau, 2013; Verma, 2013; and Bhaskaran and Jubi, 2014). Several studies have also been carried out to understand the

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significant role emotional intelligence plays in employee engagement as well as in other workplace factors (Xanthopoulou *et al.*, 2007; Hoffman and Simon, 2008; Sinberg, 2010; Ravichandran *et al.*, 2011; Vajda, 2011; Brunetto *et al.*, 2012; Fariselli *et al.*, 2013; Khuong and Yen, 2014; Akhtar *et al.* 2015; and Sarangi and Vats, 2015).

Problem and Hypothesis

In the present research, the authors intended to study the role of emotional intelligence in regard to employee engagement of IT professionals. It was hypothesized that employee engagement of IT professionals with high emotional intelligence would be higher than those with low emotional intelligence.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Sample: The present study was carried out with 320 IT professionals. Out of these 160 had high emotional intelligence and 160 IT professionals had low emotional intelligence. These were randomly selected from an incidental larger population of IT professionals

Tools: Following psychological tests were used for assessing two different dimensions under consideration in the proposed research:

Measurement of Emotional Intelligence

English version of the Emotional Intelligence Scale (EIS) (Ajawani *et al.*, 2002) was used to assess the emotional intelligence level of IT professionals.

Measurement of Employee Engagement

Employee Engagement Scale (EES) constructed and standardized by Ajawani and Goyal (2015) was used to measure the employee engagement level of the IT professionals.

various multinational IT companies in India. Care was taken to maintain the male-female ratio as 1:1. Emotional intelligence scale and employee engagement scale were forwarded to these IT professionals through email. Thereafter, on the basis of Q₁ and Q₃ statistics on the obtained scores of emotional intelligence scale, all the IT professionals scoring below Q₁ were classified as of low emotional intelligence and those scoring above Q₃ were classified as of high emotional intelligence. Finally, 320 IT professionals (160 with high emotional intelligence and 160 with low emotional intelligence) were selected randomly for further analysis.

RESULTS

Average employee engagement scores of IT professionals with low emotional intelligence and IT professionals with high emotional intelligence are given in Table 1. It is clear from Table 1 that the average employee engagement score of IT professionals with high emotional intelligence (M=121.369, Figure 1) was higher than that of IT professionals with low emotional intelligence (M=73.719, Figure 1). The obtained t-ratio for the difference (21.740) was significant at .01 level of significance for 318 degrees of freedom and provided empirical ground to conclude that IT professionals with high emotional intelligence had higher employee engagement level than IT professionals with low emotional intelligence. These results permitted to conclude that excellence of IT professionals with high emotional intelligence in regard to their employee engagement level over IT professionals with low emotional intelligence was true. In other words, it can be said that IT professionals with high emotional intelligence truly showed higher level of employee engagement than IT professionals with low emotional intelligence.

DISCUSSION

Since emotions have an impact on employees and their engagement level, emotional intelligence might be one of the major driving forces in employees’ engagement level.

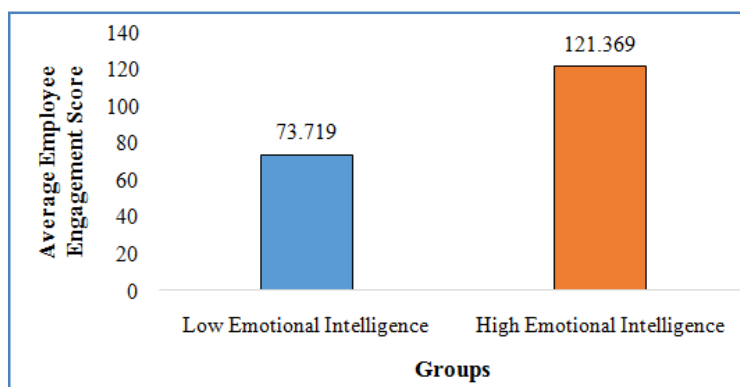


Figure 1. Average Employee Engagement Scores of IT Professionals with Low Emotional Intelligence and High Emotional Intelligence (as per Table 1)

Table 1. Statistical Details for Employee Engagement Scores

Comparison Group	n	M	Σx ²	t value	Probability
Low Emotional Intelligence	160	73.719	74804.344	21.740	p<.01
High Emotional Intelligence	160	121.369	47415.244		

Procedure

Initially, 4000 IT professionals having a service tenure in the present organization of less than 5 years were selected from

It can be concluded that emotionally intelligent employees are more aware of and manage their emotions better than those who are not emotionally intelligent and as a result have higher employee engagement level. In conclusion, the higher

employee engagement of IT professionals with high emotional intelligence (high EI group) may be attributed to emotional self-awareness, assertiveness, self-regard, self-actualization, independence, empathy, interpersonal relationship, social responsibility, problem solving, reality testing, flexibility, stress tolerance, impulse control, happiness and optimism dimensions of emotional intelligence.

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