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# The Impact Of Emotional Intelligence On Employee Engagement

The current business environment is consumed by technological advancements and a growing trend towards globalization. In order to succeed, organizations are forced to create a competitive advantage, while effectively managing resources to enable them to achieve strategic objectives and stay ahead of competitors. Employee Engagement (EE), an area that has been studied extensively in recent years shows that highly engaged employees lead to organizational success (Woordruffe, 2006). This is due to positive relationships seen between EE and organizational performance factors such as profitability, productivity and customer satisfaction (Rasheed et al. 2003). Considering this, one factor that surfaced as being a good predictor of EE is Emotional Intelligence (EI) (Ravichandran et al., 2011, Schutte, 2014). Research by Luthans, Avolio, Avey & Norman, (2007) showed that behaviours and attitudes in organizations are dependent on emotional intelligence, with individuals that display higher emotional intelligence possessing greater control of their emotions and relationships (Siegling et al., 2014). Therefore, EI has an impact not only on emotional factors but also the physical and professional outcomes of employees (Luthans, Luthans & Avey, 2014).

While both these concepts have been widely researched individually, there is a gap in assessing the relationship between these two constructs. This study aims to fill this gap and contribute as to the extent of the relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Employee Engagement

Prior to analyzing the relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Employee Engagement, it is imperative that these constructs be defined to enhance understanding of their implications further.

## Emotional Intelligence

Emotional Intelligence is a prevailing concept in the management of human resources due to its ability to aid organizations in identifying and determining the value of individuals. (Wessels, 2014, pp. 72-74). Emotional Intelligence is a concept that has stemmed from human emotion, a facet that has widely been studied in social research. Emotions often guide our responses and actions instinctively and the outcomes of these influences; positive or negative, heighten the importance of emotional intelligence.

There have been varying opinions and descriptions for the term, but a widely accepted definition is the ability to handle one's own and other individual's emotions and feelings; to differentiate between these feelings and accurately describe them and to use this information to direct reasoning and decision making. (Cherniss, 2000; Kannannatt, 2008; Shooshtarian, Ameli, & Aminilari, 2013). Goleman (2005) a prominent researcher in the field of EI clarifies that social skills, compassion and motivation are key factors that contribute to EI. Furthermore Goleman (2005) believes individuals who are high in emotional intelligence are able to persuade others by controlling and being aware of themselves.

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## Employee Engagement

Employee Engagement is a construct that has continued to gain interest not only in the research world but also by organizations to combat the market competitiveness that exists (Albrecht, 2010). The construct has faced challenges in being recognized as an individual relationship due to related variables such as organization commitment, individual commitment, personal and organizational involvement. (Alvi et al., 2014). However research now shows that employee engagement has sufficient evidence to be considered a standalone state (Albrecht, 2010; Markos & Sridevi, 2010; Truss et al., 2014). While EE has received a lot of research into the construct, there is also a significant amount of confusion around it as well. A lack of a universal definition is one main reason for this.

According to Kahn (1990), Employee engagement is defined as the extent that employees feel committed towards their roles in an organization according to physical, emotional and cognitive dimensions. The physical component refers to the energy physically exerted to carry out their roles. The emotional component refers to the feelings and attitudes towards individual tasks, work environments and the organization. Lastly the cognitive component refers to the beliefs an employee has towards employers and the organization. Baumruk 2004, Richman 2006 and Shaw (2005) define employee engagement as an intellectual and emotional commitment to the organization while other researchers such as Truss et al (2006) believe that employee engagement is a “passion for work”. While there are several differing definitions, there is a common theme seen across all of them, seeing a psychological and emotional component in each of these definitions. The employer-employee relationship plays a significant role in the performance of an organization, on both individual levels as well as a whole (Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes, 2002). Moreover, an employee’s engagement levels are affected by their views and feelings about their jobs which can in turn determine their passion and enthusiasm towards work. (Alvi et al., 2014).

## Theoretical Rationale

It was found that in the few studies that have assessed the relationship between emotional intelligence and employee engagement, that opinions differ in the effectiveness of EI on EE (Mayer et al., 2000; Shamsuddin & Ujang, 2008). To address this and further explain the constructs addressed above, theoretical frameworks supporting Emotional Intelligence and Employee Engagement will be addressed.

Over the years, three major emotional intelligences theories were brought forth, differing in the explanation of how EI is defined, the instruments used to measure the concept, the factors that constitute EI and how EI behaves interpersonally and intrapersonally (Codier, E., Kooker, B., & Shoultz, J., 2008).

The Ability Model, was developed by Peter Salovey, David Caruso, and John Mayer in 1998. The theory views emotion as an information source that aids leaders in improving social capabilities in the workplace. Furthermore, it also notes that there are individual differences in how emotion is evaluated and applied to a social setting. A 141 question scale was developed by Mayer et al (2004), A Multifactor Emotional Intelligence Scale (MEIS) to understand how individuals vary in their ability to assess emotion and appropriately navigate through social environments. Recent research into reliability places The MEIS as one of more trustworthy

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measurements for measuring emotional intelligence (Olatoye, Akintunde, & Yakasai, 2010; Webb, 2009).

The second theory, referred to as the trait model developed by Reuven Bar-On (1999) emphasizes on the ability of an individual to process emotional information and apply it to a social environment. It was developed in a clinical environment and measured personality attributes that allow emotional adjustments (Cherniss, 2000).

The final theory, looks at one of the most prominent researchers in the field of emotional intelligence. Daniel Goleman's theory focused on skills and qualities, combining inherent traits and emotional intelligence abilities that improved leadership performance (Codier, E., Kooker, B., & Shultz, J., 2008). Using an organizational setting, allowed Goleman to understand and measure the effectiveness of this model, which resulted in clustering this model into two main categories, personal and social competencies. These categories were further narrowed down into four dimensions; self-awareness, self-management, social-awareness and relationship management (Goleman, 2012).

- **Self Awareness:** This dimension of EI refers to the ability of an individual to identify one's feelings, emotions, strengths and the influence it has on other members of the organization (Lopez-Zafra, Garcia-Retamero, & Martos, 2012).
- **Self-Management:** This dimension of EI focuses on the ability of managing one's emotions and actions and the ability to remain positive and headstrong in situations. This is particularly important for leaders to help motivate their employees. (Palmer, Walls, Burgess, & Stough, 2001)
- **Social- Awareness:** This dimension of EI moves away from a self-focus and examines how individuals identify, understands and attends to the needs of other organization members (Gleeson, 2014). This too is an important concept for any employee in a leadership position as well as for employers to keep in mind. An ability to be socially-aware of the needs and wants of employees and being able to address them will motivate staff and create a more engaging employee.
- **Relationship- Management:** This dimension of EI is highly important in the current global setting as it refers to the ability of individuals to influence and motivate others (Jayakody & Gamage, 2015). This tests interpersonal competencies, communication and the ability to build trust and relationships with other members. Being highly competent in relationship management is important in decision making, motivation and conflict resolution in an organization

From the beginning, the concept of employee engagement in the workplace has been scrutinized as being "old wine in a new bottle" (Wefald, 2010). However, management scholars continue to research and prove its independent standpoint. Employee Engagement, the second construct identifies the influence of physical, emotional and cognitive dimensions in the workplace (Truss, Delbridge, Alfes, Shantz, & Soane, 2014). This stemmed from research by Kahn (1992) that believed there was a psychological presence in the concept opposed to other factors such as job involved and organizational commitment. According to his model, there are variations in individual engagement depending on psychological safety, importance and availability at a job.

Another model was the work engagement model, developed by Maslach and Leiter's in 1997. The model focused initially more on a negative outlook of the relationship people had with work.

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(Maslach, Schaufeli & Leiter, 2001). However this was further expanded into a positive impact namely job engagement, that look at the dimensions of burnout; “exhaustion, cynicism, and lack or personal efficacy” against engagement “energy, involvement and efficacy”. Their results validated past research, confirming that employee engagement had conceptual differences such as job satisfaction, involvement and commitment.

## **The Relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Employee Engagement**

In the current global context with technological advancements and a rise in competition, professional careers have become more complex and employees are forced to adapt and engage in multiple roles. With higher pressure, individuals are forced to be more psychologically aware and the need for emotional intelligence is necessary. Not only does it impact individuals, but it promotes positive emotions in a group setting. This leads to greater teamwork, cooperation and better organization performance. (Farh, Seo & Tesluk, 2012; House & Aditya, 1997). Furthermore, emotional intelligence is seen to improve decision making and problem-solving in the workplace (Shamsuddin & Ujang, 2008). An awareness of both individual and other emotions allows employees to work more effectively and improves their efficiencies. Past research has shown that psychology plays a large role in employee engagement and the relationship between employer and employee is important in determining how committed employees are to completing their work and achieving organizational goals (Markos & Sridevi, 2010). The Evidence, a report by Dodge, & D’Analeze (2012) highlights that the 25% of companies that were high in employee engagement had double the annual income compared to companies that didn’t rank high in Employee Engagement. Furthermore, they also noted that organizations with high engagement results had a greater productivity rate of 18% than lower rated companies. Gupta’s (2008) results showed that emotionally and intellectually engaged individuals were committed to their companies, valuing their goals and those of the organization

## **Relevance of Literature Findings to Proposed Topic**

The analysis of this paper is relevant to the topic due to not only understanding the concept of Emotional Intelligence and Employee Engagement further but also emphasizing the importance of EI in predicting the usefulness of employee engagement to an organization. The review of multiple dimensions of both constructs help examine how individuals can build and maintain relationships, are more aware of their own behaviours as well as give them insight on how to control these emotions. It also gives insight to employers on how this can be used to improve conditions for employees and can be a strategic advantage to build a workforce of passionate and engaged employees resulting in competitive advantages and better overall performance for an organization.

## **Gaps in Research and their Connection**

Upon review of the available literature from different articles, there are a few gaps in literature identified. Even though there has been significant research into the concept of Employee Engagement, there isn’t a universally accepted definition for the construct. Furthermore, authors still question the need to have a unique, individual construct for Employee Engagement. Considering the emotional and psychological component to both variables, it would be expected

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that more research would be conducted examining their relationship. Moreover, in the studies that have been carried out, there are quite a lot of variations in results. Numerous research has identified these two individual constructs as being imperative for an organization to adopt but there is still a gap in the practical adoption of these constructs in the workplace.