Emotional Intelligence in the Workplace: Exploring its Effects on Journalists' Perceived Work Stress, Job Satisfaction, and Organizational Commitment

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the effect of emotional intelligence on employees' perceptions of work stress, and the subsequent effect on their job satisfaction and organizational commitment. With a sample of 179 journalists, it is found that employees with higher emotional intelligence perceive less stress at work. Employees' perception of stress is negatively related to their job satisfaction and organizational commitment. In addition, employees with higher emotional intelligence are prone to be more satisfied with their jobs and more committed to their organization. The findings suggest that the provision of relevant training programs and selection of employees with higher EI are conducive to reducing the level of perceived stress, and thus enhancing greater job satisfaction and affective commitment on employees.

Keywords: emotional intelligence, work stress, job satisfaction, organizational commitment

I. INTRODUCTION

Emotions, as an inseparable part of everyday life, affect individuals and organizations in a profound fashion. Employees carry emotions with them working every day. The way they perceive, express and manage their emotions (i.e., their emotional intelligence) is regarded as a strong predictor of a successful life, of psychological health, and of job performance (Bar-On, 2001; Law *et al*., 2004; Goleman, 1995, 1998). EI incorporates a set of related psychological processes (e.g., emotional assessment, expression, and regulation), in handling the affective information (Mayer and Geher, 1996; Mayer and Salovey, 1997; Salovey and Mayer, 1990, 1994). Joseph and Newman (2010) contend that the emotion regulation process enables employees to induce and sustain a positive affective

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state, which subsequently promotes extra-role behavior, job motivation, and ultimately job performance. Based on broaden-and-build theory, positive emotions are conducive to broadening employees' behavioral repertoires, improving their behavioral flexibility (Fredrickson, 2001), and further developing the link between positive affective states and work outcomes (Weisinger, 1998; Rode *et al.*, 2007; Tsai *et al.*, 2007; Joseph and Newman, 2010). In addition, the ability to regulate emotions and self-motivate is crucial to improving individual stress resilience. Recent research confirms that positive emotions are important facilitators in helping individuals to recover from stressful life events (Fredrickson, 2001; Fredrickson *et al.*, 2003; Zautra *et al.*, 2005; Ong *et al.*, 2006). Slaski and Cartwright (2002) maintain that individuals with higher EI tend to perceive less stress and perform better than those with lower EI.

Emotions, however, can be disruptive as they interrupt employees' attention and impede organizational effectiveness. Along with the ever-changing organizational dynamics, employees face a tremendous amount of pressure to keep up with emerging, unexpected events. Organizational spontaneity might inflict a great deal of stress on them. The way individuals appraise and perceive their relationships with the environment can lead to a difference in their perceived levels of stress or negative emotions (Lazarus 1976; Slaski and Cartwright, 2002, 2003).

Journalism is a profession highly involved with emotion-stricken events, pressing deadlines (Furnham, 1997; Mann and Holdsworth, 2003), frantic competitions for exclusive news, and professional ethical issues (Lin and Tsang, 2000). The emergence of the Internet, especially Web 2.0, has made a dramatic change in the role and status of journalism. In addition, dangers associated with the spot coverage of emergencies and violence inflicts a tremendous amount of stress upon journalists. For instance, a cumulative effect between the media coverage of terrorism and posttraumatic stress (PTS) is confirmed by Houston (2009). Endres (1988) indicates 50% of reporters intend to quit and 41% suffer from depression resulting from stress at work. Furthermore, Cook and Banks (1993) maintain that reporters will choose to leave the journalism field when perceiving intense job burnout. In spite of these studies, there is still a lack of research investigating the effect of EI for employees in high-strain jobs on their perception of stress, work attitudes, and behavior. In particular, Bearn (2006) also argues that the general

views found in the trade publications and journalism reviews do not seem entirely consistent with more systematically collected data about journalists' work attitudes. Hence, with a sample of journalists in the competitive media industry, this study aims to examine the effect of EI in the high-strain context on employees' perception of work stress, and the subsequent effect on their job satisfaction as well as organizational commitment.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES

2.1 Emotional Intelligence - Work Stress

Conceptualized as an ability to perceive, understand, and regulate the emotions from others, EI is regarded as a significant factor in predicting interpersonal interactions in the work context (Mayer and Salovey, 1997; Mayer *et al.*, 2000). In the four-branch ability model, Mayer *et al*. (2004) categorize the abilities and skills of EI into four dimensions: the ability to (a) perceive emotion (branch 1), (b) use emotion to facilitate thought (branch 2), (c) understand emotions, (branch 3), and (d) manage emotion (branch 4). Instead of being an innate ability, EI is to be learned and enhanced through training (Selye, 1956; Pellitteri, 2002; Wong *et al*., 2004). An individual with a high EI level is proficient at regulating personal emotions to respond appropriately towards emotional situations (Wong and Law, 2002). It is found that employees with higher EI tend to perceive a lower level of pressure, maintain better psychological health to devote them to work, and thus outperform those with lower EI (Slaski and Cartwright, 2002).

EI can help people accurately recognize their own emotions and keep them in control (McBride and Maitland, 2002). According to Parkinson and Totterdell (1999), individuals will adopt different strategies to maintain their emotions in response to the affect information received through cognitive monitoring. Positive emotions are argued to have profound effects on individuals (Lyubomirsky *et al*., 2005; Ong *et al*., 2006). Fredrickson and Branigan (2005) indicate that positive emotions will promote individuals' flexibility in thinking and problem solving. The experience of positive emotions may contribute to their belief of stress resistance

when they are surrounded by challenges and adversity. In addition to the effect of offsetting the immediate adverse consequences of stress, positive emotions also play an important role in recovery processes (Ong *et al.*, 2006). Drawing on these prior arguments, this study proposes this first hypothesis:

H1: Emotional intelligence is negatively related to employees' work stress.

2.2 Work stress – Work Attitude

The imbalance between self and the work environment leads to threatening perceptions and induces work stress on the part of employees (Caplan *et al.*, 1975; Cox, 1993). Work stress can be incurred by overload, competitiveness, self-worth demands, and difficulties in decision-making, impossible duties, and responsibilities (Pines and Aronson, 1981; Etzion, 1984). High work stress is more prevalent in high-strain jobs and causes adverse psychological effects (depression, job dissatisfaction), physiological effects (headaches, heart disease), and behavioral effects (absenteeism, drug consumption) on employees (Karasek and Theorell, 1990; Lu, 1999; Kahn and Byosiere, 1992). The stressors in the work environment (e.g., organizational characteristics, the role in an organization, interpersonal relationships, and career development), lead to work stress and negatively affect employees' job satisfaction and organizational commitment, which subsequently affect their performances and intentions to leave (Parker and DeCotiis, 1983; Rowden, 2002; Morries and Sherman, 1981; Ferris and Aranya, 1983; Cranny *et al.*, 1992; Chiva and Alegre, 2008). Matteson and Ivancevich (1987) confirm that work stress accounts for a 50% variance of absenteeism, as well as 40% of turnover and 5% in total lost productivity. In addition, work stress is confirmed to be negatively related to job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Hrebiniak and Alutto, 1972; Parker and DeCotiis, 1983; Litt and Turk, 1985; Jamal, 1984, 1990; Spector *et al.*, 1988; Sigler and Wilson, 1988; Saleh and Desai, 1990; Lu, 1999; Peeters and Rutte, 2005). Drawing on these findings, this study proposes the second and third hypotheses:

H2: Work stress is negatively related to employees' job satisfaction.

H3: Work stress is negatively related to employees' organizational commitment.

2.3 Emotional Intelligence – Work Attitude

Karasek (1979) argues that pressures resulting from work overload will lead to employees' emotional exhaustion, which further affects their job satisfaction (Best *et al*., 2005). That is, emotional exhaustion is effective in predicting employees' work attitudes and behaviors, such as the intention to leave, absenteeism, and resignation (Babakus *et al*., 1999; Cropanzano *et al*., 2003). In addition, the percentage of positive emotions that employees experience at work is an effective indicator of employees' job satisfaction and intention to quit (Fisher, 2001).

As a result, EI has become an intriguing topic for scholars and professionals in organizations because of its significance in leading people to a better psychological status and everyday life (Bar-On, 2001; Goleman, 1995, 1998; Higgs and Dulewicz, 1999). In fact, high-EI individuals can better perceive emotions, use them in thought, understand their meanings, and manage emotions than those with lower EI (Mayer *et al*., 2004). Slaski and Cartwright (2002) also maintain that individuals with higher EI tend to perceive less stress, be more physiologically and psychologically healthy, and outperform others. The direct link between employees' EI and their workplace well-being is verified by scholars (Weisinger, 1998; Donaldson-Feilder and Bond, 2004).

Journalism's characteristics of swiftness and instantaneousness demand that journalists stay emotionally positive in order to take on tasks and achieve goals. However, there is a scarcity of research on the relationship between EI and job satisfaction (Chiva and Alegre, 2008). To fill the void in EI research and verify its effect on work attitudes in the high strain context, this study proposes the fourth and fifth hypotheses:

H4: Emotional intelligence is positively related to employees' job satisfaction.

H5: Emotional intelligence is positively related to employees' organizational commitment.

III. METHODS

3.1 Participants and Procedures

Participants consisted of 420 journalists from the electronic and print media in Taiwan. Stamped self-addressed envelopes were directly mailed to journalists. A cover letter attached to each questionnaire described the objectives of the survey in general terms and assured respondents of confidentiality as well as the voluntary nature of participation in the survey. Respondents were instructed to seal completed questionnaires in the self-addressed envelopes and send them directly to the researchers. Of these, we discarded returned questionnaires with excessive missing data. After the deletion of invalid responses, 179 valid copies were obtained, yielding a response rate of 42.6%. Participants were primarily male (62%) and single (64%), possessing bachelor's degrees (77%), and 45% were in the 30 to 39 year-old age bracket. Nearly 70% of the participants had less than 5 years of work experience.

3.2 Measures

After following Brislin's (1986) recommendations with regard to ensuring the accuracy and conceptual equivalence of both the Chinese and English versions, all question items in this study were translated and back-translated by both native bilinguals.

Emotional intelligence. The 16-item scale ($\alpha = 0.87$) was developed by Wong and Law (2002) to assess an individual's EI. It contains four EI dimensions, including self-emotion appraisal, others' emotion appraisal, regulations of emotion, and use of emotion. A 5-point rating scale was used to evaluate employees' EI. A higher score indicates a greater level of a participant's EI.

Work stress. The 15-item scale ($\alpha = 0.84$), the "Job Stress Questionnaire" (JSQ) developed by Caplan *et al*. (1975) was adopted to measure the construct of work stress, including the four dimensions of workload, role conflict, role ambiguity, and underutilization of abilities. A 5-point rating scale was used to evaluate employees' perceptions of work stress. A higher score indicates a greater level of work stress perceived by the participant.

Job satisfaction. The 20-item scale (α = 0.89) of the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (MSQ) developed by Weiss *et al*. (1967) was adopted to measure employee job satisfaction. A 5-point rating scale was used to evaluate the level of job satisfaction. A higher score indicates a greater level of a participant's job satisfaction.

Organizational commitment. The 15-item scale (α = 0.90) of the organizational commitment questionnaire (OCQ) developed by Mowday *et al*. (1979) was adopted to measure employee organizational commitment. A 5-point rating scale was used to evaluate the level of organizational commitment. A higher score indicates a greater level of a participant's organizational commitment.

3.3 Data Analysis

We used the two-step procedure involving exploratory factor analysis (EFA), confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and structural equation modeling. Given the small sample size relative to the measurement items, item parcels rather than individual items are used as manifest indicators of the latent constructs in order to maintain an adequate sample-size-to-parameter ratio (Aryee and Chen, 2006). Following Hall *et al*. (1999) recommendation and based on the EFA results, items with higher loadings on the same factor are combined into a parcel.

Data with listwise deletion of missing values used for the LISREL analysis results in a final sample size of 179. Overall measurement of the model fit is assessed with four indices: the χ^2/df value (Schumacker and Lomax, 1996), the comparative fit index (CFI, Bentler, 1990), the goodness-of-fit index (GFI, Jöreskog and Sörbom, 1988), and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA, Vandenberg and Lance, 2000).

IV. RESULTS

4.1 Correlations and Factor Analysis of Latent Variables

Table 1 presents the correlations of the latent variables and the reliabilities. Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was used to examine the convergent and discriminant validity of the four constructs. The factor loading of the scale item must be equal to or greater than 0.50 (Kaiser, 1974), and the difference between the two greatest loadings across factors for an item must be less than 0.50 (Kerlinger, 1986; Hair *et al*., 1995). In this study, the exploratory factor analysis only keeps items with factor loading greater than 0.5, which indicates a good convergent validity for each construct. In addition, the EFA results support the 4-factor model (factor loading value less than 0.5), indicating the distinctiveness of the four constructs in this study. Pertaining to the measurement model, the CFA results presented a fair fit for the 4-factor model, $\chi^2/df = 2.21$, $p < 0.01$; CFI = 0.93, GFI = 0.81, RMSEA = 0.07.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and correlations analysis

variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4
1. Emotional intelligence	3.21	0.61	[0.87]			
2. Work stress	3.14	0.48	-0.28[*]	[0.84]		
3. Job satisfaction	3.59	0.59	0.40[**]	-0.50[**]	[0.89]	
4. Organizational Commitment	3.31	0.66	0.35[**]	-0.30[**]	0.69[**]	[0.90]

Note: N=179. Figures in parentheses are *α* reliabilities; [*] $p < 0.05$; [**] $p < 0.01$.

4.2 Structural Equation Modeling

Figure 1 presents the path coefficient estimates for the hypothesized model. The results show that EI has a negative effect on employees' perceived work stress ($\beta = -0.20$, $p < 0.1$), supporting Hypothesis 1. The results also indicate that perceived work stress has a negative effect on employees' job satisfaction ($\beta = -0.65$, $p < 0.01$) and organizational commitment ($\beta = -0.26$, $p < 0.05$), providing support for Hypotheses 2 and 3. In addition, the results demonstrate that EI has significantly positive effects on both job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.50$, $p < 0.01$) and organizational commitment ($\beta = 0.49$, $p < 0.01$), thus supporting Hypotheses 4 and 5.
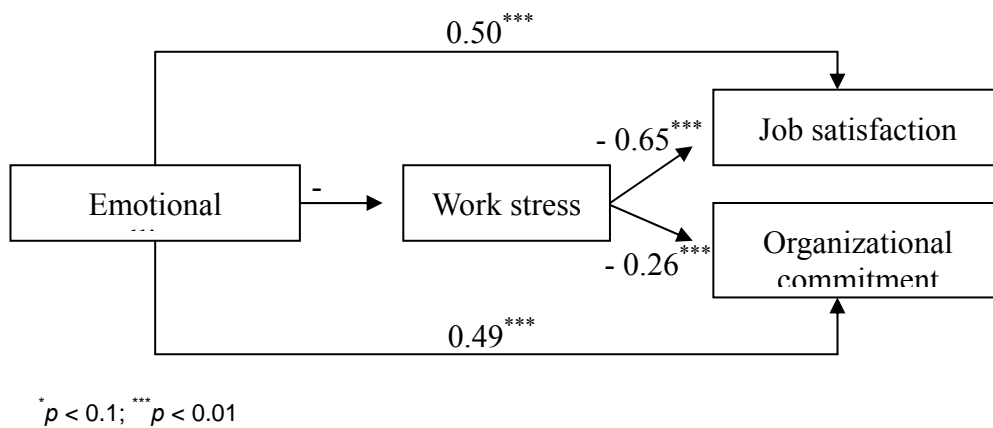
$^{*}p < 0.1;\ ^{***}p < 0.01$

Figure 1. Estimated Path Coefficients of the Hypothesized Model

V. DISCUSSION

In line with Slaski and Cartwright's (2002) findings, this study confirms that EI negatively affects the way employees perceive work stress. Employees with higher EI are apt at regulating personal emotions through the process of monitoring, evaluating, and modifying emotions so that one can respond appropriately towards emotional situations. In other words, they are prone to stay emotionally positive and be more resilient when facing stressful situations. According to Mayer *et al.* (2004), the high EI individual is less inclined to engage in self-destructive behaviors. These findings add to the growing number of studies and suggest that EI is a key component accounting for individual success (Lyubomirsky *et al.*, 2005; Fredrickson and Branigan, 2005; Ong *et al.*, 2006).

It is difficult to gain a thorough understanding of the underlying psychological process of employees' work-related attitudes and behaviors. Work stress relates to a variety of cognitive, affective, behavioral, and physiological outcomes (Kahn and Byosiere, 1992). According to the organizational determinants of job stress model, Parker and DeCotiis (1983) suggest that stressors, such as work itself, work role, organizational characteristics, relationships, career development, and external commitments, will affect the level of perceived work stress, which in turn has a subsequent effect on employees' job satisfaction and organizational commitment.

This study confirms that employees' perception of work stress has a negative effect on their job satisfaction and organizational commitment, which is consistent with the findings from prior research (Hrebiniak and Alutto, 1972; Parker and DeCotiis, 1983; Jamal, 1984, 1990; Litt and Turk, 1985; Spector *et al.*, 1988; Saleh and& Desai, 1990; Lu, 1999; Peeters and Rutte ,2005; Best *et al.*, 2005).

Furthermore, this study indicates that EI has a positive, direct effect on job satisfaction and organizational commitment, in line with prior studies (Fisher, 2001; Babakus et al., 1999; Brown et al., 2003; Matthews et al., 2002; Dries and Pepermans, 2007). Carmeli (2003) maintains that EI helps employees effectively keep the perceived stress in rein and prevents the negative effect of stress on their work-related attitudes. Mayer et al. (2004) also confirm that individuals with higher EI tend to have positive social interactions and better management on emotions for the fact that they are more likely to hold on to organizational goals and complete missions without the interference of personal emotions. As a result, higher EI employees tend to be more satisfied with and committed to the organizations than those with lower EI.

Payne (1985) argues that the importance of EI has been neglected for a long time. Indeed *emotional ignorance* results in many social problems, such as suicide, addiction, disease, religious conflicts, violence, and wars. The over-emphasis rationality in organizations leads to individuals' suppression of their personal emotions, and thus brings about many emotion-related problems in the workplace. It is argued that EI, compared to IQ, accounts for a greater amount of variance of goal achievement and task completion on the part of employees (Dulewicz and Higgs, 1998; Yuvaraj and Srivastava, 2007). As a matter of fact, individuals with high IQ are not assured to acquire the skills to handle emotion-laden situations. For instance, people with high IQ tend to feel exhausted frequently in the face of emotional difficulties or interpersonal conflicts even though they know about the causes of their depression. Greenspan (1989) also contends that traditional education neglects the emotions involved in the interpersonal interaction, such as love, attachment, assertiveness, anger, and competition. In particular, Sears and Holmvall (2010) maintain that the beliefs regarding the use of emotion can be shared via interpersonal interactions at the workplace. Positive interpersonal relationship may improve employees' job satisfaction and reduce the perceived

level of stress (Abraham, 2000). That is, this interpersonal relationship helps employee acquire more experiences related with managing emotions and thus maintain emotionally positive when performing their tasks. According to social learning principles (Bandura, 1997), motivation can be contagious in that individuals are more likely to display higher EI in task performance when perceiving great skills of emotions management on the part of their colleagues. Furthermore, managers should apply managerial practices, such as training, to strengthen employees' psychological resilience and develop a collaborative relationship which induces employees' mutually supportive behaviors. As a result, the negative effects from stress at work will be minimized. Employees who are emotionally balanced are more likely to be internally motivated and further have better job performance in organizations.

5.1 Practical Implications

To conclude this research, some suggestions for managers in practice may be derived from the research findings. The importance of emotion has been long neglected in the past. Managers have to recognize its significance in organizational effectiveness when conducting employee selection. EI or relevant personality tests will be conducive to better understanding potential employees. However, the issue of the potential for motivated distortion needs to be taken into account with the adoption of self-report EI assessments. Job applicants are prone to respond in a socially desirable fashion when applying for a very desirable job (Christiansen *et al.*, 2010). Therefore, both self-report EI and the non-cognitive measures such as performance-based EI (Christiansen *et al.*, 2010) can be taken as concurrent assessment tools in employee selection. In addition, organizations should offer EI-related training programs for current employees to assist them in acquiring relevant knowledge and skills to better understand and manage themselves. Moreover, stress is ubiquitous in our daily lives and contemporary organizations. Every member in an organization is bothered by or suffers from stress to a certain degree. Therefore, stress management programs will be particularly helpful for employees in high-strain contexts to release pressures and conquer stress.

5.2 Limitations and Recommendations

This study has a number of limitations which needs to be highlighted. In the first instance, this study adopts a cross-sectional design, making causal interpretation impossible. These findings therefore should be further confirmed by longitudinal studies. However, the main effect of EI on work stress is confirmed by earlier research, which yields at least certain support in the causal direction of the relationships found in the present study. Second, the constructs of EI, stress, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment are measured with data collected from a single source of a self-reported questionnaire. Although factor analysis confirms the four constructs are distinct from one another, the problem of common method variance still needs to be considered when interpreting the results. Third, the results of the present study are drawn from data collected from the media industry, leading to the fact that the generalization of the findings to other industries might thus be limited. Further research on employees in other industries may be necessary in order to verify these findings. Finally, this study mainly examines the effects of EI and perceived stress on employees' work attitudes. Various organizational and outcome variables (i.e., internal-management system, industry competitive environment, organizational citizenship behavior, and turnover rate), may be incorporated in future research for further verification.

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工作場所中之情緒智力對於員工工作壓力、工作滿意度與組織承諾的影響：以新聞從業人員爲例

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摘要

　　本研究以台灣新聞媒體產業之記者人員爲研究對象，探討個體的情緒智力對其在職場上感受的工作壓力、工作滿意度與組織承諾之影響。研究結果指出情緒智力較高者通常感受到較少的工作壓力，而員工感受的工作壓力則會負向影響其工作滿意度與組織承諾。此外，高情緒智力的員工往往有較高的工作滿意度與組織承諾。本研究建議組織可提供員工相關的訓練課程，以及選用情緒管理能力較佳的員工，如此將有助於減少工作壓力對員工所造成的負面衝擊，進而增進其工作滿意度與對組織的承諾。

關鍵詞彙：情緒智力，工作壓力，工作滿意度，組織承諾

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