

Influence of Emotional Intelligence on Conflict Management Styles of Employees: A Study of the Indian Railways

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ABSTRACT

Most employees experience conflict at workplace with their colleagues as a usual or normal part of their job. Some individuals handle it better, while some of them may need intervention. The area of 'work conflict' has rapidly grown over the last two decades. High conflicts and bad ways of managing them cause extreme job stress and low engagement at work. This study investigates the influence of Emotional Intelligence (EI) on the conflict management style of employees in government sector organizations. The study comprised of a sample 73 employees, both from management and non-management cadre of Indian Railways. The results obtained through quantitative analysis demonstrate a clear and definite relationship between the emotional intelligence of an employee and his/her conflict resolution technique.

Keywords: Conflict Management, Emotional Intelligence, Employee Engagement, Job Stress

INTRODUCTION

Emotional Intelligence (EI) as a concept has gained popularity in management literature and research. It is very important for one to keep abreast of the theory and research on which EI is based (Singh, 2010). The propensity of people to leave their jobs on the basis of their relation with their boss is 4 times between good and bad (Zipkin, 2000). Hence, organizations and academics alike, are taking keen interest in EI and

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its significant relationship with conflict resolution styles within the supervisor-subordinate paradigm (Yu, Sardesai, Lu & Zhao, 2006). The main reason being that if conflict is managed in a positive way then it can have constructive results (Darling and Fogliasso, 1999) with organizational as well as personal benefits (Silverthorne, 2005). Hence, it seems quite plausible that organizations with high productivity and achievement orientation should naturally resort to effective conflict management and resolution orientation as well.

Though the term 'Emotional Intelligence' was coined in the 1990s by Salovey and Mayer, the construct did exist for a quite long time. In fact the first idea of existence of multiple intelligences and social intelligence being independent of academic intelligence was pointed out by Thorndike in the early 1930s (Landy, 2005). It took almost 50 years for a concrete theory to be developed on multiple intelligence by Howard Gardner (1983). On this regard, Brigadier General James Dozier's account of his captivity under an Italian terrorist group is a living embodiment of emotional intelligence and its impact on conflict resolution. This had happened in 1981, long before the term 'emotional intelligence (EI)' was coined.

During the course of his captivity, he had experienced different shades of emotions from his captors. This made him realise that to calm the situation and handle it tactfully, he had to get his own emotions under control. The calmness that ensued eventually helped to create an emotional contagion between him and his captors. His verbal accounts did facilitate in creating an initial construct to identify what EI really is. He closely observed and accurately perceived the emotional responses of his captors. Simultaneously, he also analysed the various undesired possibilities of danger those responses posed for him. Thus, by proper regulation and expression of emotions, he was able to handle the emotions of his captors effectively. Dozier stood convinced that this is the only factor that helped him to save his life (Campbell, 1990).

Given the context, this study attempts to firstly, examine the correlation between emotional intelligence and its influence on the conflict management styles of employees. Secondly, it attempts to establish the fact that difference in gender does not play a role when it comes to emotional intelligence and conflict management styles amongst employees in the government sector.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Emotional Intelligence

There are diverse contentions prevalent about the meaning of Emotional Intelligence. Salovey and Mayer (1990) characterized EI as the capacity to screen one's own particular and others' sentiments and feelings, to segregate among them and to utilize this data to guide one's reasoning and activities. Echoing similar thoughts, Goleman (1995) defined EI as understanding one's own feelings, empathy for the feelings of others and the regulation of emotion in a way that enhances living.

This field of study is developing so quickly that even the definitions are also getting augmented and changed. Both researchers and analysts are in an overhauling mode, reshaping their particular interpretation of the construct. This too is affecting the existing models of EI.

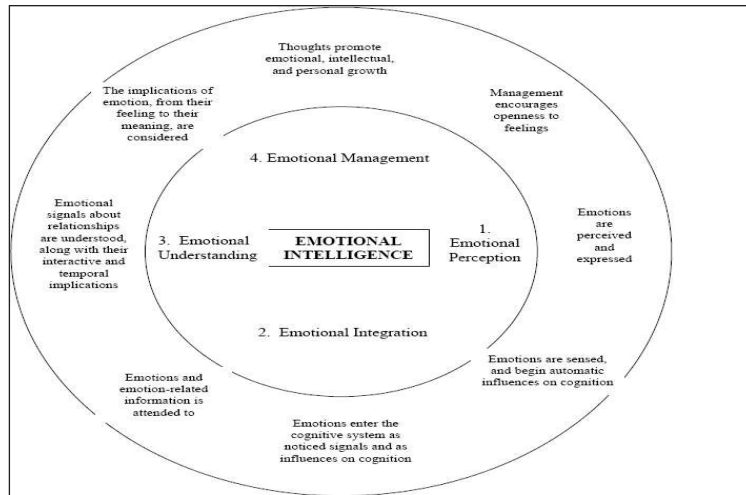
Primarily, three principle models of EI exist:

Ability Model

Salovey and Mayer (1990) defined EI as – “the subset of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one's own and other's feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions” (page 189).

The ability model visualizes feelings as valuable repository of data which helps an individual to explore and understand the social environment better. According to Salovey and Mayer (1997) EI majorly consists of two areas: experiential and strategic. These are then further bifurcated into two branches each which get reflected in the ability model. Emotional perception and integration/assimilation is the experiential part. Whereas, understanding and managing emotions are the strategic part of EI. It also expresses that the ability to process emotional information varies amongst individuals along with their ability to relate the same to a wider cognition.

As per the model, EI constitutes of four types of abilities:



Mayer and Salovey’s (1997) Four-Branch Model of Emotional Intelligence

Source - Yvonne Stys & Shelley L Brown(2004) A Review of the Emotional Intelligence Literature and Implications for Corrections.

MIXED MODEL

Goleman’s (1998) mixed model posits EI as an amalgamation of a myriad of competencies and skills that drives leadership performance. The model enumerates five major constructs pertaining to EI:

Self-awareness	Managing Emotions	Motivating Oneself	Empathy	Social Skill
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •The ability to recognize what you are feeling, to understand your habitual emotional responses to events and to recognize how your emotions affect your behavior and performance. •When you are self-aware, you see yourself as others see you, and have a good sense of your own abilities and current limitations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •The ability to stay focused and think clearly even when experiencing powerful emotions. •Being able to manage your own emotional state is essential for taking responsibility for your actions, and can save you from hasty decisions that you later regret. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •The ability to use your deepest emotions to move and guide you towards your goals. •This ability enables you to take the initiative and to persevere in the face of obstacles and setbacks. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •The ability to sense, understand and respond to what other people are feeling. •Self-awareness is essential to having empathy with others. •If you are not aware of your own emotions, you will not be able to read the emotions of others. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •The ability to manage, influence and inspire emotions in others. •Being able to handle emotions in relationships and being able to influence and inspire others are essential foundation skills for successful teamwork and leadership.

Mixed model of emotional intelligence

Source – Goleman, D. (1998). Working with emotional intelligence, Bantam Books, New York.

Goleman incorporates a set of emotional competencies within each construct of EI. Which, instead of being inherent talents, is rather learned capabilities that if worked on, can be developed to achieve exceptional performance. As per him, an individual’s potential for learning emotional

competencies is determined by his/her general emotional intelligence with which he/she is born.

Trait Model

Petrides, Pita and Kokkinaki (2007) proposed a conceptually viable differentiation between the models of EI basis ability and traits. This trait model recognizes the subjectivity of emotions. This definition also recognizes various facets of EI as personality traits, quite opposed to mental abilities and/or competencies.

Both the mixed and the trait model has been criticised by Salovey, Mayer and Caruso (2008) for lacking theoretical validity. They go on to say, that these models offer little or no justification for including certain traits and emotional abilities while others are not.

CONFLICT AND ITS RESOLUTION

An organization in any part of the world is an eclectic mix of stakeholders and their respective priorities. Given this premise, conflict becomes a very common phenomenon and an equally important aspect of the workplace. Often a result of perception, it need not necessarily be evil. Rather, it's always better to harp on the positive outcomes negating the pitfalls. That essentially is what conflict management is all about.

The primary focus of conflict management is to augment learning within the group, thereby contributing to effectiveness and performance within the organization (Rahim, 2002). Effective conflict management can help groups improve their outcome (Rahim & Bonoma, 1979; Alper et.al., 2000). From a system point of view, it can be said that conflict arises out of interaction between different interdependent groups (input). These groups in turn, perceive potential opposition (transaction) of values and goals (Putnam & Poole, 1987; Wall & Callister, 1995), which ultimately gets manifested in incompatibility, disagreement or dissonance (output) between or within entities (Rahim, 1992). Conflict generally arises out of incongruence of needs or interest, incompatibility of preferences, paucity of desirable resources or out of interdependence in performance of activities or functions (Rahim, 2002).

Rahim & Bonoma (1979) posited that there are two basic dimensions that differentiate conflict resolution styles. Firstly, the degree or extent of an individual's attempt to satisfy his/her own concerns (assertiveness). Secondly, the degree or extent of his/her attempts to satisfy the concern of

others (cooperative). Based on this, there are five conflict resolution styles. These are – integrating, accommodating, compromising, avoiding and dominating (Rahim, 1983). The integrating style, with high concern for self as well as others (Rahim, 1983) focuses on a collaborative approach to conflict resolution (Gross & Guerrero, 2001). The accommodating style places high importance to the concern of others only (Rahim, 1983). This style is all about giving in to the demands of others to find resolution to a conflict (Friedman et.al. 2000). The compromising style seeks to strike a balance between the concerns for both self as well as others (Rahim, 1983). The avoiding style displays least concern for self as well as for others, resulting in unresolved conflicts due to evasion (Gross & Guerrero, 2001). Finally, the dominating style, true to its name, places exclusive importance to the concern for self. Thereby totally disregarding the concern of the other party (Friedman et. al. 2000).

Yu et. al. (2006) had established that there is a significant relationship between subordinate's style of conflict management with his supervisor and his emotional intelligence. It was found that supervisors with high emotional intelligence generally resort to either integrating or compromising styles. Goleman (1998) has also suggested that employees with higher emotional intelligence are better suited to ably negotiate and handle conflicts more effectively within their organization. Conducting studies on Goleman's emotional intelligence model, Rahim et.al. (2002) has established the fact that empathy and social skills have a positive association with self-regulation and motivation. Motivation in turn was found to be positively associated with problem solving strategy within the premises of conflict management strategy.

THE PROBLEM STATEMENT

The Indian Railways is one of major public sector employers in India with a very significant forward linkage with the economy of the country. Despite all the investments, the technological advancements, changing demographics and regulatory requirements, the railways still face a challenge of suffering huge losses as enumerated in the railways budget 2015-16.

On September 24, 2015 the railways minister informed of having signed up with Deloitte to formulate a robust manpower policy for its officer cadre. This apparently was intended to make railways leaner by 'surrendering' positions (Rao, 2015). Now, this has sparked a fair bit of

controversy within the corridors of railways leading to a lot of conflict between the officer cadre, workmen and the unions. Elaborating this further, Rao (2015) state that the conflict is mostly because the office cadre feels a sense of being 'arm-twisted' and that the unions are being given an upper hand in this whole issue. This essentially led to strife in relations amongst the officers and the workers under them. This in turn was bound to affect the overall synergy and the productivity of the organization.

In this context, the need was felt to study the current state of affairs amidst employees of Indian Railways (managerial and non-managerial cadre) with regards to their conflict management styles and emotional intelligence. It has been widely established that EI has a major influence in the conflict management styles of employees (Goleman, 1998; Yu et al, 2006). So, this study intended to examine the influence of EI on the conflict management style of the employees. This in turn, may help us understand the dominant styles prevalent amongst them while dealing with conflict situations like the one which has been stated above.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Objectives of the Study

The objectives for this study were arrived upon after extensively surfing through the existing literature and taking cues from the various studies that have already been conducted in this regard. The objectives are as follows:

- To find the relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Conflict Resolution Techniques of employees in the government sector.
- To measure the effect of Emotional Intelligence on conflict management techniques of government employees.
- To explore the difference in the level of Emotional Intelligence and conflict resolution techniques with respect to gender and employment type.

Sampling Method and Tools Used:

A pilot study was done with a select group of 15 employees to find out if the questions in the questionnaire were easy to understand and was not very time-consuming to fill. The key questions that dealt with major personality traits in EI and issues faced in conflict management were identified via

interviews with the employees and a final questionnaire was prepared that included Emotional Intelligence and Conflict Resolution Techniques. Emotional Intelligence was measured using the 25-item Daniel Goleman's Emotional and Social Competence Inventory (ESCI) jointly designed by Goleman and Boyatzis in association with Hay Group.

Conflict Management Styles were measured by using the 28-item ROCI-II survey. A 5-point Likert scale was used to rank each item. Greater EQ of a supervisor is indicated by a higher score. A higher score also indicates a greater use of a particular style of managing conflicts with one's supervisor. (Highest score - 5 = Strongly Agree, Lowest score - 1 = Strongly Disagree).

The self-administered, final questionnaire was circulated to employees in the North Central Zone of Indian Railways. A total of 73 responses were collected from employees from managerial as well as non-managerial cadre. The data collected was then analyzed by using statistical tools like Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Test, Correlation, Chi – Square Test, One – Way ANOVA and Regression Analysis with the help of IBM Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21.

Hypotheses

H0: There is no significant relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Conflict Management Style

H1: There is a significant relationship between EI and Conflict Management Style

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The primary data has been statistically analyzed through statistical tools like Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Test, Correlation, Chi – Square Test, One– Way ANOVA and Regression Analysis. SPSS version 21 was used for data entry and its analysis. The 73 completed questionnaires were also checked for entry errors.

RELIABILITY ANALYSIS

Cronbach's alpha was used to establish the reliability based on internal consistency of measures. Reliability coefficient is 0.87 which is very much within an acceptable range (greater than 0.7) for the Total EI score.

RELIABILITY

[DataSet 2]

Sclae: ALL VARIABLES

Case Processing Summary

		N	%
Cases	Valid	73	100.0
	Excluded*	0	.0
	Total	73	100

*. List wise deletion based on all variables in the procedure

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.870	.953	61

Bivariate Analysis

To test for relationships between the main variables included in this study, Pearson correlation coefficients were computed using SPSS. Descriptions of correlations were based on the guidelines for conventional practice outlined by Cohen and Cohen (1983). According to these guidelines, effective values for correlations are as follows:

$p = .10$ (weak); $p = .30$ (moderate); $p > .50$ (strong)

CORRELATIONS

[Data Set 3]

Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
EI	91.75	12.894	73
CM	4.12	.555	73

Correlations

		EI	CM
EI	Pearson Correlation	1	.708**
	Sig.(2-tailed)		.000
N		73	73

CM	Pearson Correlation	.708**	1
	Sig.(2-tailed)	.000	
	N	73	73

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Cross-Tabulation

Gender Hypothesis: Emotional Intelligence and Conflict Resolution:

H0: Male and female employees don't differ significantly in the levels of emotional intelligence and conflict resolution techniques.

H1: Male and female employees differ significantly in the levels of emotional intelligence and conflict resolution techniques.

Chi-Square Test

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	15.157*	33	.997
Likelihood Ratio	14.082	33	.998
N of Valid cases	73		

*. 66 cells (97.1%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .07.

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	16.183*	25	.909
Likelihood Ratio	14.475	25	.953
N of Valid cases	73		

*. 48 cells (92.3%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 0.07.

Symmetric Measures*

	Value
N of valid cases	73

*. Correlation statistics are available for numeric data only.

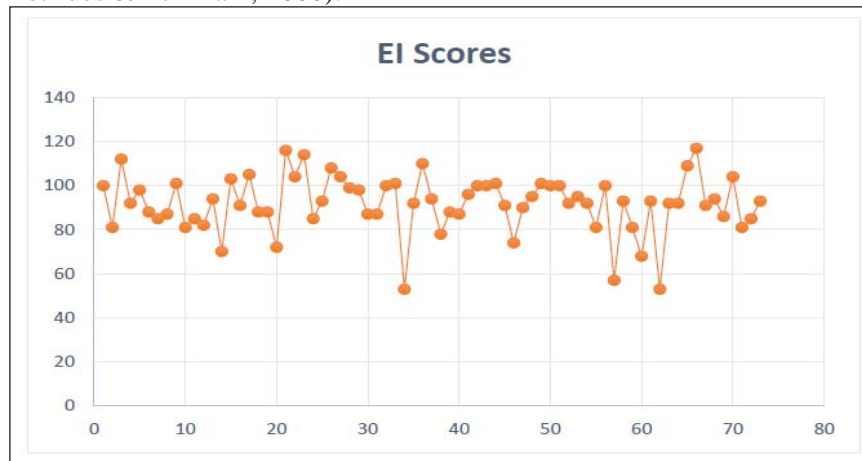
Cross Tabulation and Chi-square tests inferred that null hypothesis stands accepted.

Pearson Chi-square values for the Crosstabs are as follows:
 Gender * EI_rating, $p = 0.997 > 0.05$; Alternate Hypothesis rejected
 Gender * CM_Scores $p = 0.909 > 0.05$; Alternate Hypothesis rejected

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATION

Findings

It was found that emotional intelligence is quite prevalent amongst the employees of the organization. Most of the employees of the sample space were found to have HIGH Emotional Intelligence, each scoring well on the individual dimensions of emotional intelligence as well. Very few were found to have low EI Scores. It was also found that the difference in EI levels of male and female employees were not significant at all. This means that similar level of EI is possessed by both male and female employees. Though this finding do not seem to either corroborate or contradict the point that women generally report a lower EI than they really possess, in a self-report, while for men it's the other way round (Brackett & Mayer, 2003; Brackett et al., 2006; Lumley et al., 2005; Petrides & Furnham, 2000).



There is a significant correlation (correlation coefficient = 0.708) between EI scores and Conflict Resolution Score of an employee. This means that there is a definite relationship between the emotional intelligence of an employee and his conflict resolution technique.

Also it was found that people with high EI scores had higher scores for collaborating style of conflict management. This would imply that

people who understand emotions better tend to have a more collaborative style of managing conflicts with their colleagues. However there are some variations, which might be due to external factors.

Recommendations

The beauty of emotional intelligence or EQ lies in the fact that it can be learned and developed as opposed to IQ. Also, it develops gradually as a person grows and matures. Hence, there is always a good chance for organizations to reap the benefits of trainings on EI. But, most importantly, a culture needs to be developed first which would appreciate this change in thought.

With reference to the current conflict scenario within the organization, it is very encouraging to see that majority of the employees have high emotional intelligence. With such high scores of EI, the employees majorly have a collaborative style of conflict resolution. This augurs very well for the future of the organization. What railways should essentially try is to ensure more transparency and greater communication with its officer cadre as well as unions and workmen. Since most of them have equal concern for self as well as for others, the conflicts arising out of the 'staff rationalising' project, can be mitigated.

Also, it is highly recommended for railways to harp on the potential of so many emotionally intelligent employees in building a harmonious organization culture. Make the employees aware of the benefits of emotional intelligence and facilitate a gradual inculcation amongst the remaining. This can be done through various workshops, team- building exercises and outbound learning programmes.

Once the foundation is laid, then they should translate the learning into practice. They should encourage employees to share their feelings and problems with their supervisors in an amicable manner. An 'open door' policy would definitely help in this regard. Then they should also encourage the practice of peer-to-peer, bottom-up and top-down feedback system. Here people, especially supervisors should be properly trained on how to give feedback in a constructive and empathetic manner. Finally, they should identify various behavioural as well as emotional competences/ skills which are significant to be successful at work. Then they can incorporate them in the ambit of behavioural competencies of the job and a part of the overall performance management and appraisal process.

Current trend within successful organizations is to make use of

emotional intelligence in the settings of workplace. It covers a wide range of skills such as rapport building, empathising and encouraging motivation. These skills essentially rely upon an individual's ability to be a good listener and in turn a good communicator. Learning and espousing the intentions behind trainings pertaining to EI will definitely be able to bring vitality and dynamism to the organization.

LIMITATIONS

There are two primary limitations of this study. Firstly, the small sample space of employees may affect the reliability of the findings. Secondly, the data that has been collected is entirely through participant self-report. Which means that it might be prone to response bias as employees may not have filled in the responses with utmost honesty devoid of any bias.

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