

Emotional Intelligence and Employee Performance in Distance Learning Programmes in Nigeria

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Abstract: *Emotional Intelligence plays a vital role in individuals' professional, home and personal lives as the relationships people form are regulated by the rules of behaviour that are prompted by the emotions. Both public and private sector organizations need to cope with the change in an effective way and Emotional Intelligence is the useful ornament in helping the leaders of the organizations to deal effectively with the change that takes place in the organizational environment. In this article, we examined emotional intelligence and employee performance in Distance learning programmes in Nigeria. Emotional intelligence is a strong predictor of high performance among employee of distance learning institute. Key determinants of emotional intelligence identified in the course of the study are self-awareness, self-management, accurate self-assessment, self-confidence and empathy. This study recommends that Management should look for an organizational wide approach of bringing the employees closer to each other like organizing get together activities, end of the year parties and other social events so that they can understand themselves better as this will go a long way in increasing their awareness of others and relate well with others.*

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence, Employee performance, Distance Learning Programmes.

Introduction

Organizations are made up of people with feelings, beliefs, culture, and needs, and to relate with them satisfactorily and avoid conflict in the work place regularly, one has to be emotionally intelligent. Managers have to understand the feelings of their subordinates, their reasoning and their thinking; they have to anticipate their actions and reactions in every given situation and they need to be intelligent emotionally to do so. This was corroborated by Rosete and Ciarrochi (2005) when they made the statement that managers high on comprehending their own feelings and that of their subordinates are more likely to achieve business success. Questions have often emanated about why it is that many of those who show outstanding knowledge academically or the best graduates in schools find it difficult to progress in life and in the work place, and the answer has almost always been that they are low on Emotional intelligence (EI). This was seen when Mayer and Caruso, (2002) observed that Emotional Intelligence plays a vital role in individuals professional, home and personal lives as the relationships people form are regulated by the rules of behaviour that are prompted by the emotions.

Emotional Intelligence is the ability to recognize and regulate the emotions in one's own self and others and to make use of this information in order to guide one's thinking and actions (Giardini & Frese, 2006; Mayer, Roberts, & Barsade, 2008). The application of emotional intelligence in the organization includes the areas like personnel selection, development of employees, teams and the organization. The organizations must coach their employees in developing their interpersonal skills and coach them to perform effectively on the job with other employees

in the organization. (Reuven Bar-On et al, 2007). Employees need to enhance their emotional intelligence skills, apart from technical skills, which in turn will enhance their productivity on the job. Management of emotional intelligence by the team members will help in developing interpersonal skills of the team members. Organization's to be successful, need to develop employee's emotional intelligence skills to work effectively in the organisation. (Bob Wall, 2008).

Emotional intelligence is gaining traction in the public and private sphere particularly since the relationship between emotional intelligence and effective employee's performance has been clearer than ever. Emotional Intelligence is an indispensable factor liable for determining triumph in life and psychological health seems to play an essential part in shaping the contact between employees in their working environment. This paper is aimed at investigating emotional intelligence and employee performance in Distance learning Institute University of Ibadan. This paper is divided into five sections, the part 1 is the introduction, part 2 is the review of literature, the part 3 focus on emotional intelligence and employee performance, the part 4 examine determinants of emotional intelligence and part 5 finally led to conclusion and recommendation.

Review of Literature

There is growing evidence that there is indeed a relationship between emotional intelligence and work performance and several studies lend credence to this assertion. Nel (2001) conducted a study to examine the relationship between emotional intelligence and job performance of call center agents, working at a major life insurance company in Western Cape, South Africa. He found several emotional

intelligence competencies correlated with performance, particularly in client service and administration. Lopes, Grewal, Kadis, Gall and Salovey (2006) surveyed forty-four (44) analysts and administrators who worked for a Fortune 400 insurance company and found that, when measured by a set of abilities, emotional intelligence positively affects work performance. Bachman (1988) states that the most effective leaders in the United States Navy are warmer, more outgoing, emotionally expressive and sociable. Higgs (2004) studied the relationship between emotional intelligence and performance in United Kingdom call centers and obtained data from two hundred and nine (209) respondents from three (3) organizations; the study showed a strong relationship between emotional intelligence and individual performance. Kumar (2014) also maintains that emotional intelligence plays a prominent role in achieving workplace performance.

Research relating to emotional intelligence in the Nigerian context is limited in comparison to other climes. Adeyemo and Ogunyemi (2005) investigated the impact of emotional intelligence and self-efficacy on occupational stress of university academic staff. Results show that emotional intelligence contributes to the prediction of work stress in participants. Nwokah and Ahiazu (2009) state that emotional intelligence leads to marketing effectiveness in corporate organizations. Oyesoji (2008) assessed the relationship between emotional intelligence and performance in the Nigerian police force and observed that there is a relationship between emotional intelligence and performance. Akintayo (2010) studied the effect of emotional intelligence and work-family conflict in Nigerian organizations and found that emotional intelligence has a moderating role on work-family conflict. Other studies on the subject of emotional intelligence have been conducted by Tella (2011), Animashaun (2008), Ofole (2012), amongst others. Mayer, Salovey and Caruso (2008) stated in their study that emotional intelligence basically refers to the ability of recognizing and then regulating the emotions of oneself and that of the others. This information about the emotions will assist the leaders to guide the actions and behaviors of one-self and that of the others. According to Kim, Cable, Kim and Wang (2009), people with high emotional level can gather and regulate the emotions accurately and then use that information to make decisions and to enhance the performance by changing the behaviors in a desired manner.

Emotional Intelligence and Employee Performance

Sometimes we are faced with very difficult and challenging situations that we have to decide how we have to handle it in an appropriate manner without hurting any parties involved and leaving us with no regrets later on therefore we are required to go through systematic process of pondering upon the issue and analyzing it for its impacts both positive and negative on self and others who might be

affected by the decisions we arrive at hence wise decisions that we are not sure about are a necessity in our daily dealings with several issues hence emotional intelligence entails all the above issues and is a paramount tool in dealing with challenging issues (Marc, Susan, and Salovey, 2011).

The term Emotional Intelligence came to exist way back in the 1990s by Salayo and Mayer (1990) but it started gaining the current attention it has when it was republished by Goleman (1996) where he defined it as an individual's recognize and deal with their own feelings which is of great importance in later enabling us relate well with others by being in better position to handle others feelings. In reality, emotions control our actions and can therefore impact or redirect our behaviors for good or worse thus the need to handle our emotions and those of others carefully more especially when faced with very challenging situations (Jonas, 2013).

Out of the so many EI models developed over the years, Goleman (2001) improved a model that has been widely adopted and used to date. In his latest publish, Goleman (2002) used this model to define emotional intelligence as the ability to identify and manage our feelings and those we associate with through appropriate ways of dealing and associating with four domains of EI which include; self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management which are shared by all the different theories developed by different researchers, scholars and authors about EI even though vocabulary varies from one theory to another (Nwokah and Ahiazu, 2009). Nwokah and Ahiazu (2009) stated that many researchers compare social and emotional intelligence by looking at the number of people it involves for example emotional intelligence is mainly individual while social intelligence is more of relationship management.

Moghadam, Jorfi & Jorfi (2010) stated that both public and private sector organizations need to cope with the change in an effective way and Emotional Intelligence is the useful ornament in helping the leaders of the organizations to deal effectively with the change that takes place in the organizational environment. Singh (2007) was of the view that emotional intelligence supports the leadership of the organization in recognizing the emotions of their own as well as those of others. It not only recognizes but also manages those emotions for the benefit of the organization. Bar-On et al (2000) stated that emotional intelligence not only includes the recognition and management of emotions but also include the development of employees and for that the leaders of the organization needs to develop the skills of the employees to enable them to perform their assigned tasks effectively for the success of the organization.

Many researchers have written about the impact and importance of emotional intelligence and many of them have described the emotional intelligence according to their

own perspectives. They developed three models of the emotional intelligence such as the ability models, the mixed model and the trait model. Mayer and Salovey (1993) described emotional intelligence to be the ability to recognize one's own emotions as well as the emotions of others and also to manage those emotions for the success of the organization. Bar-On (2000) described emotional intelligence the ability of understanding oneself as well as others in order to fulfill the demands of the organizational environment effectively.

Determinants of Emotional Intelligence

Self-Awareness

Victoroff and Boyatzis (2012) mentioned that Self-awareness is "knowing one's internal state, preference, resources and intuition. It's not automatic to have the ability to recognize our personal moods and reactions when in the spot light, privately and still be able to remain conscious afterward whether in teams or individually (Goleman *et al*, 2002). "Self-awareness also involves having a realistic assessment of one's abilities. People who have this strength are aware of their strengths and weaknesses, open to candid feedback from others, and willing to learn from past experiences. This courage comes from certainty, through self-awareness, about our capabilities, values and goals"" as cited by (Fatt, 2002). Self-aware people have the ability to accurately perceive own emotions and stay aware of them as they happen. This includes keeping on top of how one tends to respond to specific situations and people.

It's only appropriate for us to first and foremost know that our brains have an emotional and rational centers that that develops throughout our infancy thus "when a strong enough stimulus is received through the sense, part of the signal is sent directly to the amygdala, the emotional center of the brain, before the rational side of the brain gets a chance to decide on the appropriate response (McPheat, 2010). MCPheat (2010) then defines emotional self-awareness as the "innate potential to feel, use, communicate, recognize, remember, describe, identify, learn from, manage, understand and explain emotions. Victoroff and Boyatzis (2012) mentions that "to be emotionally self-aware, we must recognize our emotions and their effects. Ingram (2013) states that emotional self-awareness is "concerned with the identification and response to the feelings that the presenting issues give rise to.

Self-management

According to Rahim & Psenicka (1996), self-management is the way of managing oneself. They stated that self-management is basically the crucial factor which can affect the performance of the employees and other people of organizations. Boyatzis (2002) mentioned in the study that self-awareness is the strong forecaster and tool of performance in any organization. Barrick & Mount (1991)

stated that self-discipline is also an important part of the self-management which focuses on fulfilling all responsibilities that can bring high level of performance in return in almost all level of organizational hierarchy.

According to Spencer & Spencer (2008), the quality of adaptability is also the important element of the self-management because if a leader possesses this quality of adaptability, he or she can create a high level of employee's productivity and performance in the organization. This quality is also being used by all the superiors of the organizations for getting success in short period of time. Spencer & Spencer (1993) added one other factor in measuring the level of self-management by stating that self-management can be gauged on the basis of achievements (that has been achieved) because performance can be measured by studying all the achievements that the leaders possessing high level of self-management has achieved. Schulman (1995) in his research mentioned that the ability of being proactive is also an important part of selfmanagement which can augment the performance of the overall organizational activities. He further mentioned that optimism also adds to the self-management as it indicates high level of self-management because this quality of optimism can only be achieved if a person controls his emotions of pessimism in an effective way.

Accurate Self-Assessment

Victoroff and Boyatzis (2012) states that, it's very important for us to discover and recognize our strengths and weaknesses if we are to improve our self-awareness. We have to accurately evaluate the impact of our emotions on the people we work with, families, society and even our performance, behavior and general relationships. We ought to do this because in the current world, we are bound to work in teams, relate to people live in societies thus the more we know about the impact of our emotions the better for our output and relationships and even of more significant use to team/organization leaders (McPheat, 2010). According to Pickerden (2014), he suggested a constant evaluation of self for SWOT constantly improves our behavior and make us better people by the day. MCPheat (2010) further states that, for effective self-assessment, there is need for honesty in the process of acknowledging and identifying ones emotional strength and weaknesses.

Self Confidence

Most times we are forced to push away our feelings instead of acknowledging and recognizing them and how much they influence us and in what direction because we lack the confidence to do so. Once we develop confidence to constantly evaluate our feelings and their impacts, we are in better position to understand that our weaknesses and strengths don't mean our worth and values (McPheat, 2010). Thus the feeling of being able to accomplish so many

things due to the skills, competence and knowledge that's at our disposal (Thompson, 2014). (Thompson, 2014) further quotes that improving confidence means developing one's self esteem and self-belief/Self efficacy hence "the belief in one's capabilities to organize and execute the course of actions required to manage prospective situations. But then Hollenbeck and Hall (2004) state that confidence is not a constant but rather differs from task to task.

Empathy

As much as it's difficult to take a moment and put ourselves in others shoes to dig out the reasons or see from their point of view why they behave and react to things the way they do especially when in the middle of a heated disagreement, we have to from time to time to see things from others view so that when we are taking actions or making decisions we do so after understanding our view and those of others thus objective decisions are made without any bias but rather consideration and empathy (McPheat, 2010).

It takes time, experience and ability to be in touch with our very own emotions in order to perfect empathy. We are only to understand other if we have been in the same situations ourselves and this can only be possible if we have had several experiences that are bound to enable us to have empathy for others (McPheat, 2010). (McPheat, 2010) further mentions that it requires a lot of techniques to recognize others emotions because it's never a direct thing so we are sometimes forced to either read between the lines, ask questions or read body languages like facial expression and other non-verbal expressions. Once we have recognized how others are feeling, we have to be careful not to destroy the rapport we have created so far by disagreeing with why they are feeling the way they are but rather make a responsibility to investigate further to understand why they are feeling the way they do hence we have to be sensitive to others feelings and emotions.

Conclusion and Recommendation

This study examined emotional intelligence and employee performance in distance learning programmes in Nigeria. Emotional intelligence is a strong predictor of high performance among employee of distance learning institute. Key determinants of emotional intelligence identified in the course of the study are self-awareness, self-management, accurate self- assessment, self -confidence and empathy. The following recommendations are considered useful for distance learning institute management and employee performance in Nigeria.

1. Management should look for an organizational wide approach of bringing the employees closer to each other like organizing get together activities, end of the year parties and other social events so that they can understand themselves

better as this will go a long way in increasing their awareness of others and relate well with others.

2. The institute should institute a reward system where employees that exhibit outstanding empathy are recognized as this will engender group cohesion and understanding.

3. It is essential for the university administration to pay attention to applicant Intelligence Quotient and emotional intelligence ability in staff recruitment exercise.

4. It will also be beneficial if a customized emotional intelligence development program is designed for academic staff and non-academic staff within the institute, so that areas where behavioral changes are required will be identified. This mode of intervention is necessary because leaders have the task of managing diverse emotions within the workplace. However, these recommendations will only be possible if the employer (government) focuses on resolving the specific challenges within the sector and commits to enhancing service delivery.

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