

Emotional Intelligence and Employee Retention in SMEs in Awka Anambra State, Nigeria

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Abstract: *The study examines the effect of emotional intelligence on employee retention in SMEs in Awka, Anambra State. The study adopted descriptive survey design and the population of the study of Small, Micro and Medium Enterprises is 472. Complete enumeration was used. Data were collected with the aid of structured questionnaire. Cronbach Alpha was used to test the reliability of the instrument. Data were analyzed using arithmetic mean and hypothesis one was tested using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient while hypotheses 2 was tested using Simple Regression with the aid of Statistical Packages for Social Science (SPSS version 27). Findings revealed that there is significant positive relationship between self-awareness and job autonomy; it was also revealed that emotional competence has a positive effect on job satisfaction. The study concluded that emotional intelligence practices such as self-awareness and emotional competence contributes to reduced rate of labour turnover and high employee retention among SMEs in Awka, Anambra State. It was recommended that there should be continuous delegation of task to staff so as to determine the capacity of staff and self-awareness of staff.*

Keywords: *emotional intelligent, self-awareness, emotional competence, job autonomy, job satisfaction*

1.1 Background of the study

Emotional intelligence is the ability of an individual to understand his emotions such as his personality, his temperament and that of people around such as colleagues, friends and staff so as to determine the best approach towards relating with staff. Staff hired into an organization are from different backgrounds and of different behavior which may not be healthy for business growth and development. It is almost impossible for employees to work together without conflicting with one another and emotional intelligence is an effective tool in aligning the interest of staff and instilling job cooperation among staff at work place (Okogba, 2017). Emotional intelligence could be a vital tool in studying an employee as well as knowing what is needed by an employee in order to incorporate an employees' need so that employee retention would be achieved. Emotional intelligence practices start from the understanding of the personality of oneself which is self-awareness so as to be able to relate what is acceptable and what is not acceptable in an organization.

Tega (2014) posits that emotional intelligence suggests four very important competencies: (1) Self-awareness, which is the competency to strongly understand one's emotions and be conscious of them as they happen, basically by managing one's reaction to certain situations and people. (2) Self-management, which is the competency to stay alert of one's emotions and be flexible to drive positively his/hers behavior towards those emotions, and be able to address all possible emotional reactions for all situations and for all people. (3) Social awareness, which is the competency to correctly recognize emotions of others and their possible effects, i.e., to be able understand other people's thoughts and sense their feelings even though they do not correspond quite like this. (4) Relationship management, which is the competency to successfully manage interactions by using own efficient levels of awareness for one's own emotions and those of others i.e., provide clear communication to all involved and effectively handle conflict (Bradberry & Greaves, 2013).

SMEs in Awka, Anambra State is stigmatized with issue of high labour turnover as employees do not seem to stay long on their job. This could be due to various factors ranging from job dissatisfaction, low pay, poor management-employee relationship and high rate of conflict among SME's staff and management. The personality of Management and staff of SMEs varies and management seems to ignore the adoption of emotional intelligence practices such as understanding the personalities of staff in the organization so as to determine their competent level. Nwaribeaku (2017) maintains that SMEs are faced with the challenges of increased rate of job mobility caused by job factors that do not fit into the satisfactory requirement of staff. Staff of SMEs are not given the opportunity to show their competent level on the job and this could be the reason employee leave an organization in search for a career path where they can gain self-awareness. Based on the backdrop the study examines the effect of emotional intelligence on employee retention in SMEs in Awka, Anambra State.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of this study is to determine the extent of relationship that exists between emotional intelligence and employee retention in SMEs of Awka, Anambra State. The specific objectives of the study are;

1. To ascertain the nature of relationship that exists between self-awareness and job autonomy in SMEs of Awka, Anambra State.

2. To determine the effect of emotional competence and job satisfaction in SMEs of Awka, Anambra State.

1.3 Research Questions

The following questions were formulated by the study;

1. What is the nature of relationship between self-awareness and job autonomy in SMEs of Awka, Anambra State?
2. What is the effect of emotional competence and job satisfaction in SMEs of Awka, Anambra State?

1.4 Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated for the purpose of the study;

Ho₁: There is no significant relationship between self-awareness and job autonomy of SMEs in Awka, Anambra State.

Ho₂: There is no significant effect of emotional competence and job satisfaction of SMEs in Awka, Anambra State.

2.1.0 Conceptual clarification

2.1.1 Concept of Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence refers to the individual's capability to highly perceive own personal emotions and those of others and be able to "handle" those emotions by interacting with all audiences forming relationships i.e business relationships, personal relationships (Ogaga, 2013). Harms and Credé (2018), emotional intelligence is regarded as either a trait or an ability. In the first case, emotional intelligence is viewed as an inherent considered being an innate feature that enables and promotes well-being. In the second case, emotional intelligence plays a role in comprehending and regulating emotions as well as in understanding and integrating them into cognitions (Bradberry & Greaves, 2013). Emotional intelligence refers to the individual's capability to highly perceive own personal emotions and those of others and be able to "handle" those emotions by interacting with all audiences forming relationships i.e business relationships, personal relationships (Ogaga, 2013). Several scientific investigations have measured the effects of emotional intelligence on significant outcomes, such as life quality, occupational success, resistance to stress etc. (Nelis, 2019). Tega (2014) posits that emotional intelligence suggests four very important competencies: Self-awareness, Self-management, Social awareness, and Relationship management. Emotional intelligence is key to manage levels of stress which is common in emotional labor practices. Emotional intelligence has proven particularly important in the service sector and in instances where employees interact with customers (Slaski & Cartwright, 2012). Leaders high on emotional intelligence are rather better at helping their employees keep positive moods while interacting with customers and performing emotional labor (O'Boyle, 2015).

Self-awareness: Self-awareness is the most crucial competency associated with work place emotional intelligence. According to Yeung (2019); the first step to becoming emotionally intelligent is to become as self-aware as possible. Self-awareness is the ability for one to recognize his or her emotions and their effects. Studies suggest that People who are aware of their emotions are more effective in their jobs. They recognize and understand their moods, emotions and needs and can perceive and anticipate how their actions affect others. Self-awareness competencies include emotional self-awareness, accurate self-awareness and self-confidence. Emotional self-awareness is the first component of self-awareness. This reflects the importance of recognizing one's own feelings and how they affect one's performance. Accurate self-Assessment involves knowing one's inner resources, abilities and limits. People with this competency are aware of their strengths and weaknesses, reflective, learning from experience, open to candid feedback, new perspectives, continuous learning and self-development (Goleman, 2018).

Emotional competence: Emotional competence is conceived as the integration of seven seemingly unrelated proficiencies: perspective taking, strategic self-presentation of emotions, helping targets of communication accept one's genuine emotional reactions, lack of guilt when using emotions strategically, fostering self-authenticity, developing an ironic perspective, and incorporating one's moral code into the self-regulation of emotions (Evans, 2014). Emotional competence can be understood as an ability to create "ideal emotional selves" that guide emotional self-regulation and, as such, is goal-directed or teleonomic. Somewhat similar ideas have been proposed by Ibarra (2010) who conceives of membership in an organization as an extending of one's possible selves through experimenting and imitation of role models (Pratt, 2010). People who carefully construct their personal selves are called "collage observers" and are "more likely to find behaviors that fit who they are, who they want to be, and what they can do" (Ibarra, 2010). Emotional competence also resonates partly with Mumby and Putnam's (2012) suggestion of a feminist approach to emotions in organizations, which argues that social actors do not simply enact feeling rules of the organization but rather cope with ambiguity through integrating seemingly contradictory emotional skills into bounded emotionality: "Under norms of bounded emotionality, individuals choose appropriate organizational actions based on a system of tolerance and ambiguity rather than a system of reducing ambiguity through satisficing" (Mumby & Putnam, 2012).

Job autonomy: Job autonomy is viewed as both relational and motivational, where the relational perspective involves managers sharing power and authority with subordinates, while the motivational perspective focuses on enabling employees to control some aspects of work (Okpako, 2016). Job autonomy may be related to personal outcomes such as perceived equity, personal control, self-esteem, and self-efficacy (Hill & Huq, 2014). Gerals and Terziovski (2013) describe job autonomy as involving delegation of responsibility from management to employees, and collapsing hierarchical forms of organization. Job autonomy may involve a variety of processes by which employees contribute to organizational decisions, but does not imply that employees have the authority or power to make decisions. Job autonomy is generally interpreted to involve the transfer or delegation of decision-making power to employees (Sharma & Kaur, 2019).

Job satisfaction: The definitions of job satisfaction come from various researchers and authors as till now there's no global definition for that term, the most quoted definition by researchers comes from Swaminathan and Jawahar (2013), job satisfaction "a pleasurable or a positive emotion state resulting from the appraisal of one's job or job experiences". Ozturk (2010), defined job satisfaction as the emotional feeling of gratification that is experienced by an employee due to many factors of work. Mehboob and Bhutto (2012) define job satisfaction as "a positive feeling about the job resulting from an evaluation of its characters", where an employee who has a high level of Satisfaction will tend to positive toward his job, and on the other side, an employee who has a low level of satisfaction will defiantly tend to be negative towards his job. Ozturk (2016) avers that job satisfaction explains whether employees are happy or not, as well as the fulfillment of their needs and wants when doing their jobs, which can influence their motivation, morals, and reaching target in the organization, also, if the employees are happy, in other words, satisfied, they will likely to keep working in the organization, according to Miao (2011), job satisfaction can affect both social and economic aspects of an organization it's assume that employees who perform well in their job are definitely satisfied, which leads remaining in the organization and becoming more devoted to the organization, conversely.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

This study was suitably anchored on Affective Events Theory (AET) propounded by Howard in 1974. The theory explains how emotions and moods influence employee commitment, organizational performance and job satisfaction. It emphasizes the linkages between employee's internal influences such as cognitions, emotions, mental states and employee's reactions to such incidents that occur in their work environment which affect their job performance, commitment and job satisfaction. This theory stresses that affective work behaviors are explained by employee's mood and emotions while cognitive based behavior is the best predictor of job satisfaction. Affective events theory maintains that positive-inducing (up lifts) as well as negative inducing (hassles) emotional incidents at work are distinguishable and have a significant psychological impact upon workers job satisfaction. The result of internal factors such as cognition, emotions, mental states and external affective reactions displayed through job satisfaction, job performance and employee commitment. The theory also posits a positive relationship among job satisfaction, commitment, recognition, market share and retention or turnover in the organization. The theory supports the fact that employers needs to adopt emotional intelligence practices toward staff such as understanding the personality of staff and conditions attached so as to know appropriate measures to take to eliminate high labour turnover which is common in SMEs Business.

2.3 Review of Empirical literature

Okon, Anietie & Abosede (2015) studied how Emotional intelligence relates to employee commitment in the Nigerian banking industry. Emotional intelligence competencies studied were self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and social skills. Data was collected from a convenient sample size of 376 employees in the Nigerian banking industry using an adapted questionnaire which was earlier developed. Descriptive and inferential statistics provided the basis for the analysis. The result agrees with earlier studies reinforcing the opinion that emotional intelligence relates to employees' performance.

Muhammad & Rauf (2017) conducted a research on Emotional Intelligence and Employee Performance: An Intervention Based Experimental. Thirty-six (36) participants with a low level of emotional intelligence had joined the study voluntarily after submitting an informed consent taken for training and coaching interventions. The results of paired sample T-Test showed a significant increase in emotional intelligence scores from pretest stage to posttest with a medium effect size. Results further revealed a significant increase in employees' performance scores of the participants after their enhanced level of emotional intelligence.

Asilaza & Zachary (2016) studied the effect of emotional intelligence on employee continuance commitment in private sector a case of Kinyara sugar limited in Uganda. A stratified random sampling was used to sample 208 respondents who represented the total population of KSL with 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error. The finding revealed that the improved ability of employee's self-management results into improved employee's commitment. The finding also indicated that employee's improved social-awareness aspects contribute positively to normative commitment. The study concluded that well developed and management skills

of the four domains of emotional intelligence self-awareness, self-management, social-awareness and relationship management enables employees to understand and manage their abilities and control their short comings.

Willem, Belschak & Bagozzi (2017) researched on emotional competence and affective commitment of sales persons of Plastic Firms in Kenya. A cluster analysis of responses to measures of the seven proficiencies by 220 salespeople revealed four distinct groups of people. The groups were defined by emotional competence syndromes consisting of combinations of different levels of the seven proficiencies. One group, the highly emotional competent, scored high on all seven proficiencies, a second group scored low on all seven. Two other groups resulted wherein one group was dominated by feelings of guilt in the use of emotions strategically, and the second was characterized by the inability to accept ambiguous and contradictory situations by assuming an ironic perspective. In a test of predictive validity, the highly emotional competent group, but not the others, coped effectively with envy and pride, achieved high social capital, and performed well.

Andrade, Martins, Cunha, Albuquerque & Ribeiro (2016) studied the Emotional Competence and employee performance in healthcare professionals. Cross-sectional descriptive-correlational quantitative research with a universe of 116 health professionals: 40 with experience in palliative care and 76 without experience. The study revealed that Healthcare professionals with high emotional skills are the oldest (≥ 35 years old), female, with a university degree and with no experience in palliative care ones. The study concluded that Career and the type of relationships at workplace influence the emotional competence of professionals with experience; the type of unit influences healthcare professionals with experience in palliative care.

Siddiqui and Hassan (2013) studied the impact of emotional intelligence (EI) on turnover rate of first line managers of FMCG organizations in Karachi. A sample of 40 employees from different FMCG organizations of Karachi who are performing their duties at first line management level falling within the age range of 20–40 years, with education level from Intermediate to Masters has been drawn randomly. Descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) was applied to study the sample characteristics and linear regression analysis and Karl Pearson’s Coefficient of Correlation (Pearson’s product moment correlation coefficient) is calculated. This analysis shows strong impact of low emotional intelligence with increased employee job turnover rate.

Ha Nam, Dao , Hasanuzzaman and Tran (2020) investigated the impact of emotional intelligence on turnover intention, Survey data collected from 722 employees at banks in Vietnam was analyzed to provide evidence. Results from the partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) using the SmartPLS 3.0 program indicated that there was a negative effect of emotional intelligence on employees’ turnover intention; this was mediated partially through work-family conflict and job burnout. Besides, this study indicated that perceived organizational support could decrease work-family conflict, job burnout and turnover intention of employees. It could also moderate the relationship between emotional intelligence and work-family conflict.

Gopinath and Chitra (2020) investigated the influence of emotional intelligence on job satisfaction of employees of sago companies in Salem District. This study considers emotional intelligence as a multidimensional construct and compares the effects of these dimensions on job satisfaction. For this purpose researcher used descriptive research design, 217 samples were collected using stratified random sampling technique. The researcher found significant and positive relationship between Emotional Intelligence on Job Satisfaction.

3.1 METHODOLOGY

Survey Research Design was used for this study. The reason for adopting survey research design is because the study intended to source its data primarily from respondents with the aid of structured questionnaire. The population of the study comprises the management and staff of the selected registered SMEs in Awka, Anambra State, which include Crunches Fast Food, Roban stores, Parktonia Hotels Ltd, stanel world, Millennium Industries with the total 472 staff strength. Complete Enumeration Method was adopted. The study adopted simple random sampling technique and the reason for adopting simple random sampling technique is because the study aimed to give equal chances to all members of the population to be selected in the sample. Well-structured questionnaire of Likert Scale of Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree and undecided was used. Cronbach alfa was used to test for the reliability of the instrument at 5% level of significant.

Reliability Statistics

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items

.817	.001	5
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Table: above shows Cronbach's alpha value of 0.817, this shows that the instrument is highly reliable.

Method of Data Analysis: The data in relation to the research questions were analyzed using mean. The test of hypothesis one was done using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient while hypotheses 2 was tested using Simple Regression Analysis through Statistical Packages for Social Science (version 23).

4.1 DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

Table 4.2.1 Analysis of Responses to the Nature of Relationship between Self-Awareness and Job Autonomy in SMEs of Awka, Anambra State

S/N	Self-Awareness	SA	A	U	D	SD	Mean Score	Remark	Source;
1.	I understand the emotions of colleague and superior in my firm.	89	76	31	123	102	2.83	Disagree	
2.	I know my tolerance level in this organization.	106	105	42	72	76	3.08	Agree	
3.	I strive to avoid issues that will get me upset.	130	143	55	47	46	3.63	Agree	
	Job Autonomy								
4.	I am in control of my roles in this organization.	106	115	18	93	89	3.13	Agree	
5.	I execute my task freely without any instructions from management staff.	94	104	21	103	99	2.98	Disagree	
6.	I solve all challenges encountered in the course of executing my task.	104	124	23	86	84	3.19	Agree	

Computation of Respondents' responses on Field Survey, 2021.

Table 4.2.1 Shows that respondents agreed to the questions on the relationship between Self-awareness and job autonomy with mean scores of 3.08, 3.63, 3.13 and 3.19 respectively but disagreed to understanding the emotions of colleague and superior and executing task freely without any instructions from management staff with mean scores of 2.83 and 2.98 respectively.

Table 4.2.2 Analysis of Respondents Responses to the Effect of Emotional Competence on Job Satisfaction in SMEs of Awka, Anambra State.

S/N	Emotional Competence	SA	A	U	D	SD	Mean Score	Remark
1.	I consider the emotions of colleagues and staff in the course of communicating with staff.	129	152	41	51	48	3.62	Agree
2.	I feel comfortable in the manner at which management relates with me.	145	147	49	41	39	3.76	Agree
3.	Some staff and management personnel of this organization have aggressive personality.	110	103	39	72	97	3.14	Agree
	Job Satisfaction							
4.	I am comfortable with my job in this organization.	115	95	45	81	85	3.18	Agree
5.	Management adopt an approach that makes us feel comfortable on the job.	102	104	21	103	91	3.05	Agree
6.	I am sure of staying long in my employment in this organization.	145	114	48	62	52	3.57	Agree

Source; Computation from Field Survey, 2021.

Table 4.2.2 shows that respondents agreed to questions on the relationship between emotional competence and employee job security with mean scores of 3.62, 3.76, 3.14, 3.18, 3.05 and 3.57 respectively.

4.3.1 Test of Hypothesis One

Ho₁: There is no significant relationship between self-awareness and job autonomy of SMEs in Awka, Anambra State.

Table 4.3.1 Correlation between Self-Awareness and Job Autonomy of SMEs in Awka, Anambra State.

		Self_awareness	Job_autonomy
Self_awareness	Pearson Correlation	1	.771**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.014
	N	421	421
Job_autonomy	Pearson Correlation	.771**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.014	
	N	421	421

Result Summary

Table 4.3.1 shows that there is significant relationship between self-awareness and job autonomy with $r=0.771$, $n=421$ and p value of 0.014 ($p<0.05$). Therefore, we reject the null hypothesis and conclude that there is positive relationship between self-awareness and job autonomy of SMEs in Awka, Anambra State.

4.3.3 Test of Hypothesis Two

Ho₃: There is no significant effect of emotional competence and job satisfaction of SMEs in Awka, Anambra State.

Table 4.3.3a Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.683 ^a	.467	.426	39.53671

a. Predictors: (Constant), Emotional_competence

Summary

Table 4.3.3a shows that with Regression Co-efficient $R=0.683$ and 0.426 , emotional competence has effect on job satisfaction.

Table 4.3.3b ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	17812.630	1	17812.630	11.395	.005 ^b
	Residual	20320.970	420	1563.152		
	Total	38133.600	421			

a. Dependent Variable: Job satisfaction

b. Predictors: (Constant), Emotional competence

The ANOVA test table shows the P value is 0.005 which indicates significant effect as stated by the decision rule. Since, P value is less than 0.05, the alternate hypothesis would be accepted that there is significant effect of emotional competence on job satisfaction.

Table 4.3.3c Coefficients^a

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	-8.514	23.944		.356
	Emotional_competence	1.141	.338	.683	3.376
					.728
					.005

a. Dependent Variable: Job satisfaction

The coefficient table shows that with P value of 0.005, according to the decision rule, the null hypotheses would be rejected and the alternate hypothesis is accepted that there is significant effect of emotional competence on job satisfaction with R= 0.683.

5.0 SUMMARY CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Summary of Findings

1. The result of the test of hypothesis revealed that there is positive relationship between self-awareness and job autonomy with $r=0.771$, $n=421$ and p value of 0.014. This implies that self-awareness could result in exploring skills and talent of employees on the job so as to establish job autonomy.
2. The test of the third hypothesis revealed that there is positive effect of emotional competence on job satisfaction with $R= 0.683$. This implies that emotional competence as an emotional intelligence factor significantly affects the level of perceived job satisfaction.

5.2 Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

1. The study concluded that emotional intelligence practices such as self-awareness, and emotional competence contributes to reduced rate of labour turnover and high employee retention among SMEs in Awka, Anambra State. The study deduced that self-awareness assists in exploring potentials of employee such as skills, ideas and know-how of employees on the job. When employees are granted some level of autonomy, they tend to explore their skills and talents on the job as well becomes accountable on the job. emotional competence such as the ability of a manager to accommodate erring staff, constructively criticize staff and instruct staff on what to do would result in assuring long stay of employees on the job. Emotional intelligence practices by managers and owners of SMEs would result in cordial relationship with employees and thus it could be a retention strategy for employees. The study recommends that there should be continuous delegation of task to staff so as to determine the capacity of staff and self-awareness of staff. This will guarantee some level of autonomy on the job for exploring potentials of employees. Also management should be able to understand emotional competence level of staff so as to determine how to constructively criticize erring staff, pass instructions and treat staff of the organization tactically.

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