

Emotional Intelligence and Career Competencies: Finding Satisfaction in Academic Administration

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The study of emotional intelligence within academic administration presented an opportunity to explore proposed linkages between emotional competencies and satisfaction with occupational demands. The literature revealed that academic administrators, such as deans, can benefit from the development of emotional intelligence competencies. Five key competencies were discovered after creating and analyzing a theoretical model. The research revealed that deans who perceived themselves as flexible, assertive, and tolerant of stress tended to be more satisfied with their positions. Likewise, their overall satisfaction with work was higher if they considered themselves to be effective problem solvers and self-actualizers.

INTRODUCTION

According to Hill and Jones (2004) the theory and practice of emotional intelligence fits well within the framework of strategic leadership research. Researchers and practitioners have been interested in determining what makes a leader effective and how do great leaders wield power and influence within organizations (Bennis, 1984; Collins, 2001; Greenleaf, 2002; Hambrick & Mason, 1984; Ireland & Hitt, 2005). Owners, executives, and managers who make strategic decisions for an organization shoulder a large amount of responsibility and accountability. These individuals need to have distinctive knowledge, skills, and abilities to succeed. They operate essentially as team captains who build, develop, inspire, challenge, and reward others in creative ways. They anticipate trends, envision possibilities, communicate objectives, share information, and encourage feedback. These leaders need to be energetic, accurate, and passionate toward achieving results, while expressing integrity, humility, and empathy toward others. Strategic leaders, in other words, need to be emotionally intelligent.

Goleman (1998) noted that leaders with high levels of emotional intelligence improve organizational performance. This study considered leadership specifically within the domain of higher education. The purpose of this study was to examine the proposed linkage between emotional intelligence and job satisfaction for academic administrators, such as deans, and attempt to discover which of the EQ competencies were most strongly related to job satisfaction. The construct of Bar-On's conceptual and psychometric model was used as a method to determine if emotional intelligence was related to job satisfaction for the study group. The independent variables, EQ competencies, were measured and assessed by using the BarOn EQ-i:125 on-line test instrument (Bar-On, 2004). An examination was conducted of which EQ competencies were most essential for the given position. The dependent variable, job satisfaction, was measured and assessed in an overall manner by using a Global Job Satisfaction survey (Lucas, 1996; Price & Mueller, 1981) with eight statements and five Likert scale choices ranging

from strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1). Regression analysis was performed on the data to determine if a positive relationship existed between the EQ competencies and job satisfaction.

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

The study of intelligence in the emotional realm has developed over time. An early contributor, E. L. Thorndike (1920), viewed a major component of human intelligence as *social intelligence* which means the ability to function in interpersonal situations. More recently, the Mayer-Salovey model defined emotional intelligence as the ability to perceive, understand, manage and use emotions to facilitate thinking. The Goleman model viewed emotional intelligence as an array of emotional and social competencies that contributed to managerial performance. Finally, the Bar-On model defined emotional intelligence as, “*An array of noncognitive capabilities, competencies, and skills that influence one’s ability to succeed in coping with environmental demands and pressures*” (2004, p. 14). Bar-On’s definition illustrated the importance of emotional intelligence for determining an individual’s psychological well-being and potential for life success. For the purposes of this study, the Bar-On model was used as a way to describe and interpret emotional intelligence characteristics.

Prior Research

In addition to emotional intelligence, the study job satisfaction has enhanced the body of research committed to better understanding people within the context of the workplace. For instance, Spector (1997) stated that: “Job satisfaction is simply how people feel about their jobs and different aspects of their jobs” (p. 2), while Henne and Locke (1985) noted that workers who perceive their job values are being fulfilled tend to be content or satisfied whereas workers who perceive their job values as being frustrated tend to be discontent or dissatisfied. Even so, prior research was limited, especially in higher education, due to the newness of studying relationships between emotional intelligence and job satisfaction.

The following researchers provided diverse findings on similar subjects. Kafetsios and Zampetakis (2008), for example, studied 523 educators in Greece. Results demonstrated that emotional intelligence was an important predictor of work affectivity and job satisfaction. In another study that included 475 educators, Kafetsios and Loumakou (2007) discovered that the EQ competencies of General Mood and Interpersonal had significance to job satisfaction depending on the age group under consideration. Sy, Tram, and O’Hara (2006) conducted research on 187 food service employees and concluded that: “Our findings confirm the predictive power of EI beyond the Big Five Personality factors on important constructs such as job satisfaction and performance” (p. 471). Moreover, Howard (2009) found significant correlations between dimensions of emotional intelligence and levels of job satisfaction.

Finally, research has been linked to discovering combinations of EQ competencies that best predict satisfaction and/or performance outcomes for various occupational groups. Druskat, Sala, and Mount (2006) included one of Bar-On’s studies on the impact of emotional intelligence on performance. According to the authors, the results from the study indicated that: “It is possible to scientifically develop EI models within organizations that can be used to accurately predict performance in various occupations. These models can be and are reliably employed to recruit, hire, and promote potentially effective employees” (p. 17). Similarly, Stein and Book (2000) discovered combinations of ideal EQ competencies for various occupations. The authors found that people most satisfied with their work tend to possess the emotional characteristics most needed for that particular position (p. 262).

DISCUSSION

EQ means and standard deviations were calculated for the sample group of deans. Total EQ for the 111 respondents had a sample mean of 104.28. Regression analysis was conducted on each of the EQ competencies in order to determine which items had the strongest positive relationship to job satisfaction. The purpose of individually testing each independent variable with global job satisfaction was to gain a

deeper level of understanding concerning the specific EQ subscale competencies related to job satisfaction. The results of the regression analysis revealed that 15 out of 21 EQ competencies, including Total EQ, were statistically significant ($p < .05$). The relationship between Total EQ and global job satisfaction was significant to the .000 level ($p < .05$). The t -statistic was 4.230 for the regression. In addition, the top five EQ subscale competencies that emerged from this study, when analyzed individually with global job satisfaction, were flexibility, assertiveness, stress tolerance, problem solving, self-actualization.

SUMMARY

The motivation for this study was to better understand career competencies stemming from emotional intelligence and related to satisfaction within positions of academic administration. Consequently, the findings from this study offered insight into which emotional intelligence traits most likely provided job satisfaction. The research revealed that deans who perceived themselves as flexible, assertive, and tolerant of stress tended to be more satisfied with their positions. Likewise, their overall satisfaction with work was higher if they considered themselves to be effective problem solvers and self-actualizers. It is important to note, however, that any inferences gleaned have limitations and may not be applicable beyond the scope of this study. In conclusion, future research should build upon the knowledge gained from this study and the assessment of which EQ competencies have the most significant influence upon job satisfaction within positions of academic leadership needs further investigation.

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