

An Explication of Emotional Intelligence

Dr. Erin McLaughlin
Nova Southeastern University

ABSTRACT

The study of emotions has been a heavily researched topic in areas such as sociology and psychology, but has more recently moved into organizational behavior research as a result of an increased emphasis in studying how emotions relate to performance. In this study I propose that the emotional intelligence (EI) of subordinates is positively related to job performance. I argue that mood mediates the EI-job performance relationship, and propose that emotional labor of the job moderates the EI-mood relationship.

Key words: Emotional Intelligence, Mood, Emotional Labor

INTRODUCTION

Emotions are an undeniable part of organizations. The study of emotions has been a heavily researched topic in areas such as sociology and psychology, but has more recently moved into organizational behavior research as a result of increased emphasis in studying how emotions relate to performance (e.g., Rozell, Pettijohn, & Parker, 2002; Suliman, Abubakr & Al-Shaikh, 2007). Furthermore, from an organizational perspective, job performance is a top concern (e.g., Williams, 1988). An understanding of emotional intelligence is essential for organizations to achieve the highest levels of excellence possible. When individuals are able to identify, facilitate, understand and manage their own emotions, as well as the emotions of others, organizations can achieve success in our highly competitive business environment.

This paper is arranged in three sections. First, I begin by providing a theoretical background of emotional intelligence (EI), mood, and emotional labor. Second, I will discuss the proposed conceptual model including the following: the relationship between EI and employee job performance; employee mood as a mediator in the EI-job performance relationship; and emotional labor as a moderator between the EI-employee mood relationship. Finally, I will conclude the proposal with a discussion of the contributions, limitations, and future research directions of the proposed conceptual model.

Emotional Intelligence

The concept of emotional intelligence (EI) has gained the attention of researchers and practitioners alike (e.g., Shapiro, 1997; Weisenger, 1998; Abraham, 1999) due to the perception that it is a way to survive in today's hostile, competitive, and unpredictable environment. Employees are no longer perceived as biological machines able to leave their feelings, norms, and attitudes at home when they go to work (Suliman, et al., 2007). Thus, organizations have identified the need to send their employees to various EI training courses offered by management consultants (Wong & Law, 2002). Management researchers are also embracing the concept of EI due to its applicability to workplace issues such as performance, job satisfaction, absenteeism, organizational commitment, and leadership issues (Rozell, et al., 2002).

The roots of EI stem from the concept of "social intelligence" which was first acknowledged by Thorndike in 1920. Thorndike defined social intelligence as "the ability to understand and manage men and women, boys and girls—to act wisely in human relations" (p. 231). Gardner (1993) followed up on Thorndike's work and identified seven intelligence domains in his development of the Multiple Intelligence Theory. In Gardner's work on multiple intelligences, he recognized interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligences as two imperative aspects of the social intelligence outlined by Thorndike (1920). Specifically, intrapersonal intelligence was "one's intelligence in dealing with oneself, and thus the ability to symbolize complex and highly differentiated sets of feelings" (p. 239); while interpersonal intelligence was "one's intelligence in dealing with others and the ability to notice and make distinctions among other individuals and, in particular, among their moods, temperaments, motivations, and intentions" (p. 239).

Although 'emotional intelligence' was not specifically published until 1990, general literature had at least referenced the concept as early as the 1980's (Payne, 1986). The work of Payne (1986) was actually a doctoral dissertation in which Wayne Payne never published his theory regarding this notion of emotional intelligence. However, by the late 1980's, psychologists, evolutionary biologists, psychiatrists, computer scientists, and others had

identified a number of human capacities involved in identifying and understanding emotions. A means to organize these many research contributions was imperative, so Mayer and Salovey (1990) proposed that the abilities together made up a unitary emotional intelligence. They suggested that EI could be divided into three broad areas, and further into sub-areas; later Mayer and Salovey (1997) added a fourth and final branch to their model. For this study, I will use Mayer and Salovey's (1997) four dimension model of EI which contains the following:

1. *Identifying emotions.* Identifying or perceiving emotions is the initial and most basic of the four branches. It is the nonverbal reception and expression of emotion, and includes several skills such as the ability to identify feelings, express emotions accurately, and to differentiate between real and phony emotional expressions (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2002). Furthermore, emotions tend to appear in facial expressions, tone of voice, body language, and even works of art (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Emotions researchers, evolutionary biologists, specialists in nonverbal behavior, and others have made tremendous strides in understanding how human beings recognize and express emotions. They have pointed out that emotional expressions evolved in animal species as a form of critical social communication; and that facial expressions such as happiness, sadness, anger, and fear are universally recognizable in humans (Mayer & Salovey, 1997).
2. *Facilitating emotions.* Mayer and Salovey (1990) identified the second area as using emotions to facilitate thought. This is the capacity of emotions to enter into and guide the cognitive system and promote thinking. The emotional facilitation of thought includes the ability to use emotions to redirect attention to important events and to generate emotions that facilitate decision making (Salovey and Mayer, 1990).
3. *Understanding emotions.* This dimension is an assessment of an individual's ability to understand emotions and to reason with emotional knowledge (Kerr, Garvin, Heaton & Boyle, 2006). An individual who understands the complexities of emotions can better handle challenging situations, and the ability to comprehend the cause of emotions gives insight into human nature, particularly regarding relationships (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Understanding emotions is the ability to comprehend complex emotions, the ability to recognize the causes of emotions, and the ability to understand relationships among emotions (Mayer, et al., 2002). Therefore, fully understanding emotions involves the comprehension of the meaning of emotions, coupled with the capacity to reason about those meanings, and it is central to the group of emotionally intelligent skills (Mayer & Salovey, 1997).
4. *Using emotions.* The highest branch of the EI model (Mayer & Salovey, 1990) involves managing both your own feelings and the emotions of others. Managing emotions includes the ability to remain aware of one's emotions, even those that are unpleasant, the ability to determine whether an emotion is clear or typical, and the ability to solve emotion-laden problems without necessarily suppressing negative emotions (Mayer, et al., 2002). Because the using emotions branch is viewed as the most advanced EI ability within the model it has the potential for the greatest impact on performance functions (George, 2000); furthermore, the ability to regulate emotions can assist in the creation of effective strategies to achieve enhanced performance.

Thus, psychology professors John D. Mayer and Peter Salovey are the true founders of emotional intelligence. In their first academic paper (Mayer & Salovey, 1990), the first formal definition of emotional intelligence emerged as, “the ability to perceive emotions, to access and generate emotions so as to assist thought, to understand emotions and emotional knowledge, and to reflectively regulate emotions so as to promote emotional and intellectual thought” (p. 187). In their theory of EI, Mayer and Salovey implied that two distinct mental processes, thinking and feeling, actually work together to focus on the extent to which people’s cognitive capabilities are informed by emotions and the extent to which emotions are cognitively managed.

Shortly after Mayer and Salovey’s (1990) work on EI, journalist Daniel Goleman came across their ‘emotional intelligence’ concept as he was preparing a book on emotional literacy in education. Goleman was captivated by the underlying notions of EI and in 1995 he published the *New York Times* bestseller “Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ.” Captivated by the topic, Goleman published “Working with Emotional Intelligence” in 1998 and “Primal Leadership: Learning to Lead with Emotional Intelligence,” with colleagues Boyatzis and Mckee in 2002.

While there has been substantial discussion about the interaction of cognitive and noncognitive neural systems in the human brain, as well as theory on how that affects emotions (e.g., Fischer, Shaver, & Carnochan, 1990; Izard, 1992, 1993), specific theory on EI and its affect on job performance is quite limited. Following the work of Wong and Law (2002), I will borrow from Gross’ model of emotion regulation (Gross, 1998a, 1998b) in the theoretical development of my propositions. As defined by Gross, emotions are “adaptive behavioral and physiological response tendencies that are called forth directly by evolutionarily significant situations” (Gross, 1998b, p. 272). Because emotions are response tendencies, it is possible for them to be controlled and managed. Thus, emotion regulation refers to “the processes by which individuals influence which emotions they have, when they have them, and how they experience and express these emotions” (Gross, 1998b, p. 275).

Matching the emotion regulation definitions, as provided by Gross, to Mayer and Salovey’s (1990) definition of EI reveals a theoretical foundation for the continually developing stream of research on EI. Before emotions can be controlled, people must identify and accurately express their emotions (Identifying emotions). Furthermore, Gross’ emotion regulation model stipulates that an individual can modify how they use their experiences and emotions, to perhaps promote thinking and guide cognitive thought (Facilitating emotions). While Mayer and Salovey (1997) identify the need to recognize the causes of emotions and the ability to understand relationships among emotions (Understanding emotions), Gross’ emotion regulation model emphasizes an understanding of the reason for the experiencing of the particular emotions. Since our own emotions are often stimulated by others’ emotions, the ability to manage both your own feelings and the emotions of others (Managing emotions), is also imperative in Gross’ model. Thus, the defining of EI and emotion regulation lead to the notion that people with higher emotional intelligence should be more capable of controlling their response tendencies; therefore, such individuals will be more effective in their emotion regulation process. When Gross’ model of emotion regulation is applied to the work context it is evident that emotionally intelligent employees will be more capable of controlling their perception of the environment in which they work (Wong & Law, 2002).

Also continuously addressed and developed over the years are the measures of the EI construct. An early EI measure was developed by a doctoral graduate named Reuven Bar-On, who had just completed his dissertation on psychological well-being. Shortly thereafter, Bar-On

read Goleman's (1995) book and realized the measure he had created for his dissertation was right in line with Goleman's (1995) discussion on EI; so Bar-On quickly went back to his dissertation work and identified his case as the EQ-i, a multidimensional questionnaire measure of emotional intelligence (Bar-On, 1997). Various EI measures were seen throughout psychology, sociology, education, and management literature for many years thereafter. Notable measures included Goleman's Emotional Competency Index (ECI; Goleman, 1995), as well as academic measures based on the work of Mayer and Salovey (1997). According to Ashkanasy and Daus (2005, p. 443) the EI research and associated measures could be identified as part of one of the following three research streams:

- Stream 1 is based on the four-branch abilities model, proposed by Mayer and Salovey (1997), and measured using the MSCEIT.
- Stream 2 encompasses various self- and peer-report measures based on the Mayer-Salovey representation (e.g., Jordan, Ashkanasy, & Hartel 2003; Schutte, Malouff, Hall, Haggerty, Cooper, & Golden, 1998; Wong & Law, 2002).
- Stream 3 comprises expanded models of emotional intelligence that encompass components not included in Salovey and Mayer's definitions, and are represented by the EQ-I (Bar-On, 1997) and the ECI (Goleman, 1995).

Emotional intelligence has become an increasingly popular measure for identifying potentially effective leaders and as a tool for developing effective leadership skills. George (2000) argues that emotionally intelligent leaders can promote organizational effectiveness at all levels. Furthermore, that the EI of leaders plays an important role in the quality and effectiveness of social interactions with other individuals. Salovey, Bedell, Betweiler, and Mayer (1999) found that individuals who rated highly in the ability to perceive accurately, understand and appraise others' emotions, were better able to respond flexibly to changes in their social environments and build supportive networks. Mayer, et al. (1999) proposed that a high level of EI might enable a leader to be better able to monitor how work group members are feeling and take the appropriate action. It is suggested that emotionally intelligent individuals can perceive, understand, and regulate the emotions of others thus making emotional intelligence a significant factor in the success of interpersonal interaction in a work context (Dulewicz, Higgs, & Slaski, 2003). One such instance is employees who may be performing adequately in their current role, but moving them to a position that takes advantage of both technical competencies and emotional abilities could increase their job performance and satisfaction (Salovey & Mayer, 1990).

Abraham (1999) suggested that optimistic individuals would perform better than pessimistic individuals, particularly in sales, and thus, leading to a direct relationship between EI and performance. Ashkanasy and Hooper (1999) associated success at work with the display of positive emotions, proposing that affective commitment is essential in social interaction. Mayer, Goleman, Barrett, and Gutstein (2004) found that understanding of your own emotions, as well as understanding others' emotions, was found to play an important part in organizational life; furthermore, the authors stated that superiors need to manage the mood of their organizations and that a combination of psychological abilities, known as emotional intelligence, will assist in accomplishing work related goals. The work of these authors, Mayer and Salovey (1990, 1997), Goleman (1995, 1998, 2002), and Wong and Law (2002) leads me to my first proposition:

Proposition 1: The level of emotional intelligence of a subordinate is positively related to that subordinate's job performance.

Employee Mood

Even though Affective Events Theory (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996) is a widely respected theoretical model of moods in the workplace, the importance of the mood-performance relationship remains relatively under-researched (Humphrey, 2006). Nonetheless, a few brave researchers have tackled the somewhat ambiguous connection. For instance, Jordan, Lawrence, and Troth (2006) reviewed the available literature on the mood-performance relationship and then completed a longitudinal study to further demonstrate the sizeable impact moods can have on performance. In their article they identify that “moods have an independent and incremental affect on performance – even when incorporating well-known and researched variables such as team cohesion, task conflict, and interpersonal conflict; in addition, they demonstrated that moods have a strong impact on these group processes” (Humphrey 2006, p. 180). These findings reiterate that mood is an actual predictive variable with an independent effect on performance, suggesting the need for manager’s to be aware of employees’ moods.

According to Jones and George (1998), moods depict how people feel as they live their daily lives, such as interactions with others. Additionally, moods are affective states providing information to people about experiences and general states of being (Jacobsen, 1957; Morris, 1989; Nowlis, 1970; Pribam, 1970). As defined by Lazarus (1991) a mood is “a transient reaction to specific encounters with the environment, one that comes and goes depending on particular conditions” (p. 47); furthermore, moods can be induced by dispositional affect and/or emotions. Thus, the need to differentiate moods and emotions is essential for clarification of the two constructs as used throughout the literature. The primary distinction is that emotions are affective states interrupting ongoing behaviors and cognitive processes as they are tied to specific events or circumstances (Simon, 1982). Moods on the other hand are less intrusive or intense, and are the affective states not overtly tied to particular events or circumstances (Jones & George, 1998). Moods affect ongoing activities but in more subtle, less interruptive ways; nonetheless, these day-to-day feelings are significantly affected (Clark & Isen, 1982; Thayer, 1989). Unlike emotions, individuals may not realize that a mood is influencing their behavior, nor may they realize they are even experiencing this “mood” state. Although the realization may not be present, previous research has identified ways to test an individual’s mood through carefully developed questionnaires (e.g., Lane & Jarrett, 2005; Matthews, Jones, & Chamberlain, 1990; Terry, Lane, Lane, & Keohane, 1999). Barsade (2000) tested this lack of awareness in a laboratory study where she found individuals’ positive moods were positively related to their performance in a group. Forgas (1990) tested individual moods and concluded that positive moods led to more positive judgments and negative moods led to more negative judgments, demonstrating how the individuals’ emotions can change decision making and judgments. Furthermore, Tellegen (1985) expressed that moods can be described as moderately unstable, short-term, intraindividual changes.

Overall, an acceptable way to rationalize moods is to think of them in terms of the extent to which they involve positive or negative affect (Meyer & Shack, 1989; Watson & Pennebaker, 1989; Watson & Tellegen, 1985; Jones & George, 1998). High levels of positive affect can be described as moods like “excited,” “enthusiastic,” “active,” “elated,” “peppy,” and “strong,” whereas moods entailing high levels of negative affect can be described by such terms as “distressed,” “hostile,” “jittery,” “nervous,” “scornful,” and “fearful” (Tellegen, 1985; Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988; Watson & Tellegen, 1985).

Mood has been identified as an influence on individuals in numerous situations (e.g., Martin & Tesser, 1996; Lane & Terry, 2000); however, there has recently been considerable

interest on how psychological states, such as mood, are predictive of performance (e.g., Carver & Scheier, 1990; Thelwell, Lane, & Weston, 2005). In important situations, moods have been found to influence performance in both positive and negative ways. Specifically, as found in the results of a study conducted by Carver and Scheier (1990), although individuals may want to experience positive moods prior to a particularly difficult or uncertain task, it was actually found that individuals experienced negative moods due to the discrepancy existing between the task demands and the resources available to deal with the situation. Additional research has found that pre-examining mood states is not only predictive of performance, but also relative to self-set goal difficulty and self-efficacy estimates for the attainment of those goals (Lane, Whyte, Terry, & Nevill 2005). In an empirical investigation of 50 undergraduate students, the Lane, et al. (2005) study reported significant positive intercorrelations between vigor, self-efficacy, self-set goals, and exam performance. Specifically, the findings supported that higher positive moods, such as happiness, and lower negative moods, such as tension, were associated with higher self-efficacy and high goal difficulty levels, which led to higher performance levels. Additionally, Wong and Law (2002) found that emotional intelligence had a positive relationship with job outcomes, but the relationship was moderated by emotional labor; because mood is a personal outcome, the same principles should apply regarding the EI-mood relationship. Thus, as a whole, the previously mentioned literature creates the foundation for the formulation of my second proposition:

Proposition 2: Employee's mood mediates the relationship between subordinate EI and subordinate job performance.

Emotional Labor

While I have used others' arguments and empirical investigations to defend my case on how EI affects job performance and that mood potentially mediates that relationship, I also recognize this may not be the case across all job categories. One reason for these inconsistencies across occupations might be the extent of emotional labor necessary to complete the required tasks. When thinking about it practically, it only makes sense that some jobs are more extensively interactive, like salespeople interacting with customers. Hochschild (1983) identified flight stewardesses as an example of a job requiring a high level of emotional labor, as they are required to stay courteous and friendly to customers even if they are in a bad mood or having a bad day. Wong and Law (2002) also identified bill collectors as having an occupation that requires a high level of emotional labor; although the bill collectors may feel an inclination to sympathize with the clients unable to pay, they must be clear about the task at hand and stay tough on the debtors. On the other hand, some jobs require little, if any, interaction with others, like factory line workers or afterhours janitorial workers. Thus, I borrow the concept of "emotional labor" to represent the degree to which a job necessitates the management of emotions in order to obtain a more positive mood, and in turn positive job performance.

Over the years, emotional labor has been seen as a continuously developing area of theoretical development and investigation (e.g., Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993; Hochschild, 1983; Morris & Feldman, 1996, 1997). Numerous scholars have identified workplace emotions as a commodity employees provide in exchange for individual rewards (Hochschild, 1983; Morris & Feldman, 1996, 1997; Sutton, 1991; Sutton & Rafaeli, 1988, Turner, 1986; Van Mannen & Kunda, 1989; Wharton & Erickson, 1995). These scholars commonly identify three types of "labor" which employees offer in exchange for the rewards. The three types of labor are mental,

physical, and emotional. As explicitly defined by Wong and Law (2002) “mental labor refers to the cognitive skills and knowledge as well as the expertise of employees; physical labor refers to the physical efforts of employees to achieve organizational goals; and emotional labor refers to the extent to which an employee is required to present an appropriate emotion in order to perform the job in an efficient and effective manner” (p. 249).

Additionally, Hochschild’s (1983) investigation of the training of flight attendants at the Delta Airline Stewardess Training Center found that jobs requiring emotional labor have basically three things in common: a) they require face-to-face or voice -to-voice contact with the public; b) they require the worker to produce an emotional state in the customer; and c) they allow the employer, through training and supervision, to exercise some control over the emotional states of employees. Furthermore, research has depicted that emotional labor can have both positive and negative effects for workers with regard to job satisfaction/dissatisfaction (e.g., Morris and Feldman, 1996), job commitment/burnout (e.g., Cordes & Dougherty, 1993; Maslach, 1982, Maslach & Jackson, 1981; Pines & Maslach, 1980), and job performance (e.g., Rutter & Fielding, 1988). Morris and Feldman (1996) argued that the key dimension of emotional labor that is negatively associated with job satisfaction is emotional dissonance, which is defined as the conflict between genuinely felt emotions and emotions required to be displayed in organizations (Middleton, 1989). Workers can experience this emotional dissonance if the emotion display required does not match their real feelings (Morris & Feldman, 1996). Another example of research supporting this notion is the work of Rutter and Fielding (1988) which found that the perceived need to suppress felt emotions in the workplace was negatively associated with job satisfaction and performance outcomes. Research has also focused on the negative effect of emotional labor on job commitment/burnout (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993). The definition of burnout, as defined by Maslach (1982), is a lack of energy and a feeling that one’s emotional resources are used up; workers may feel fatigue, frustration, and tension as they do not want to give of themselves as they have in the past. The negative effects of emotional labor may not only affect the employee but also the organization. An organization may experience customer dissatisfaction, as well as poor job performance and task ineffectiveness from workers. Thus, Wong and Law (2002) found that emotional labor moderated the EI-job outcome relationship; which leads to my third and final proposition:

Proposition 3: Emotional labor moderates the relationship between emotional intelligence (EI) and mood such that when emotional labor is high, the relationship between EI and mood is more strongly positive, than when emotional labor is low.

Furthermore, it is imperative that the following distinction is clear between my constructs of EI and emotional labor. As depicted by Wong and Law (2002) EI is referred to as “a set of interrelated abilities possessed by individuals to deal with emotions” (p. 244), while emotional labor is referred to as “emotion-related job requirements imposed by organizations” (p. 248). More simply stated, emotional labor is in reference to a particular type of job demand and EI is in reference to a particular set of individual abilities. For a summary of the proposed relationships see Figure 1: Model of the Proposed Relationships (Appendix).

CONTRIBUTION

As scholars continue to turn to EI as a core variable affecting performance (e.g., Rozell, Pettijohn, & Parker, 2002; Suliman, Abubakr & Al-Shaikh, 2007; Wong & Law, 2002), the relevance and timeliness of this study is evident. This model proposes that EI leads to better moods with jobs requiring high levels of emotional labor, thus leading to better overall subordinate performance.

This study also has the potential to contribute to the theoretical basis of the EI literature stream. Because EI has such strong roots and ties to social intelligence, theoretically differentiating the two constructs continues to challenge researchers; nonetheless, the EI perspective continues to be another tool that scholars can use in their efforts to identify, understand, and predict behavior. Therefore, this study will add and contribute to the understanding of EI as a theory in and of itself, as well as assisting in the building of a nomological network of support for the EI stream of research.

There are also several practical applications for this study. First, moods are positively related to performance (e.g., Humphrey, 2006; Jordan, et al., 2002), further supporting previous literature regarding the need for positive moods to obtain higher performance outcomes. Second, emotional labor can also have positive and/or negative effects on work such as job satisfaction/dissatisfaction (e.g., Morris & Feldman, 1996; Rutter & Fielding, 1988), job commitment/burnout (e.g., Cordes & Dougherty, 1993; Maslach, 1982, Maslach & Jackson, 1981; Pines and Maslach, 1980), and job performance (e.g., Rutter and Fielding, 1988). Thus, the ability to recognize the amount of emotional labor necessary for each job position will allow for a better employee-job fit. Since job satisfaction and outcomes are negatively related to suppressing or having to hide emotions on the job (Rutter & Fielding, 1988), corresponding workers to jobs that require the completion of tasks within their emotional labor capabilities is essential. Additionally, teaching subordinates and supervisors about the emotional labor necessary for various jobs within their work environment will establish an appreciation and understanding for the completion of the necessary tasks within an organization. Finally, the proposed model supports that high EI levels are preferred in the workplace and are most prevalent if the jobs require emotional labor. If emotional labor was not necessary for the position, then resources may be wasted in seeking only employees with high levels of EI. Thus, the use of emotional intelligence assessment tools in organizations could serve as a way to increase job performance.

In closing, the purpose of this study was to provide a proposed conceptual model of the relationship between emotional intelligence and employee job performance; to assess employee mood as a mediator in the relationship between emotional intelligence and employee job performance; and to investigate emotional labor as a moderator of the relationship between emotional intelligence and employee mood. When individuals possess high emotional intelligence, in jobs requiring emotional labor, employees will have a more positive mood, thus leading to more positive subordinate job performance.

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APPENDIX

Figure 1: Model of Proposed Relationships

