



The Relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Innovative Work Behavior

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Abstract: Researchers agree that innovation is one of the competitive business strategies to ensure sustainability of local small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) in the global market. However, the level of innovative work behavior (IWB) among Malaysia's SMEs is not encouraging. Studies have claimed that emotional intelligence as one of the precursors of innovative work behavior. Emotional intelligence (EQ) enables employees to disseminate and implement innovative ideas more effectively as they have the abilities to understand and manage their own emotion and others. Thus, this study aimed to examine the relationship between emotional intelligence and its respective dimensions with innovative work behavior among employees working in food and beverage (F&B) medium sized enterprises. The research is quantitative research questionnaires as data collection method. A total of 400 questionnaires were collected from F&B medium sized enterprises' employees located at Selangor, Kuala Lumpur, Johor, Perak, and Penang via quota sampling. Descriptive analysis confirmed that the level of IWB is moderate in line with previous studies. EQ explained 25.7% variance in IWB with self-management has the strongest influence. This finding implies that selection and hiring of employees should consider the use of EQ for testing.

Keywords: Emotional intelligence, innovative work behaviour, medium sized enterprise, food and beverage manufacturing employees

1. Introduction

Malaysian researchers (Subrahmanya et al., 2010; Chin, 2010; Talebi & Tajeddin, 2010) had found that innovation is one of focal business strategies for local small and medium sized enterprise to stay competitive in the global market. This is especially true in the context of Food and Beverage (F&B) industry as it contributes around 10% of Malaysia's manufacturing production (MIDA, 2018). Moreover, since this industry relies on manual labor, investment in human capital keeps growing to increase employee expertise in product, process to improve organizational efficiency, standards, and productivity. Such strategies require employees to demonstrate innovative work behavior (IWB). According to De Jong & Den Hartog (2010), employee's IWB are described as behaviors which include exploration, generation, championing, and implementation of ideas to start the process of innovation. Innovativeness of employees can also effectively foster and stimulate organizational creativity (Kesting & Ulhoi, 2010).

Nonetheless, Hilmi et al. (2012) claims that the level of innovative work behaviour among Malaysian employees is not particularly high. This fact is indirectly supported by Global Innovation Index (GII) (MASTIC, 2019), where Malaysia retains its 35th position in the GII 2019 with innovation index of 43.16%. As the country’s innovation performance is linked with the accrued performances of business entities, this implies that employees’ innovative work behavior remains a significant issue.

There are numerous variables at various levels (organizational, individual and situational) that are claimed to improve innovative work behaviour. In fact, numerous studies have been focusing on organizational variables such as organization climate (Imran et al., 2010), transformational leadership (Reuvers et al., 2008), and ethical leadership (Yidong & Xinxin, 2013) while there is limited study on individual variables especially emotional intelligence. According to Steiner (2007), emotional intelligence (EQ) is one of significant predictors in enhancing innovative work behaviour since high level of EQ means that employees have the abilities to disseminate their ideas effectively and implement innovative solutions at work (Goleman, 2001). Thus, this paper aimed to identify the levels of IWB and EQ among F&B employees and determine whether EQ is a significant predictor of IWB.

2. Literature Review

This section reviews the conceptual definitions of both EQ and IWB and their related models or theories. Previous studies linking these two variables were also highlighted as basis of hypothesis formulation.

2.1 Innovative Work Behavior and Related Models.

Different authors have different definition for innovative work behaviour (IWB). Dorenbosch et al. (2005) describe IWB as the willingness of an employee to develop innovations. On the other hand, Carmeli et al. (2006) define IWB as consisting different behaviors that could be labelled as innovative. Their definition involves creating and promoting ideas, seeking support, and effectively implementing innovation in the workplace. They also point out the comparative nature of novelty, including new and acquired (novel or adopted) ideas as part of IWB. Similarly, Devloo et al. (2015) define IWB as a broad and encompassing behavioral framework consisting not only idea generations, but also transforming these ideas into concrete innovations. Essentially, IWB employees would enhance aspects of their work environment if opportunities are found and would usually be able to implement changes proposed by co-workers or others outside the company. Perhaps, one of the prominent definitions of IWB is provided by De Jong & Den Hartog (2007) where IWB refers to individual’s intentional behaviour to introduce or adapt new ideas, items, processes, and procedures to his or her job position, unit, or organization. The definition suggests that IWB is related to relative innovation and not absolute novelties. Moreover, IWB can be partial and focuses on behaviour alone excluding attitude or output.

This paper discusses two models related to IWB which are Dorenbosch et al. (2005) and De Jong & Den Hartog (2010). Dorenbosch et al. (2005) include two core macro-phases in the process of creativity and generation (Creativity-oriented Work Behaviour) and execution (Implementation-oriented Work Behaviour) as shown in Figure 1. Creativity-oriented Work Behavior consists of problem recognition and idea generation. According to Dorenbosch et al., (2005), individual’s IWB begins with the recognition and assessment of work-related issues, accompanied by the development of new and useful ideas within the work frame. The last two behavioural sets are related to applying behaviour, such as introducing a new concept to potential partners (e.g., peers and managers) and understanding actual ideas that can actually be implemented within the work-role, community, or whole organization.

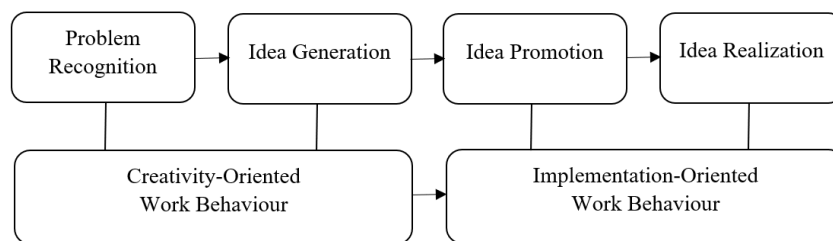


Fig. 1 - Model of Innovative Work Behaviour (Dorenbosch et al., 2005)

The model proposed by De Jong & Den Hartog (2010) have similar concept with two phases of behavioral activities which are initiation and implementation. Initiation phase includes ideas generation and exploration while implementation consists of idea championing and implementation. Individual’s innovation starts with the idea exploration such as seeking or attempting to learn about it in new ways to develop existing goods, services, and work processes. The idea is then generated which means generating ideas related to new goods, services, processes, new market penetration, improvements in current work processes, or in general, solutions to defined problems. Idea championing includes finding support and creating a group of supporters for the new concept. Championing also involves acts related to finding support and establishing relationships, such as convincing and influencing other

workers, facilitating, and negotiating. Finally, idea implementation takes place where employees decided to develop experiment and commercialize new goods, services, or work processes. It includes developing new goods or workflows and testing and modifying.

The review of various conceptualization of IWB and its related model found that De Jong & Den Hartog's (2010) definition of IWB is the most suitable to be adopted in this study due to its established empirical support.

2.2 Emotional Intelligence and Related Theories

Emotional Intelligence (EQ) has been claimed as one of the main factors in improving innovative work behaviour (Suliman & Al-Shaikh 2007; Jafri et al. 2016). Salovey and Mayer coined the term "emotional intelligence" in 1990 where the concept of emotional intelligence embraces interpersonal and intrapersonal skills as the ability to track the feelings and emotions of one and others, to interpret and use that knowledge to direct one's own thoughts and behaviours. Mayer & Salovey (1997) further refined their concept of EQ and refers it as the ability to interpret, appraise, and express emotions correctly; the ability to access or produce feelings as they encourage thought; the ability to identify cognitive and emotional knowledge; and the ability to regulate emotions to support emotional and intellectual development. Bar-On (1997), on the other hand, viewed emotional intelligence as being non-cognitive abilities, and skills that affect an individual's ability to successfully cope with environmental needs and stress. Bar-On (2002) clarified that emotional intelligence encompasses one's cognitive, personal, and social aspects of general intelligence: it encompasses talents, competencies, and skills related to self-understanding, peer-related, family-related, and adjusting to changing environmental circumstances and needs. The popular guru of EQ, Goleman (1995), described emotional intelligence as the ability to motivate and persevere in the face of frustrations; the ability to control desire and postpone gratification; the ability to regulate one's moods and avoid distracting thinking; and the ability to focus and hope in the organizational settings.

Contrary to IWB, EQ has more established theoretical root. The concept is rooted in the Theory of Multiple Intelligences by Gardner (1983). According to Gardner (1983), there are eight types of intelligences: linguistic-verbal, logical-mathematical, musical, visual-spatial, physical-kinesthetic, naturalistic, and two types of personal intelligences: interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligences. Interpersonal intelligence is the ability to identify and differentiate between the moods, temperaments, motives, and intentions of others, while intrapersonal intelligence is the ability to discern, mark and draw upon feelings as a means of recognizing and directing one's behaviour. Mayer & Salovey (1997) further expanded Gardner's personal and intrapersonal intelligence into the skill model of EQ which focuses on perceiving comprehension, managing feelings, and using that knowledge to promote learning, and directing one choices. Their EQ model consists of four forms of human abilities: emotional perception, emotional assimilation, emotional understanding, and emotional management, seeking to promote the growth of modern knowledge and a better way to build trusting relationships. Bar-On (1997), on the other hand, proposed competencies-based EQ model consisting of self-expression, self-perception, decision-making, interpersonal, stress management, and 15 subscales. The model assumes that people with an above-average EQ typically fulfill environmental needs and stress more effectively. Recent model of EQ that claimed to be well suitable for organizational context is the one proposed by Goleman (2001) following his book titled "Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ". Goleman's model of EQ outlines four main EQ constructs: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management. It was originally developed with five domains in 1998 and redesigned with four domains in 2001. His mixed model of emotional intelligence combines capability and personality of an individual. The first domain of self-awareness is the basis of all other domains. Individual with high level of self-awareness can identify and recognize one's emotions and use intuition to direct decision-making. Self-management is the second domain that enable regulating of emotions and desires in respond to changing circumstances. Social awareness involves the ability to interpret, understand, and respond to other people's emotions by recognizing social networks. Lastly, relationship management is the fourth mechanism capable of encouraging, shaping, and improving others when handling conflict (Goleman, 2001). Central to Goleman's model is the fact that emotional ability is not an innate talent, but an ability that could be learned and developed to achieve outstanding performance. In this study, Goleman's EQ model is chosen as it is a performance-based measure. (Matthews et al., 2004).

2.3 Emotional Intelligence and Innovative Work Behavior

As mentioned earlier, there is limited empirical evidence linking EQ and IWB. However, several studies have found significant relationship between these two constructs. A study conducted by Shojaei & Siuki (2014) among managers found that there is a strong and important association between the EQ and its elements with managers' IWB. In addition, regression analysis showed the highest influence of the self-management component in estimating the innovative work behaviour of the managers followed by relationship-management, self-awareness, and social awareness. In addition, Al-Omari's (2017) study showed that emotional intelligence has a strong connection with innovative work behaviour among telecommunications engineers in the telecommunications sector in Jordan. In similar vein, Dincer & Orhan (2012) also found significant positive relationship between EQ and IWB among employees in Turkish banking sector. Rego et al., (2007) who investigated the relationship between leaders' EQ and their team's

innovation showed that emotionally intelligent leaders act in ways that stimulate their team member’s creativity and innovation. Other studies also demonstrated that EQ has a significant relationship on IWB in entrepreneurial firms (Piperopoulos, 2010; Zampetakis et al., 2009; Slaski & Cartwright, 2003; Zhou & Shalley, 2003; Goleman, 1998; Janssen, 2000). Although none of these studies have been focusing on SMEs’ employees, it is hypothesized that there are indeed significant relationships between EQ and its dimensions with IWB (H_a).

3. Methodology

This study employed a quantitative approach using a cross-sectional survey strategy. Williams (2007) claimed that a quantitative research approach can be used to respond to relational questions of variables within the study. A cross-sectional survey was commonly used in behavioral and social science studies to describe relationships among hypothesized variables.

3.1 Data Collection and Sample

The data were collected through questionnaires distributed among employees of forty SMEs located in Selangor, Kuala Lumpur, Johor, Perak and Penang. Each company gave permission for data collection with a quota of ten employees. These states were selected based on the concentration of F&B SMEs. According to Human Resources Development Funds (HRDF Human Capital Report, 2019) internal database, there are 309 medium-sized enterprise food and beverage industries in Malaysia with Selangor, Kuala Lumpur, Johor, Perak and Penang having a higher number of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) with 19.8%, 14.7%, 10.8%, 8.3% and 7.4% respectively (Economic Census 2016, Department of Statistics Malaysia 2017).

Majority of respondents were males (58.5%), Malay (41.3%), below 35 years old (69.8%) with an average working years of less than six years (63%). Majority of respondents were degree holders (44.5%) indicating that majority of respondents were not blue-collar employees.

Table 1 - Profiles of respondent

Demographic	Items	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	234	58.5
	Female	166	41.5
Age	25 years old and below	154	38.5
	26 - 35 years old	125	31.3
	36 - 45 years old	61	15.3
	46 years old and above	60	15.0
Race	Malay	165	41.3
	Chinese	124	31.0
	Indian	84	21.0
	Others	27	6.8
Educational Level	Secondary School (SPM)	71	17.8
	Pre-University/Diploma	128	32.0
	Bachelor’s Degree	178	44.5
	Master	17	4.3
	Doctorate Degree (PHD)	6	1.5
Working Experience	3 years and below	138	34.5
	4 - 6 years	114	28.5
	7 - 9 years	57	14.3
	10 years and above	91	22.8

3.2 Measures

Questionnaires used in this study were adopted from validated measurements of previous researches. Innovative work behavior was measured using 10 items from De Jong & Den Hartog (2010) while emotional intelligence was measured using 12 items adapted from Goleman (2001). The Cronbach’s coefficient alpha for EQ is 0.848 while the Cronbach’s Alpha value for the innovative work behavior is 0.893. Both values are above 0.7 which showed high inter-item consistency (Nunnally, 1978). Exploratory factor analysis for EQ revealed Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling of 0.720, which is good (Hair et al., 2012). Bartlett’s test of sphericity was significant at $\chi^2(66) = 598.329, p < 0.05$. Rotated component matrix revealed four dimensions of EQ as claimed in the model accounted for 52.8% of variance.

Innovative work behavior has Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling of 0.879, which is good (Hair et al, 2012) and Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant at $\chi^2(91) = 1110.611, p < 0.05$). However, rotated component only showed three dimensions of IWB with 46.394% of variance explained.

Prior to linear regression analysis, assumptions of linearity, residual independence, multivariate normality and homoscedasticity were tested and confirmed.

4. Results and Discussion

Descriptive analysis (Table 2) showed that the means (M) and standard deviation of both EQ and IWB and their respective dimensions. Idea implementation had the highest mean which was 3.680 while the second highest mean was idea exploration (M=3.608) followed by idea generation (M=3.581) and idea championing (M=3.525). Relationship management had the highest mean which was 3.823 followed by social awareness and self-management (M=3.818 and 3.700 respectively). The lowest mean is 3.695 which was self-awareness.

Table 2 - Mean and standard deviation

	Mean	Standard Deviation
Dependent Variable (Innovative Work Behaviour)		
Idea exploration	3.608	0.581
Idea generation	3.581	0.526
Idea championing	3.525	0.716
Idea implementation	3.680	0.618
Independent Variable (Emotional Intelligence)		
Self-awareness	3.695	0.669
Self-management	3.700	0.722
Social awareness	3.818	0.616
Relationship management	3.823	0.631

Regression analysis showed that emotional intelligence accounted for 25.7% variance in IWB as shown in Table 3. Among the dimensions, self-management has the strongest relationship with IWB, followed by self-awareness. These findings are consistent with previous studies (Shojaei & Siuki (2014); Janssen (2000); Dincer and Orhan (2012) despite contextual differences. Recognizing the understanding of oneself and others are linked to organization values of innovativeness. These values enable workers to trust each other and then pursue the common goal of teamwork and thus achieve the goal of innovativeness

Table 3 - Multiple regression

Variable	IWB		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β
Self-awareness	0.146	0.034	0.210**
Self-management	0.144	0.031	0.224**
Social awareness	0.078	0.039	0.104*
Relationship management	0.119	0.037	0.161*
<i>R</i> ²	0.257		
<i>F</i>	34.178**		

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

5. Conclusions

Findings of this study highlighted the importance of emotional intelligence in cultivating innovative work behavior. Self-awareness is indeed a fundamental understanding of how we feel and why we feel that way. The more we are conscious of our emotions, the easier it is to control and dictate how we might react to others. From the result, self-awareness is significantly related to IWB, emphasizing its importance especially in terms of exploring and generating new ideas. This is because creativity involves sense-making which could only be made possible through heightened self-awareness. This is indeed confirmed by the significant relationship of self-management. According to Goleman (2001), self-management refers to the capability to manage one's behavior, emotions, and feelings in flexible ways to achieve the desired results. Optimal self-management leads to a sense of well-being, a sense of self-efficacy or confidence, and a sense of connection with others. Innovative work behavior requires employees to ensure ideas could be translated into real improvements and this requires them to be adaptable. Although in terms of strength, the

relationship between social awareness and relationship management were not as strong as the self-awareness and self-management, these dimensions of EQ still play important roles especially in terms of idea championing and implementation. The ability to recognize and manage people emotions whether they are the superiors, co-workers or subordinates are instrumental in getting the ideas to be accepted and later on implemented. This finding is further supported by previous researchers (Goleman, 1998; Slaski & Cartwright, 2003; Zhou and Shalley 2003; Zampetakis et al., 2009; Piperopoulos, 2010) who found a significant relationship between emotional intelligence and innovativeness in entrepreneurial organizations. Relationship management is the capability to effectively control one's own emotions, others' emotions, and the context to effectively handle social interactions (Goleman, 2001). In order to advocate ideas, there is a need to influence and refine one's reaction to move the interaction in a positive direction. It is important that this is a genuine effort to help everyone achieve the best possible result and not ever become an act of self-interest exploitation.

This contribution of this study is twofold. The major contribution would be in using EQ as testing for selection and hiring purposes. As EQ has demonstrated to be predictor of IWB, human resource practitioners need to consider EQ assessment together with personality assessment. Empirically, this study contributes in filling in the existing knowledge gap on the theoretical linkage between EQ and IWB. Although generalization of the findings should be done cautiously, its future implications are indeed promising.

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