What is the Value of Soft Skills? Emotional Intelligence and Work Values in Global Work Environment

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Abstract: This research paper discusses the profile of emotional intelligence and work values among 437 purposively selected call center representatives from the Middle East, Iran, Pakistan, Russia, India, and the Philippines. The descriptive, comparative-correlational methods were employed as this paper also aims to find out whether customer service representatives (CSRs) differ on emotional intelligence and work values based on selected demographic characteristics. The researchers utilized three instruments, namely the Demographic Profile Sheet, Emotional Competence Inventory, and Work Values Inventory. The general findings reveal that there is a significant relationship between emotional intelligence (particularly on the clusters of self-management, social awareness and relationship management) and work values (specifically in the areas of management, achievement, supervisory relations, way of life, and independence). The organizational development support programs with emphasis on diversity management have been recommended to set future directions for organizations in Business Process Organizations involved in the study.

Introduction

An important feature of call center work is the presentation of emotions that are specified by the organization and embodied in the rules of employment (Morris & Feldman, as cited in Deery, et al., 2010). In relation to this, Holman, as cited in Wegge, Vogt & Wecking (2007), found that since agents are supposed to be always friendly to customers, and because their performance is usually controlled by the organization (e.g. by making test calls), deviations from this norm will easily be detected. Hence, strong requirements to hide or downplay negative emotions and to fake positive

emotions during work are present in call center work (Wegge, et al., p. 694, 2007). According to Grandly (as cited in Deery, et al., 2010), when encountering customers who are hostile, it is common for employees to be forced to express emotions they do not feel like that of being friendly and happy. It is also common for CSRs to suppress emotions that they genuinely feel such as anger and frustration. This can lead to feelings of inauthenticity and emotional dissonance (Lee & Ashforth, as cited in Deery, et al., 2010). Hochschild (as cited in Zapf et al., 2003) coined the term "emotional labor" for this kind of job requirement. Zapf, as cited in Zapf et al. (2003) also referred to it as emotion work, which is defined as the psychological processes necessary to regulate organizationally desired emotions as part of one's job.

Zapf, Vogt, Seifert, Mertini and Isic (as cited in Zapf, 2003) differentiated the aspects of emotion work namely (1) the requirement to display positive emotions, (2) the requirement to display negative emotions, (3) the requirement to sense the interaction partner's emotions or the "sensitivity requirements", and (4) the dissonance felt between the felt and displayed emotions or "emotional dissonance". In the study of Zapf e al. (2003), it was proven that CSRs had to express less negative emotions and frequently exposed to emotional dissonance. Emotional dissonance can lead to anxiety and burnout (Lee & Ashforth, as cited in as cited in Deery, et al., 2010).

It may be impossible that CSRs will always be in a good mood during their conversations with customers, especially when some of them are rude. But as expected of them, CSRs must always be friendly, as if they are "smiling" on the telephone, despite of how they really feel. According to Grebner, et al. (2003), emotion work implies emotional dissonance, a stressor that occurs when an employee displays emotions that are appropriate when dealing with customers. However, these emotions are different from what the employee genuinely feels.

Other workers have employed collective methods in order to cope with job stress. These workers (1) draw on the social support of their colleagues; (2) withhold full support from management to create porosity in them; and (3) temporarily withdraw through absenteeism, a behaviour which becomes collective as workers develop norms of absences becoming legitimate if it is a response to stressful work, thus creating an absence culture. This can be reinforced by team leader absence permissiveness. Therefore, a supportive co-worker, absence culture and team leader absence permissiveness are able to lessen the effects of job demands on emotional exhaustion (Deery, et al, 2010).

The employees who receive support from colleagues and supervisors are able to cope better and experience less strain. The help they receive provide a bolster on their emotional resources in dealing with their work-related difficulties (House et al., as cited in Deery, et al, 2010). This is further proven in the study of Korczynski (as cited in Deery, et al, 2010) that among CSRs, peer support and empathy are important for them to cope with the emotional pain caused by aggressive and abusive customers.

Review of Related Literature

On Emotional Intelligence and Work Values

Different models and research findings are related to the current study. Some studies on demographic data related to emotional intelligence have been explored by Sergio (2011), Sergio and Marcano (2013) and Sergio, Dungca, and Ormita (2015) when demographic variables and emotional Intelligence were correlated. The baseline literature established the link between demographic variables (such as gender, civil status, work time schedule, and nationality) on emotional intelligence.

Goleman (1998) has set out a theoretical framework of emotional intelligence (EI) that reflects how an individual's potential for mastering the skills of Self-Awareness, Self-Management, Social Awareness, and Relationship Management translates into on-the-job success. This model is based on EI competencies that have been identified in internal research at hundreds of corporations, educational institutions, and organizations as distinguishing outstanding performers. Focusing on EI as a theory of performance, it looks at the physiological evidence underlying EI theory, and it reviews a number of studies of the drivers of workplace performance and the factors that distinguish the best individuals from the average ones.

The importance of emotions in workplace has been established by many scholars. Growing (2001) investigated the roots of emotional intelligence in organizational environment in classical management theory and practice to understand the abilities of human being. Over three decades of psychological assessment intervention and research has justified the importance of taking social and emotional competencies into consideration when attempting to predict occupational effectiveness. Cherniss and Goleman (2001) concluded that interventions targeted at EI-based competencies are effective and tend to enhance such desired outcomes as self-awareness and rapport.

On another hand, the theory and research on work values by Roe and Ester (1999) precede largely from

the premise that it is derived from people's basic value systems that help them navigate through the multiple spheres of their lives. An early definition by Rokeach (1973) states that a value is an enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or end-state of existence is personally or socially preferable. It is an opposite or converse mode of conduct or end-state of existence Uyguç (2003). Rokeach (1973) defined beliefs about preferable modes of conduct 'instrumental values' and beliefs about preferable end-states 'terminal values'. In a value system, individuals rank-order their instrumental and terminal values along a continuum of importance. Work values on the other hand are more specific than general life values as they apply to a specific life domain. As such, according to Šverko (1989) and Sta. Ana, Frega, and Sergio (2013), work values influence the importance of work in the life of the individual.

The theories laid out above points to internal (emotional) state driven outwardly as one deals with people in any organization; whereas, the manifestation of behavior (internal and external values system) is treated as a separate circumstance. Linking the two theoretical constructs would establish a baseline literature on emotional intelligence and work values.

The following hypotheses are drawn:

H1: The demographic variables such as age, gender, civil status, work time schedule, and nationality have significant differences based on emotional intelligence.

H2: Emotional intelligence significantly relates to work values of the respondents.

Methodology

A total of 437 purposively selected Customer Service Representatives in Dubai, UAE and the Philippines representing different nationalities namely Middle East (Egyptian, Emirati, Syrian, Palestinian, Jordanian, Omani, and Iraqi), Iran, Pakistan, Russia, India and the Philippines were included in this study.

The Demographic Profile Sheet, Emotional Competence Inventory (ECI) and Work Values Inventory were the research instruments used to gather demographic characteristics, emotional competence and work values data, respectively. The Demographic Profile Sheet includes items such as age, gender, civil status, work schedule and nationality. The ECI measures 18 competencies (identified by Dr. Daniel Goleman, 1998) organized into four clusters: *Self-Awareness (*knowing one's internal states, preferences, resources, and intuitions; it contains three competencies: emotional awareness, accurate self-assessment and self-confidence)*, Self-*

*Management (*refers to managing ones' internal states, impulses, and resources; it contains six competencies: emotional self-control, transparency, adaptability, achievement, initiative, optimism)*, Social Awareness (*how people handle relationships and awareness of others' feelings, needs, and concerns; this contains three competencies: empathy, organizational awareness, and service orientation)*, and Relationship Management (*the skill or adeptness at inducing desirable responses in others; this cluster contains six competencies: developing others, inspirational leadership, change catalyst, influence, conflict management, teamwork and collaboration) while the revised Work Values Inventory developed by Dr. Donald Super includes 15 work values scales—Altruism, Variety, Creativity, Way of Life, Security, Associates, Aesthetic, Prestige, Management, Achievement, Surroundings, Social Relations, Economic Reasons, Intellectual Stimulation, and Independence.

Descriptive statistics were employed to provide quantitative descriptions of the respondents' demographic characteristics such as frequency and percentages distribution and the profile of the respondents in terms of data on emotional competence and work values. Pearson's r was utilized to determine the correlation between emotional intelligence and work values.

Problem Formulation

The following research objectives are involved in this study:

1. To know the profile of the respondents in terms of age, gender, civil status, work time schedule, and nationality.
2. To describe the difference between the demographic profile variables and emotional intelligence.
3. To establish the correlation between emotional intelligence and work values.
4. To recommend programs for organizational development.

Problem Solution

The formulated research objectives are hereby addressed:

The Demographic Profile of the Respondents

The respondents are mostly female (69.8%), single (68%) and with ages ranging from 20 to 29 (78.5%) years old. More than 50% of the respondents represent

the United Arab Emirates. Majority of the respondents follow real time work schedule (53.8%).

Significant Differences on Emotional Intelligence based on Demographic Variables

As can be gleaned on Table 1, there are differences on emotional intelligence based on demographic variables. CSRs do not seem to differ on all clusters of ECI as well as the overall emotional intelligence when grouped according to age.

There are gender differences on overall emotional intelligence but not in any of the four clusters of emotional intelligence. On *Social Awareness*, *Relationship Management* and overall emotional intelligence, CSRs differ when grouped according to civil status and work time schedule. Only in *Social Awareness* cluster, however, that there is a significant difference among CSRs based on nationality. Based on these findings, it can be said that single and married CSRs differ on how they handle relationships as well as their level of awareness of other's feelings, needs and concerns. Likewise, CSRs' work time schedule and nationality seem to contribute to differences in the way they handle relationships and their awareness of others' feelings and perspectives. The same result has been found in terms of the CSRs' skills or adeptness at inducing desirable responses in others. Single and married differ in this aspect in the same manner as those CSRs working on real and opposite time.

Table 1. Differences on Emotional Competence based on Demographic Variables

Demo. Variables		Self Aw.	Self Mgmt.	Social Aw.	Rel. Mgmt.	ECI Overall
Age	t	.364	802	1.422	1.133	1.185
	p	.716	.423	.156	.258	.237
Gender	t	1.949	1.937	1.782	1.651	2.345
	p	.052	.053	.075	.099	.019
Civil Sta.	t	1.067	1.771	2.207	2.125	2.286
	p	.286	.077	.028	.034	.023
Work Sc.	t	1.133	1.704	2.943	3.262	2.911
	p	.258	.089	.003	.001	.004
National.	f	1.221	1.055	4.056	.485	.806
	p	.298	.385	.001	.787	.546

In the study conducted by Ealias and George (2012), they found that there is a significant difference on the emotional intelligence between married and unmarried respondents.

Malik, Khatoon and Khursid (2011) said married prospective teachers had higher level of emotional intelligence than unmarried ones. Significant difference was also observed in emotional intelligence among student teachers when they were grouped according to marital status (Singaravelu, n.d.). This is also supported by the study of Sergio (2011) and Sergio and Marcano (2003).

Correlation between Emotional Intelligence and Work Values

Table 2 displays the correlation between emotional intelligence and work values. The first emotional intelligence cluster which is Self Awareness or the ability to manage one's internal states, impulses and resources has a negative relationship with all areas of work values. This means that the CSRs are not able to recognize their emotions and its impact on them, the strengths and limitations they have and their self-worth, the more they will not be able to value their work in all its dimensions.

Table 2. Correlation between Emotional Intelligence and Work Values

Work Values		Emotional Intelligence				
		Self Aw.	Self Mgt	Soc. Aw.	Rel. Mgt.	ECI Overall
Creativity	R	.029	.048	.089	.089	.082
	P	.544	.313	.064	.064	.089
Management	R	.056	.114	.057	.119	.111
	P	.244	.017	.237	.013	.021
Achievement	R	.050	.107	.120	.125	.128
	P	.294	.025	.012	.009	.007
Surroundings	R	-.011	-.044	-.020	-.049	-.040
	P	.814	.360	.672	.311	.402
Sup. Rel.	R	.074	.127	.194	.100	.155
	P	.123	.008	.000	.037	.001
Way of life	R	.076	.113	.108	.037	.103
	P	.114	.018	.024	.442	.031
Security	R	.020	.072	.096	.053	.075
	P	.680	.133	.044	.270	.116
Associates	R	-.073	-.012	.000	-.014	-.033
	P	.128	.795	.993	.773	.489
Aesthetics	R	-.048	.083	.122	.086	.075
	P	.315	.083	.011	.072	.118
Prestige	R	.010	.076	.077	.059	.069
	P	.830	.111	.106	.215	.148
Independence	r	.062	.119	.103	.069	.110
	p	.195	.012	.031	.148	.021
Variety	r	.025	.126	.082	.030	.080
	p	.606	.008	.088	.528	.096
Eco. Return	r	.000	.018	.008	.057	.027
	p	1.000	.713	.866	.238	.568
Altruism	r	.012	.108	.087	.050	.079
	p	.802	.024	.069	.296	.099
Intel. Sti.	r	-.015	.037	-.023	-.016	-.007
	p	.752	.445	.625	.736	.884

The second emotional intelligence cluster which is Self Management or the ability manage ones' internal states, impulses, and resources that contains six competencies: emotional self-control, transparency, adaptability, achievement, initiative, optimism has significant relationship with some areas of work values such as Management, Achievement, Supervisory Relations, Way of Life, Independence, and Altruism. The result implies that the more that the CSRs are in control of their emotions, the more they can perform on their jobs and the more efficient they

can function as a supervisor or manager in the workplace being unconditionally dedicated. Moreover, as an implication, CSRs have to manage their emotions because of the nature of their stressful work. They have to control their temper when encountering irate callers and this result to emotional dissonance.

The third emotional intelligence cluster is Social Awareness or how people handle relationships and awareness of others' feelings and needs has a significant relationship with work values, specifically with Achievement, Supervisory Relations, Way of Life, Security, Aesthetics, and Independence. This result showcases that the more call center workers can show empathy, recognize the emotions of their work group, as well as anticipate, recognize and meet the needs of the customers, the more they will be able to value work through leadership without restraint.

The fourth emotional intelligence cluster which is Relationship Management concerns the skill or adeptness at inducing desirable responses in others also possesses significant relationship with work values, particularly with Management, Achievement, and Supervisory Relations. It is so because the CSRs' work is stressful in so many ways and they need to show teamwork, collaboration, leadership, and to meet targets through collective efforts, manage change, and resolve conflicts. Thus, a high EI is likely to help boost work values.

It can be gleaned from the table that the overall emotional intelligence clusters and dimensions significantly relate to work values such as Management, Achievement, Supervisory Relations, Way of Life, and Independence. These findings point that the higher the work values pertaining to interest to lead and exercise autonomy, the more emotionally intelligent the CSRs are. This result is supported by Sergio, Dungca, & Ormita (2015) when they have found out that the respondents can manage their own emotions and can relate well with people around them, recognizing common rules as essential to their individual roles, and be able to contribute without being directed. Hence, the alternative hypothesis that there is a significant relationship between emotional intelligence and work values among CSRs is accepted.

The results are supported by Bradzil & Slaski (2003) when he pointed out that people with high EQ are more grounded, more resilient and are more satisfied at work; they display empathy, are adaptable and able to cope with pressure and generally experience less stress and better health and well-being than low scorers.

In the light of the foregoing findings and conclusions, the recommendations below are presented to help improve the call center organizations towards organizational development.

The researchers believe that the organizations involved in the study are constantly changing its practices depending on its response to markets conditions, process improvements, among others and these have impact on the internal customers' work-family conflicts. The emotional competencies required in coping with conflicts that involve in work and family remains to be a concern. The cross-cultural examination has pointed on the three-dimensional programs that can help organizations involved in the study cope with change:

Soft Skills Training Program. As the results showcase that most CSRs are not able to recognize their emotions and its impact on them, there is a need for Soft Skills Training Program, particularly the Self-Awareness, Self Management, Social Awareness, and Relationship Management Programs. This set of training programs may be a series of seminar-workshops that enhance emotional competence, particularly personal competence. The strategic purpose of such program is to provide the employees in the organization with the right soft skills, tools and techniques required for them to perform their role effectively as the changes in multicultural environment of CSRs are being implemented.

Communications Program. The CSRs from the Middle East, Iran, Pakistan, Russia, India, and the Philippines have something in common: The constant use of communication technology as part of globalization. Any change management efforts will be futile if the organization fails to employ the carefully structured communication mechanisms to inform internal customers about certain development efforts. Knowing that these CSRs interact with external and internal customers, communication is always viewed as a vital component to the overall change management program. Detailed resources are highly recommended for organizations in this study as they manage change. For instance, communications tool kits for managers and team head shall be made available for both physical and online facilities.

Closing the Loop Management Program. By "closing the loop", the call center organizations involved in this study actively monitor feedback on the planned changes. The first dimension (Soft Skills Training Program) is the core of implementation whilst the second dimension (Communications Program) supports the entire organizational intervention. The identification of resistance, validated surveys to describe effectiveness during implementation, and ways to combat all sorts barriers encountered are some of the efficient ways to

effectuate change in the organizations involved in this study.

Conclusion

CSRs who are male, younger, and single, as well as those whose work time schedule is opposite are more emotionally intelligent that their counterparts. Filipino CSRs were found to be emotionally intelligent in handling relationships, conscious of others' feelings and needs as well as skilled at inducing desirable responses in others. Russians, on the other hand, were found to be emotionally aware, self-confident, and capable of assessing self accurately as well as good at managing the self.

Emotional intelligence is not influenced by age. However, gender, marital status, nationality and work schedule all appear to have an impact on emotional competence among CSRs. On the other hand, work-family conflict has been found to be affected by age, marital status, nationality and work schedule but not with gender.

Based on the findings of the study, it can be concluded that emotional intelligence plays an important role in specific areas of work values (Management, Achievement, Supervisory Relations, Way of Life, and Independence) among CSRs.

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