Assessing Emotional Intelligence in the Indian workplace: a preliminary reliability study

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Abstract

The concept of Emotional Intelligence (EI) has recently attracted a great amount of interest from HR practitioners and academics alike. Whilst the majority of research in this area has been conducted in Western countries, recent studies have begun to assess the generalisability and validity of the EI concept in cross-cultural settings. The purpose of this paper was to assess the reliability of the Workplace version of the Swinburne University Emotional Intelligence Test (Workplace SUEIT) in an Indian population. The Workplace SUEIT demonstrated adequate reliability in the sample of 110 participants in India, although the mean scores for the sub-scales were significantly lower than in the Australian normative population. The results are discussed in the context that EI tests need to undergo cross-cultural examination to assess their validity and cultural relevance. Researchers using Indian workplace samples are needed to evaluate the predictive validity of tests of EI in the Indian context.

Key Words: Emotional Intelligence; Culture; India; Reliability

In an era of shifting paradigms, one of the world's fastest growing emerging economies, such as India, should be able to develop its human resources as a source of competitive advantage (Schuler, Dowling & De Cieri, 1993). In order to develop and enhance workforce capabilities and to successfully compete in the 21st Century, organisations have to embark on future oriented human resources strategies. It could be argued that the individual competencies of the workforce in any organisation would determine its overall success. This success, among other things, may be attributed to the socio - behavioural characteristics and adjustments these individuals have to make in their job-role and position-power to gain common ground in any organisational setting.

In changing times different sets of competencies are needed to meet the challenges of contemporary organizations, which think globally and act locally. Hubbard (2005) argues that to talk the talk and to take on the challenges of achieving sustainability, individual's attitudes and their breadth of thinking is a vital addition to the skills that they possess to perform their job. Although individuals are considered to be rational beings, their behaviour is complex, with individual differences exhibited through cognitive abilities, physical or motor abilities, interests, values, skills, knowledge, experience, and numerous psychological constructs. Over the last decade Emotional Intelligence (EI) has drawn significant interest from academics and HR practitioners throughout the Western world. Mayer and Salovey defined the concept of EI in the mid-90's (1993, 1997) though its roots can be traced back to Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1983) and Thorndike's (1920) theory of social intelligence. Goleman (1995) popularised the concept of EI with his best-selling books (1995, 1998) that have attracted great interest worldwide. Goleman's main premise is that EI predicts life success. The construct has gained further within organisations, momentum with organisations no longer being seen as "emotion-free" zones. Emotional Intelligence is now being considered to be important in organisational factors such as: organisational change (Ferres & Connell, 2004; Singh, 2003); leadership (Ashkanasy, 2002; Dearborn, 2002; Gardner & Stough, 2002; Weymes, 2002); management performance (Slaski & Cartwright, 2002); perceiving occupational stress (Nicklaou & Tsaousis, 2002; Oginska-Bulik, 2005); and life satisfaction (Palmer, Donaldson & Stough, 2002). To meet organisational ends (Lord, Klimiski, & Kanfer (2002), it is not uncommon to use emotions and emotion related thoughts and behaviour as the ingredients in an institutionalised recipe of emotional culture.

Along with the growing interest in EI, a number of models and measures of EI have been developed, accompanied by much debate concerning their validity (Davies, et al., 1998). Emotional Intelligence research of late has attempted to address the issue of convergent and discriminant validity from verbal and crystallised intelligence (Davies, Stankov & Roberts, 1998; Mayer et al., 1999; Roberts, Zeidner & Matthews, 2001) and personality (Day & Carroll, 2004; Schutte et al., 2004) for both "ability" and "trait" measures of EI with inconclusive results.

Cross-cultural research and adaptation of self-report and ability-based EI measures represent an important development in the field of EI research. A significant question is whether the EI construct, and the various tests used in its assessment, can be generalised across cultural groups, as subtle cultural differences, which may affect the measurement of the ability to perceive, manage, and use emotional information, may exist in the processing of emotional information across cultures (Ghorbani, Bing, Watson, Davison, & Mack, 2002). The Universalist approach to emotions assumes that emotional experience is a basic human characteristic that does not vary substantially across cultures (Diener & Lucas, 2004). At the same time, peoples' beliefs about emotions are considered to be different across cultures (Lillard, 1998), with individual differences playing a crucial role in how people respond to emotions. Not all emotions are seen as desirable across cultures, but emotions are inseparable from individuals and verv often emotions determine individual behaviour, decision-making styles and relationships (Ghorbani, Bing, Watson, Davison, & Mack, 2002).

Cross-cultural examination of the generalisability of the EI construct and its relationship to other outcome variables has recently been undertaken in a small number of studies. The Trait Meta-Mood Scale (TMMS - Salovey et al., 1995) was employed to assess emotional information processing in Iranian and American samples (Ghorbani, Bing, Watson, Davison, & Mack, 2002). Small cultural differences were noted between the two groups, and were hypothesised to be related to the American cultural bias towards individualism. Parker, et al. (2005) investigated the generalisability of the concept of EI to North American aboriginal youth using the EQ-I:YV developed by Bar-On and Parker (2000). They found that the aboriginal youth scored significantly lower on three of the four dimensions of the EQ-I:YV than a matched Canadian sample of non-aboriginal youth.

India has always been celebrated for its high diversity in culture, language and income. Asian cultures are believed to be relationship oriented. This is evident in the way communities yearn for relationships, and their expectation for the constant presence of loved ones in families. Pal (2003)suggests individualism (Hofstede, 2001) and independence are not the values cherished in a family oriented Indian culture. Again, Indians, as part of a collectivistic society, call for greater emotional dependence and are taught to interpret emotions as an intellectual exercise, rather than an emotive response (Singh, 2003). These and similar subtle cultural differences may impact on the reliability of the measurement of EI in non-western cultures; hence studies that assess the reliability of tests of EI are an important step for cross-cultural EI research. Although such research shows some promise for the generalisability of the EI concept, little research has been conducted in India.

Palmer & Stough (2001) have developed the Workplace SUEIT (Swinburne Emotional Intelligence Test) that has been tailored for use in organisational The Workplace SUEIT was developed settings. following a large factor analytic study conducted with an Australian population sample involving measures of EI covering six of the major measures and models in the area, including Mayer, Salovey & Caruso's Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT; Mayer, et al., 1999), The Bar On Emotional Quotient Inventory (Bar-On, 1997); The Trait Meta Mood Scale (Salovey, Mayer, Goldman, Turvey & Palfai, 1995); The Twenty Item Toronto Alexithymia Scale II TAS-20 (Bagby, Taylor & Parker, 1994); The Scale by Schutte, Malouff, Hall, Haggerty, Cooper, Golden, Dornheim, (1998); and The Scale by Tett, Wang, Thomas, Griebler & Linkovich (1997). The five factors of the Workplace SUEIT represent a related set of abilities concerning how effectively emotions are dealt with in the workplace (Palmer & Stough, 2001).

The main objective of this research was to provide preliminary reliability data on the administration of the Workplace SUEIT in an Indian sample. Although used extensively in Australia and now in other countries, the reliability of any psychometric test developed in one country but administered in a different country is an important research and practical question. Although the English version of the Workplace SUEIT has been shown to be reliable in a range of countries (Australia, USA, NZ, and South Africa) and Italian and German versions are reliable in their speech communities, it is unknown whether the Workplace SUEIT is reliable if administered to an Indian sample. The second objective of the study was to introduce the test to Indian researchers and to establish a research dialogue in India focussing on EI and the workplace. Clearly in order to accomplish the second objective, the first objective (reliability) must be met.

Method

Participants

The Indian data sample consisted of 150 professionals, from Bangalore and Chennai - the two major high – tech hubs in India. Using convenience sampling, it was intended to include as many professions as possible from a cross section comprised of politicians, senior and middle level executives, experts/professionals, academics and self – employed people. The response rate was 73% with 110 respondents completing the SUEIT (80 male, 27 Female, 3 unreported). The age range was from 19 to 59 (Mean: 32.10, *SD*: 8.66). Of the people who supplied their level of education, 55% had completed an undergraduate degree, and a further 31% had completed a PhD or Masters degree.

Measure

The current study examines the validity of the selfreport version of the Workplace SUEIT (Palmer & Stough, 2001) which provides scores on five factors, which are a set of related abilities concerning how effectively emotions are dealt with in the workplace: *Emotional recognition and expression (in oneself)* – the ability to identify one's own feelings and emotional states, and the ability to express those inner feelings to other; *Understanding emotions (external)* – the ability to identify and understand the emotions of others and those that manifest in external stimuli: Emotions direct cognition - the extent to which motions and emotional knowledge are incorporated in decision-making and/or problem solving; Emotional management - the ability to manage positive and negative emotions within both oneself and others; and Emotional control - how effectively emotional states experienced at work, such as anger, stress, anxiety and frustration, are controlled. Participants respond to the 64 items of the Workplace. on a five point Likert-type scale (1 = never, 5 = always)and are instructed to indicate the extent to which each statement is true of the way they typically think, feel and act at work.

Results and Discussion

The means, standard deviations, and internal consistency (coefficient alpha α) for each of the dimensions of the Workplace SUEIT pertaining to the general norms are presented in Table 1. These scores refer to scores collected via several academic studies involving the Workplace SUEIT in Australia. They represent a "normative" collection of data to which the Indian data collected in this research is compared.

As shown in Table 1, full-scale reliability is high, as is the reliability for each of the sub-scales. This sample consists of 1522 individuals (984 Females, 487 Males, 51 did not nominate their gender). The ages of

individuals who completed the SUEIT ranged from 18-72 (Mean: 40.43, SD: 10.39). Of the people who supplied their level of education (n=450): 10% had completed their high school certificate, 31% had completed a tertiary certificate, 30% had completed an undergraduate degree, and 29% had completed a postgraduate degree. The means, standard deviations, and internal consistency reliability (coefficient alpha α) for each of the dimensions of the test pertaining to the data collected from India also appear in Table 1.

As shown in Table 1, the full-scale reliability is high, but the emotional recognition and expression and emotions direct cognition dimensions reliabilities are lower than in the Australian normative data for the Workplace SUEIT. This may suggest that the items that comprise these two dimensions need to be altered or modified for future use with Indian populations. Analysis of the alpha reliabilities indicate that the removal of items "When I am anxious at work, I find it difficult to express this to colleagues" for the emotional recognition and expression sub-scale and "I weigh-up how I feel about different solutions to work-related problems" for the emotions direct cognition sub-scale improves their reliability to an acceptable level (α > 0.65). Lower reliability may also suggest cultural differences in the extent to which a dimension is valued within a society. Although definitive answer to this possibility must await validity studies, this is an interesting and intriguing finding.

It was expected that the scores derived from the Indian data would be reasonably equivalent to the Australian normative data in magnitude. A series of ttests were conducted to assess whether the means of the Workplace SUEIT differed across the two samples, with significant differences observed for all five SUEIT sub-scales and the total EI score, with the Indian sample scoring lower than the Australian normative data. These results indicate that at least for the samples employed in this study that the participants in the Indian sample showed lower scores on all of the Workplace SUEIT dimensions. This may indicate that EI, at least as measured by the Workplace SUEIT, is less valued by Indian workers than Australian workers or that there are differences in EI competencies between the two groups. Clearly we present only preliminary data here but these results provide an interesting finding that can be examined in further research employing larger samples. Changes in mean scores across groups do not allow us to make any inferences about the validity of such scores. Australian EI scores have been shown to predict organisational variables such as leadership (Gardner &

Table 1: Means, Standard Deviations, and Reliability Coefficients of the Workplace SUEIT (Australian and Indian data)

		Australian Data		Indian Data	
Scale	# items	Mean (SD)	α	Mean (SD)	α
Total EI	64	225.37 (20.14)	.91	211.07 (19.45) *	.86
Emotional Recognition & Expression	11	38.70 (5.34)	.78	36.37 (5.12) *	.62
Understanding of Emotions External	20	76.54 (7.78)	.86	72.71 (9.62) *	.84
Emotions Direct Cognition	12	35.19 (6.14)	.81	33.42 (5.60) *	.65
Emotional Management	12	42.24 (5.69)	.81	39.54 (5.46) *	.71
Emotional Control	9	32.71 (4.66)	.80	29.02 (4.37) *	.73

Note: * = p < 0.05

Stough, 2002) and such relationships may be even more important in Indian samples despite lower mean scores.

Summary

The Workplace SUEIT appears to be a reliable measure of EI within the Indian workplace, although additional studies should substantiate this preliminary finding. Further studies with larger samples are essential to identify the differences in how individual items are interpreted and further probe into the cultural bias. Given these preliminary results, the Workplace SUEIT should provide a practical measure of EI when conducting research on the predictive validity of EI in the Indian workplace.

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