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The Value of Incorporating Emotional Intelligence Skills in the Education of Accounting Students

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Abstract
The tasks and skills that are required of accounting practitioners in today's global business environment have changed significantly since the early 1990s. No longer are accounting practitioners required merely to undertake the tasks necessary for information provision, such as bookkeeping, data analysis and tax preparation. Instead, they are now in a more encompassing position which has extended their roles into information facilitation, thus repositioning accountants as knowledge professionals rather than accounting technicians. This in turn suggests a need for a greater emphasis on incorporating components of emotional intelligence in accounting education. However, as accounting students are generally not aware of this expanded role, those who are attracted into accounting courses may not possess the appropriate aptitude that would provide a good foundation for developing the skills now required in the professional accounting environment. Therefore, it is important that the teaching of accounting should incorporate strategies that enable students to understand and the need for developing these necessary, but often missing, competencies. This paper reports on two independent studies conducted at an Australian university which suggest that incorporating emotional intelligence skills into the education of accounting students, by providing a variety of learning environments and tasks, may be beneficial to accounting graduates as they seek employment.

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The Value of Incorporating Emotional Intelligence Skills in the Education of Accounting Students

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ABSTRACT

The tasks and skills that are required of accounting practitioners in today's global business environment have changed significantly since the early 1990s. No longer are accounting practitioners required merely to undertake the tasks necessary for information provision, such as bookkeeping, data analysis and tax preparation. Instead, they are now in a more encompassing position which has extended their roles into information facilitation, thus repositioning accountants as knowledge professionals rather than accounting technicians. This in turn suggests a need for a greater emphasis on incorporating components of emotional intelligence in accounting education.

However, as accounting students are generally not aware of this expanded role, those who are attracted into accounting courses may not possess the appropriate aptitude that would provide a good foundation for developing the skills now required in the professional accounting environment. Therefore, it is important that the teaching of accounting should incorporate strategies that enable students to understand and the need for developing these necessary, but often missing, competencies.

This paper reports on two independent studies conducted at an Australian university which suggest that incorporating emotional intelligence skills into the education of accounting students, by providing a variety of learning environments and tasks, may be beneficial to accounting graduates as they seek employment.

Keywords: emotional intelligence; accounting education; accounting students; accounting practitioners; perceptions

INTRODUCTION

The tasks and skills that are required of accounting practitioners in today's global business environment have changed significantly since the early 1990s. No longer are accounting practitioners required merely to undertake the tasks necessary for information provision, such as bookkeeping, data analysis and tax preparation (Barbera 1996; Fleming 1999; Burns and Scapens 2000; Blewitt 2003; Kelman 2005; Spanyi 2006). Instead, their extended roles, which include information facilitation and strategic analysis, place a greater emphasis on inter-personal communication, thus repositioning accountants as knowledge professionals rather than accounting technicians.

However, students who are attracted into accounting courses may not be aware of this extended role, and hence, not possess the appropriate aptitude that would provide a good foundation for developing the skills now required in the professional accounting environment. It is thus important that the teaching of accounting should enable students to develop these necessary, but often missing, competencies (Corrigan 1997; Albrecht and Sack 2000; Jackson

and Lapsley 2003; Power 2003; Holtzman 2004; Prober 2004; Bailey 2005; Hunton, Stone and Wier 2005; Karr 2005; Yasin, Bayes and Czuchry 2005; Abraham 2006).

Consideration must be given to the implications for accounting education arising from the conflicting requirements and perceptions of the various interest groups. This was demonstrated by the accreditation guidelines for Australian Universities (CPA and ICAA 2005) in which the two Australian professional accounting bodies listed a number of skills that are applied in practice and are valued by employers, including report writing, computer literacy, identifying and organising information, analysis and interpretation of data, and ethical reasoning. In addition, behavioural skills such as flexibility, independence, creativity, and interpersonal skills that give the ability to listen, present views, transfer knowledge, negotiate and collaborate, were deemed of equal importance. These latter skills provide the basis of what has become known as emotional intelligence (Salovey and Mayer 1990; Goleman 1995). Thus, while the traditional technical accounting skills are greatly valued by the profession, there is also recognition that individual interpersonal attributes are highly desired and need to be reinforced and further developed during students accounting education.

The management of accounting education has become increasingly more complex as the business environment continues to evolve. When the accounting role was restricted to the provision of financial information and analysis, accounting education focused on the development and application of accounting and audit knowledge. In the current climate, the acquisition of technical accounting skills is still relevant, but there is an increasing need for accountants to have business management knowledge and skills, a well developed knowledge of information technology, and greater interpersonal skills (French and Coppage 2000). Educators have been accused of placing too much emphasis on the financial and regulatory matters and failing to assist in the development of the necessary skills required by practicing accountants (Barbera 1996; Gammie, Gammie and Cargill 2002). This call for changes in the education of accountants demonstrates that it is important to ensure that all interested parties are operating from the same beliefs.

The purpose of this paper is to highlight how the role of accounting requires a shift in both the way accounting is taught and in the need to attract the types of students who are likely to flourish in the present professional environment. It does this by reporting on two independent studies conducted at an Australian university which suggested that promoting emotional intelligence (EI) by providing a variety of learning environments and tasks may be beneficial to accounting graduates. The next section of the paper provides a review of the literature. The third and fourth sections present the research method, analysis and results for each of the two studies. The relationship of these results is then discussed including the implications for accounting education. The paper concludes with suggestions for enhancing the education of accounting students and directions for further research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature pertaining to the expanded role of accountants recognises that the shift from mere information provision to extended information facilitation (Burns and Scapens 2000; Power 2003; Yasin, Bayes and Czuchry 2005) has resulted in the need for accounting graduates to be forward thinkers, skilled strategists and team players. This adaptation of the role of accounting practitioners highlights the need for changes to the education of accounting students. Although traditional accounting tasks are still seen as central to organisational operation in terms of monitoring and improving efficiency, the role of an accountant has developed from stereotypical number crunching to encompass a wider need for additional soft

skills, such as people management and communication expertise. These skills and tasks that were not traditionally considered to be necessary for accountants to be successful in the workplace are summarised in Figure 1 (Siegel 2000; Stimpson 2000; Power 2003; Karr 2005).

Recent studies have also addressed the perceptions of students about the activities in which they expect to be engaged as an accounting professional (Jackling and Calero 2006; Jones and Abraham 2006). It was found that "experiences of accounting students of their first course in accounting affect students' perceptions of accounting" (Jackling and Calero 2006, p 434), which therefore has in impact on how the education of accounting may need to be conducted. If the early experiences of accounting students are principally involved with traditional accounting tasks such as data entry, debits and credits, and basic analysis of financial reports, then the perceptions of students are likely to be heavily influenced by these tasks and lead to students developing inaccurate conclusions about the roles undertaken by accounting practitioners. Similarly, students with more exposure to accounting "appear to have a more broadly based view of the attributes required of accountants" (Jackling and Calero 2006, p 434). This suggests that giving students the opportunities to develop more accounting experience may aid them to gain a more accurate picture of the tasks and roles performed as professional accountants.

Figure 1: Additional roles required in today's global accounting environment

- Effectively communicating with a wide range of people including
  - clients and co-workers
  - government instrumentalities
  - legal and other professionals
- Undertaking advisory roles requiring strategic decision making including
  - proficiency in forward thinking
  - ability to weigh alternatives and potential outcomes
- Critical analysis of potential opportunities and projects including continually seeking improvement in both methods and effectiveness
- Managing, motivating and inspiring personnel
- Team building expertise including
  - demonstrating empathy by showing tolerance for people's differences and dealing with their issues fairly
  - acknowledging and recognising people for their contributions and performance

Thus, educators need to provide students with the opportunities to understand and develop the skills that they will require to succeed in the working environment and educators "have the responsibility to provide their graduates with a strong foundation in both technical and emotional training so that they will be well-rounded individuals, and hence worthy employees, effective managers and dynamic leaders" (Abraham 2006, p 74). One possible way in which students could be provided with the opportunity to develop these types of skills would be to cultivate the development of EI within the accounting cohort by relevant assignments and class interactions.

EI has been popularised in recent times by the books written by Daniel Goleman (1995, 1998, 2007) who built on the work of Salovey and Mayer (1990). Mayer and Salovey (1993) described EI as the ability to perceive emotions accurately; appraise and express emotions; access and/or generate feelings when they generate thought; understand and express emotional knowledge, and regulate emotions to promote emotional and intellectual growth. Similarly, Goleman (1995) defined EI as a set of capacities that include individuals knowing what they are feeling, knowing what others are feeling, managing those feelings in

relationships, and using those feelings to motivate themselves. As the result of interviews of large group of ultra-high achievers, he discovered considerable differences in the level of their IQ, their training and education, and their credentials. However he also determined that there were high levels of consistency in their ability to get along with others, their levels of motivation, and their self-discipline. Therefore, Goleman proposed that while high levels of cognitive thinking enable individuals to get "into the game", and to secure employment in the first place, the possession of "emotional skills allow greater progress at a more rapid rate" (Goleman 1995, p 32). He highlighted this proposition by demonstrating that "people who are better in EI get more out of being better" because they can recognise other people's abilities and assist them in using these to enhance performance and to develop harmony and congruent goals within the working environment (Goleman 1995, p 42).

A number of researchers have mentioned the qualities that are required for graduates to be successful in their particular fields (Hassall, Joyce, Montano and Anes 1999; Austin, Saklofske, Huang and McKenney 2004; Bailey 2005; Daus and Ashkanasy 2005; Hunton *et al.* 2005; Myers and Tucker 2005; Yasin *et al.* 2005; Donohue and Stevensen 2006). As each particular field favoured different qualities, it was expected that people with those qualities were likely to be attracted to those fields. This in turn led to an expectation that disciplines traditionally perceived to require more interaction between the respective profession and the public were more likely to attract people who enjoy that role and, therefore, could be expected to score highest in tests for EI. Cowdroy, Williams, De Graaff and Mauffette (2002) found that graduates expected to be employed within discipline-based organisations, and that often their potential employers have strong links to professional bodies' accreditation of the educational programs. This has led to a confusion of expectations and thus "a major challenge for higher education is to demonstrate relevance and educational quality to an increasingly wide range of stakeholders with conflicting expectations in the name of accountability" (Cowdroy *et al.* 2002, p. 168).

To address the issue of appropriate accounting education, it is necessary to give consideration to the perceptions of the three distinct groups of stakeholders: practitioners, academics and students. An American study by Usoff and Feldman (1998) considered the skills that are important for success in an accounting career, from a student's perspective. The research addressed the relative importance of technical and non-technical accounting skills, as perceived by graduate and undergraduate accounting students. The results suggested that there were differences between the two groups of students with undergraduates having a lower understanding of the importance of non-technical skills than postgraduates. Usoff and Felman also found differences between the genders in relation to the their respective perceptions of the importance of leadership skills. From an Australian perspective there have been several studies of various perceptions of students, academics and practitioners of accounting. Zaid and Abraham (1994) focussed on the perceptions held by these groups regarding the importance of communication skills. De Lange, Jackling and Gut (2006) focussed on the perceptions that accounting graduates have of the emphasis that should be placed on developing technical and generic skills. Watty (2005) considered the quality of accounting education from an academic perspective by conducting a survey of academic accountants, concentrating on the different views of quality in accounting education held by academics. Her results suggested that the education currently being provided in universities does not address the issue of quality but only the compliance with quality assurance and improvement programs, with little focus on the issue of providing students with a quality education.

This paper builds on this work by presenting the results of two independent studies. The first of these investigated the perceptions of the three groups of stakeholders in accounting education in relation to the current role of accountants. Focussing on the need for emotional intelligence skills recognised in this study, the second study specifically addressed the skills required for graduates to be successful in the workplace and the benefit of incorporating these into accounting education.

STUDY A: EXPANDING ROLE OF ACCOUNTANTS

Research Method

The first study surveyed accounting practitioners, academics and final year students to determine each group's perceptions of the roles of accountants into today's global environment. The accounting practitioners were approached at two separate branch meetings of CPA Australia with surveys which were distributed and collected by the function coordinator. CPA meetings were selected as a suitable medium to obtain a cross section of practising accountants, as it was assumed that this group would provide a balanced selection of accounting practitioners, and that they were likely to be current in their knowledge and appreciation of the skills and roles that accounting professionals were required to employ. All academics in the School of Accounting and Finance at an Australian university were asked to participate via an e-mail request and surveys were distributed and collected from the school office to maintain anonymity and confidentiality of data. The student survey was administered on a voluntary basis at the beginning of a third year management accounting lecture.

The research instrument used was a questionnaire developed from a review of the literature. It consisted of 32 questions that determined the importance that survey participants placed on particular characteristics and roles undertaken by accounting graduates on entering the workforce. Participants were asked to rate each item on a 5-point Likert scale, with 5 being very important. The data was initially extracted from the survey then matched, combined and processed using Microsoft Excel. The results were further analysed using non-parametric statistics to discern differences in perceptions between the target groups using SPSS to develop inferential statistics (t-test and F-test) to test the following null hypothesis and its alternative:

Hypothesis 1 (null)

There is no difference in the perceptions of academics, practitioners and students.

Hypothesis 1 (alternative)

There is a difference in the perceptions of academics, practitioners and students.

The alternative hypothesis was further sub-divided into four related hypotheses:

H_a: Academics' perceptions vary depending on whether or not they have been employed as practising accountants.

H_b: Academics and students have different perceptions.

H_c: Practitioners and students have different perceptions.

H_d: Academics and practitioners have different perceptions.

Table 1 provides a summary of the response rates of the participant groups.

Table 1: Participant response rates

Participants	Number surveyed	Useable responses	
		n	%
Academics	31	18	58%
Students	82	69	84%
Practitioners	28	26	93%

Analysis and Results

Academics were separated into two groups: those who had worked as practising accountants and those who had not. Using independent sample testing, H_a was analysed at a 95% confidence interval. Assuming equal variances, the critical t-value for 16 degrees of freedom was 1.7459 (t_{crit}= 1.7459). The results revealed that academics who had been employed as practising accountants ranked personal skills such as self-belief, self-confidence and management skills, significantly higher than those who had not worked as accountants. They also had higher expectations of the importance of information technology, budget, audit and tax roles. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative hypothesis H_a accepted, concluding that there is a significant difference in the perceptions of academics, depending on whether or not they have been employed as practising accountants.

Table 2: Summary descriptions and descriptive statistics for factors by cohort

Factor	Description	Academics			Practitioners			Students			Total		
		n	mean	Std dev	n	mean	Std dev	n	mean	Std dev	n	mean	Std dev
F1	Managerial & accounting functions	66	5.32	1.19	79	5.57	1.00	199	5.21	1.15	344	5.32	1.13
F2	Personal skills such as intelligence, motivation & leadership	69	5.71	0.94	88	5.91	1.06	208	5.72	1.04	365	5.76	1.03
F3	Academic results & education provided by universities	68	5.12	0.99	85	5.27	1.43	207	5.32	1.26	360	5.35	1.26
F4	Group working skills	61	5.51	0.98	78	5.64	0.91	200	5.48	1.12	339	5.52	1.05
F5	Analysis & ethical standards	66	5.92	1.24	87	6.04	1.08	209	5.57	1.24	362	5.74	1.22
F6	Community attitudes	52	4.69	1.46	85	5.17	1.37	209	5.17	1.21	346	5.10	1.30
F7	Data skills	60	5.70	1.27	81	5.61	1.22	197	5.49	1.07	338	5.56	1.14
F8	Work experience	53	5.11	1.28	88	5.68	0.98	205	5.46	1.36	346	5.47	1.27

Factor analysis, a technique that determines how well various items relate to each other and then forms them into clusters or factors, was also conducted using SPSS. Factors were used to more efficiently represent outcomes with each factor denoting several different variables (Salkind 2004). Table 2 summarises these factors together with the descriptive statistics for each in relation to the three cohorts. Overall, the eight identified factors explained 71.4 percent of the variances. The variance that was explained by each factor both individually and cumulatively is shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Total variance explained using rotated component matrix

Factor	Description	Initial Eigenvalues			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
		Total	% of Variance	Cum %	Total	% of Variance	Cum %
F1	Managerial & accounting functions	11.500	35.938	35.938	4.589	14.341	14.341
F2	Personal skills such as intelligence, motivation & leadership	2.601	8.129	44.068	3.483	10.884	25.225
F3	Academic results & education provided by universities	2.231	6.971	51.038	2.953	9.227	34.452
F4	Group working skills	1.704	5.324	56.362	2.816	8.800	43.251
F5	Analysis & ethical standards	1.389	4.340	60.702	2.723	8.508	51.760
F6	Community attitudes	1.234	3.855	64.557	2.273	7.104	58.864
F7	Data skills	1.150	3.593	68.149	2.216	6.926	65.790
F8	Work experience	1.048	3.277	71.426	1.804	5.636	71.426

Table 4 displays the results of the independent sample test (assuming equal variances) in relation to H_b. The perceptions of academics and students differed, with academics placing greater value on academic results, ethics and data analysis while students expectations were higher in relation to the importance of work experience and community attitudes.

Table 4: Independent samples test: Academics and Students

Factor and Description		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Diff	Std. Error Diff	95% Conf Interval of Diff	
									Lower	Upper
F3	Academic results & education provided by universities	2.859	0.092	1.137	273	0.256	0.191	0.168	-0.140	0.522
F5	Analysis & ethical standards	1.795	0.181	2.059	273	0.040	0.360	0.175	0.016	0.704
F6	Community attitudes	4.799	0.029	-2.453	259	0.015	-0.480	0.196	-0.865	-0.095
F7	Data skills	0.802	0.371	1.261	255	0.208	0.208	0.165	-0.117	0.532
F8	Work experience	2.148	0.144	-1.691	256	0.092	-0.350	0.207	-0.758	0.058

Table 5 summarises the results (assuming equal variances) for H_c, demonstrating that the perceptions of practitioners and students differed in a number of ways. Practitioners had higher expectations of the ability of graduates to critically analyse data and also rated the importance of ethical standards more highly. However, students regarded experience and community attitudes of greater importance.

Table 5: Independent samples test: Practitioners and Students

Factor and Description		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Diff	Std. Error Diff	95% Conf Interval of Diff	
									Lower	Upper
F5	Analysis & ethical standards	1.795	0.181	2.059	273	0.040	0.360	0.175	0.016	0.704
F6	Community attitudes	4.799	0.029	-2.453	259	0.015	-0.480	0.196	-0.865	-0.095
F7	Data skills	0.802	0.371	1.261	255	0.208	0.208	0.165	-0.117	0.532
F8	Work experience	2.148	0.144	-1.691	256	0.092	-0.350	0.208	-0.758	0.058

Table 6 gives the results for H_d (assuming equal variances). Practitioners have higher perceptions of the importance of discipline based components such as managerial and accounting functions. They also placed greater significance on personal skills, community attitudes and work experience. However, academics emphasised the value of academic results and university education.

These findings confirm previous research which has found that there are substantial differences in the expectations of stakeholders, about the skills required by accounting graduates (Albrecht and Sack 2000; French and Coppage 2000; Garraway 2006). The results of this study indicate that the students who are currently being attracted to an accounting major often have false expectations of the roles they will be undertaking. This suggests that if the accounting subjects to which all students are exposed as part of a common first year core in their commerce or business degree could provide a more encompassing perspective of relevant accounting tasks, then students would be a in better position to gauge their suitability to become accountants. Similarly, enabling students who would not previously have considered accounting as a major to understand the likely roles that they would undertake in the profession may attract those with the skills and abilities congruent with the needs of the profession to study accounting.

Table 6: Independent samples test: Academics and Practitioners

Factor and Description		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Diff	Std. Error Diff	95% Conf Interval of Diff	
									Lower	Upper
F1	Managerial & accounting functions	2.317	0.130	-1.384	143	0.168	-0.251	0.182	-0.611	0.108
F2	Personal skills such as intelligence, motivation & leadership	0.002	0.964	-1.227	155	0.222	-0.199	0.162	-0.519	0.121
F3	Academic results & education provided by universities	4.236	0.041	1.201	151	0.232	0.244	0.203	-0.158	0.646
F6	Community attitudes	0.482	0.489	-1.909	135	0.058	-0.472	0.248	-0.962	0.018
F8	Work experience	0.890	0.347	-2.971	139	0.003	-0.569	0.191	-0.947	-0.190

Study A demonstrated that there were deficiencies in students' perceptions of the roles and tasks of professional accountants. Study B evaluated whether the incorporation of EI skills in the accounting curriculum could be useful for addressing the expanded needs of the profession.

STUDY B: THE LINK WITH EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Research Method

The second study considered whether accounting students were provided with the opportunities to develop EI and if promoting EI development could improve student-learning outcomes and enable students to acquire the skills required in the professional environment. It also attempted to determine if there were any factors that may influence the development of EI. The research instrument used for the second study was an adaptation of the Schutte, Malouff, Hall, Haggerty, Cooper, Golden and Dornheim (1998) tool,[1] incorporating a number of additional questions to determine the level of understanding participants had about EI. Surveys were distributed to one hundred and four academics at an Australian university. Initial responses were received from thirty-two academics and after follow up this number was increased to thirty-seven, giving a response rate of 35.5%, which is sufficient to provide statistically valid information (Black 2004; Salkind 2004). Table 7 provides an overview of

[1] This survey tool what based on the Multifactor Emotional Intelligence Scale (MEIS) developed by Mayer and Salovey (1993).

the profile of the respondents. Academics surveyed in this study came from a number of separate disciplines. This led to the following null hypothesis and its alternative:

Hypothesis 2 (null)

There is no difference in the EI of academics from different disciplines.

Hypothesis 2 (alternative)

There is a difference in the EI of academics from different disciplines.

Goleman (1998) suggested that exposure to a variety of situations may increase an individual's capacity to empathise with others, leading to the third hypothesis and its alternative:

Hypothesis 3 (null)

There is no difference in EI between academics who have worked as practitioners outside academia and those who have not.

Hypothesis 3 (alternative)

There is a difference in the EI between academics who have worked as practitioners outside academia and those who have not.

Table 7: Profile of respondents in Study B

Category	Number in each category	% in each category
Discipline		
Accounting	12	32
Economics	8	22
Finance	5	14
Management	7	19
Marketing	5	14
Total	*37*	*100*
Gender		
Male	19	51
Female	18	49
Total	*37*	*100*
Practitioner experience		
Yes	27	73
No	10	27
Total	*37*	*100*
Current academic level		
A: Assoc. Lecturer	10	27
B: Lecturer	12	32
C: Senior Lecturer	7	19
D: Assoc. Professor	5	14
E: Professor	3	8
Total	*37*	*100*

Analysis and Results

The results of EI score by discipline, provided in Table 8, demonstrated that there was a difference between the disciplines. While those from economics and finance returned lower EI scores as was perhaps expected due to the nature of those disciplines, the management discipline rated second lowest, and accounting rated second, despite it traditionally being seen as providing the backroom people who are not required to need many of the skills associated with EI. Thus while the null hypothesis for H2 is rejected, and the alternative accepted, the results appeared to be inconclusive in relating disciplines to EI.

Table 8: Average EI score on 5-point Likert scale by discipline

Discipline	Average Score (out of 5)	% Score
Marketing	4.000	80.00
Accounting	3.812	76.24
Finance	3.651	73.02
Management	3.564	71.28
Economics	3.458	69.16

Additional analysis of the survey data indicated that respondents who had only worked in the area of academia, and not in their respective professional practitioner situations scored lower EI levels than their counterparts who had worked in the professional workplace at some time. This leads to rejection of the null hypothesis for H3, and acceptance of the alternative, that there is a difference in EI between those academics who have also worked as practitioners and those who have not. Such a result suggests that exposure to the working environment may assist individuals to understand themselves and enhance their ability to appreciate the need for EI in the working environment. Alternatively, these results may suggest that wider ranges of experience may be the influencing factor. Therefore, those individuals who have worked in a variety of areas and environments, and not merely gained experience within one restricted field may have discovered that they needed to develop additional skills.

In relation to gender differences, it was found that females scored higher in most areas but not all, and that males presented higher scores in questions related to their development, situational learning and abilities. This is consistent with the discovery reported by Beyer and Bowden (1997) that females tended to underestimate their performance levels, that their confidence levels were lower than their male counterparts and that they were likely to be more conservative in evaluating their confidence levels than males. The results where statistically significant variances occurred were most commonly analyses of individual feelings. EI is most often evaluated by self-assessment tests, and these results indicate that it may not be the most appropriate method if self-assessment is also affected by gender. These types of tests have the potential to be influenced by individuals consciously, or unconsciously, giving the type of response they believe is expected, or trying to present themselves in a good light (Petrides and Furnham 2000). If females are more likely to undervalue their performance, and additionally, possess less confidence, then they are likely to have low expectations of their EI, which can lead to poor performance and thus provide a self fulfilling behaviour pattern that impacts on their ability to maximise emotional growth (Beyer and Bowden 1997, p 125) cited in Petrides, Furnham and Martin (2004).

The results of the study also indicated that as the academic level of the respondents progressed there was a consistent reduction in the self-assessed level of EI. This appeared to be counter-intuitive, leading to further data analysis. Initially it was suspected that fewer academics at higher levels may have worked in the professional environment. A review of the raw data determined that this suspicion was incorrect and that the group with the least experience in the accounting professional environment were the level A academics, who also exhibited the highest levels of EI. The data also indicated that the longer the respondents had worked in academia (and hence the further they have generally advanced in their career) the greater the negative impact on their EI score. These results appear to suggest that working within one type of environment may restrict the development of EI skills, and that exposure to a variety of working environments may create the opportunity to enhance EI levels. These conclusions, while reasonable should be considered with care, as while the sample group is sufficient to be able draw valid results for disciplines overall, as the academic level

progresses, the number of participants declines and at the higher levels only includes five level D, and three level E individuals, which impacts upon, and reduces the validity of these results. However the results draw attention to the possible impact of individuals working within one area and reducing development of EI skills, and also indicate the need for additional research in this area.

IMPLICATIONS OF EI FOR ACCOUNTING EDUCATION

This research has indicated that there should be greater importance placed upon the value of experience for improving EI and developing the skills required by accounting practitioners. The literature has proposed that EI is essential to the development of graduate attributes and also of great value to future success in the professional working environment. Yet there are a number of issues that are still to be resolved, particularly in respect to the current measurement tools that exist for evaluating EI levels in individuals. There are problems with the use of self-assessment measurement tools, particularly in relation to the potential for the different genders to assess themselves differently from different bases. Additionally, ways in which to encourage EI development in students needs to be further considered and developed. Resolution of these problems is necessary to enable greater acceptance of EI, and to create training tools to develop EI skills.

The skills associated with EI are also the skills that the accounting profession suggest should be possessed by accounting graduates. To be able to develop these skills it is first necessary to be able to accurately test and measure EI. Many of the graduate qualities and generic attributes (which are described as important by universities), appear to be closely related to the skills that are displayed by those that exhibit high EI. Therefore, it is desirable to be able to accurately and validly test and measure EI as those tests would also indicate whether students had attained the desired graduate qualities. Similarly, there seems to be a need to provide academics with the knowledge and skills to enhance and encourage development of EI in their students.

In terms of encouraging EI, this research has also highlighted other factors that may be relevant to enhancing EI skills in individuals. Academics who had worked in a professional practice environment at some time exhibited higher EI. Likewise those who had spent long periods in academia had reduced levels of EI. This suggests that variety of experience may be a factor in developing emotional skills. In relation to teaching EI, it is probable that academics with higher levels of EI are more likely to be able to encourage EI development in their students, as they possess the types of skills that they would be trying to impart. By demonstrating these skills to their students they can provide examples from which students can enhance their own skills. Therefore, improving the knowledge of EI and exploring ways in which it can be developed in academics, may be likely to increase EI levels of academics and hence EI levels of students. Additionally, if variety of experience is a factor in developing EI, then teaching needs to include methods of incorporating and replicating the experience that students are likely to encounter once they leave university.

CONCLUSION

Incorporating EI skills in the education of accounting students appears to be one way that educators can provide graduates with the skill set needed to be successful in the working environment. The issues in respect of the validity of the current measurement tools being used for evaluating EI levels in individuals suggests the need for additional research and data to enhance the current acceptance of EI as an appropriate tool for measuring intelligence. Self assessment of EI has a number of problems such as individuals over or understating their

responses. This may be affected by gender or the respondent's level of confidence. It may also be affected if the respondent is trying to present a more favourable result. This research has suggested that experience in a variety of areas may have a positive impact on EI levels and there is a need to further evaluate the importance of this factor.

As the literature from the profession has suggested that particular EI skills are important for workplace success, then evaluating the EI levels of students prior to admission into an accounting degree may indicate the types of skills that the students already possess, and highlight their particular needs when providing opportunities for them to enhance those skills. Those with higher EI levels may enjoy more success in the professional accounting working environment than those with higher EQ levels alone. Thus providing students with the opportunity to develop and enhance EI as part of their accounting education may directly impact on their future performance.

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