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Abstract

Since the concept of 'emotional intelligence' (EI) was first introduced, it has been developed, adapted and embraced by the business world and more recently, by academics. EI skills have been strongly associated with dynamic leadership, satisfying personal life experiences and success in the workplace. This has resulted in calls for the incorporation of EI competencies in university curricula. This paper highlights the importance of EI and demonstrates the recognized need for well-developed EI levels in the workplace, and in particular for accountants. It outlines recent research studying emotional intelligence in relation to university students, and concludes with a call for university educators to integrate EI skills in their courses.

Keywords

emotional intelligence, business education, accounting education, accountants, university

Disciplines

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The Need for the Integration of Emotional Intelligence Skills in Business Education

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ABSTRACT

Since the concept of 'emotional intelligence' (EI) was first introduced, it has been developed, adapted and embraced by the business world and more recently, by academics. EI skills have been strongly associated with dynamic leadership, satisfying personal life experiences and success in the workplace. This has resulted in calls for the incorporation of EI competencies in university curricula. This paper highlights the importance of EI and demonstrates the recognized need for well-developed EI levels in the workplace, and in particular for accountants. It outlines recent research studying emotional intelligence in relation to university students, and concludes with a call for university educators to integrate EI skills in their courses.

INTRODUCTION

Since the term 'emotional intelligence' (EI) was first coined by Salovey and Mayer in 1990, it has been developed, adapted and embraced by the business world and also by many educators. EI skills have been strongly associated with both dynamic leadership (Emmerling and Goleman 2005; Goleman 1998a, 2000; Goleman, Boyatzis and McKee 2002; Kerr, Garvin, Heaton, and Boyle 2006; Rosete and Ciarrochi 2005) and satisfying personal life experiences (Goleman 1995; Marques 2006; Wing, Schutte and Byrne 2006). In addition, EI has been recognized as important for success in the workplace (Goleman 1998b; Kirch, Tucker and Kirch 2001; Rozell, Pettijohn and Parker 2002) which has resulted in calls for the incorporation of EI skills in university curricula (Chia 2005; Holt and Jones 2005; Low and Nelson 2005). However, the research that has been produced by academics in relation to EI has focused on its measurement rather than its incorporation into university and college courses. Thus, the purpose of this paper is twofold. First, it aims to draw attention to this anomaly by highlighting the importance of EI as recognized by business, particularly by the accounting profession, and the limited business education literature in the area. Secondly, it is hoped that business educators, and in particular, those involved in teaching accountants, will promote EI skills in their courses, or alternatively, share with the wider academic community what they are already doing to promulgate these skills by publishing in the area.

This paper begins by providing a brief history of EI in relation to business and the researchers who have contributed to the field. The second section demonstrates the recognized need for emotional intelligence in the workplace, and in particular for accountants. Following this, attention is drawn to the literature investigating EI and its relationship to education. The final section highlights the large number of studies measuring EI as opposed to the limited papers published in relation to EI skills in university courses, and urges business academics to do more to follow the recommendations of the professional bodies and incorporate EI into their curricula.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

The concept of 'emotional intelligence' was first described as a form of social intelligence 'that involves the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions' (Salovey and Mayer 1990, p. 189). Salovey and Mayer recognized the connection between two underlying components of personality, cognition and emotion. This relatively narrow definition of EI, as the ability to understand how others' emotions work and to control one's own emotions, was widened by Goleman to include such competencies as optimism, conscientiousness, motivation, empathy and social competence (Goleman 1995, 1998b).

In two articles in the *Harvard Business Review*, Goleman extended the concept of EI to the business world. First, from his research concerning almost 200 large, global companies, he reported that 'truly effective leaders are distinguished by high degree of emotional intelligence' (Goleman 1998a, p. 82). Secondly, by drawing on the experiences of over 3000 executives, he again demonstrated the link between EI and leadership and concluded that leaders can 'increase their quotient' of leadership styles by understanding which 'emotional intelligence competencies underlie the leadership styles they are lacking' and working to develop them

(Goleman 2000, p. 90). Goleman and his colleagues further adapted the concept of EI to the business world by describing its importance as an essential ingredient for business success (Goleman et al 2002; Goleman 2004; Mayer, Goleman, Barrett and Gutstein 2004). In addition, there is also an increasing body of literature that 'refers to emotional intelligence ... as [an] intrinsic contemporary leadership concept' (Marques 2006, p. 885; see also Holt and Jones 2005; Johnson 2005; Kerr et al 2006). The conclusion is that different leadership roles require different types of EI.

THE NEED FOR EI IN THE WORKPLACE

The most important qualities that characterize effective leaders include integrity, maturity, business acumen and social skills (Charan and Colvin 1999), which are also EI traits. However the traditional recruitment of business graduates put more emphasis places on intelligence quotient (IQ) measures than EQ measures (Siegel and Sorensen 1994). This is despite the fact that firms often invest significant amounts of time and money in the recruitment process (Moncada and Sanders 1999). This is particularly true in the accounting discipline.

However, the quandary in which firms find themselves is that they spend all this money on recruitment only to find there is a high turnover of graduates, resulting in a shortage of seniors and managers. To overcome this problem, firms need to hire entry-level graduates who will stay with the firm and move through the internal promotion process rather than seeking external promotion. This in turn will lower the employee turnover rate, increase job satisfaction and improve moral. But, in order to do this, firms need to use recruitment strategies that go beyond merely assessing IQ measures and technical skills because 'even in entry-level positions, IQ can't reliably distinguish average and star performers' (Emmerling and Goleman, 2005, p. 9).

This was shown by the Moncada and Sanders (1999) US study of the perceptions of accounting students, academics and employers in relation to the characteristics considered most important in the recruitment process. While grade point average topped the list for getting to the first interview, in order to be invited for a second interview graduates needed to display interpersonal skills, compatibility with the firm, oral communication skills, enthusiasm and maturity. These results acknowledge the importance of EI competencies. However, few formal accounting education programs emphasis the attainment of these skills.

Thus, much of EI training is left to the employer, and requires a significant commitment to the process by the employers, both in terms of time and finances (Kirch, Tucker and Kirch 2001). To this end, management must communicate to employees that success will be measured by the appropriate adoption of critical EI skills. This will then have a snowball effect because those who see their colleagues being rewarded for successfully demonstrating EI skills will be more willing to seek training for themselves.

The importance of EI skills in the accounting workplace is highlighted by the very nature of the job. Accountants work both by themselves and in teams. Personal EI skills of self-awareness, self-regulation and motivation (Goleman 1998b) are essential if individuals are to recognize their owns strengths and weaknesses, develop good self esteem, maintain integrity, demonstrate flexibility, take responsibility for their own actions, take initiative and strive for excellence. Interpersonal EI skills such as empathy and social ability are at the heart of handling relationships. They involve understanding the needs of others, implementing successful conflict management strategies, listening and leadership. Thus EI is an essential ingredient for a productive workplace (Smigla and Pastoria 2000).

Furthermore, the importance of EI skills has been recognized by the US professional accounting bodies. The American Institute of Certified Public Accountants (AICPA) identified the critical nature of EI competencies (AICPA 2000) and the Institute of Management Accountants concluded from their research that "all corporate accountants need good communication and interpersonal skills (IMA 1996, p. 14). It has been asserted that although accounting literature has gave little attention to behavioral issues in the past, today 'many organizations and researchers are recognizing that emotional intelligence skills are critical to success' (Akers and Porter 2003, p. 66). Akers and Porter also reported that a Harvard Business School study of its graduates revealed there was little or no significant correlation between career success and IQ. This is consistent with the contention that measures such as IQ and grade point averages lack predictive ability, and that it is EI which provides the missing link between university results and career success (Chen, Jacobs and Spencer 1998; Goleman 1995, 1998b).

But the recognition of the importance of EI has not be limited to the US. Writing in the UK publication *Accountancy Age*, Darling asserted that 'it is necessary for [accounting] firms to ensure their staff are developed to become more emotionally intelligent' which will 'create a better working environment' (Darling 2000, p. 24).

Chia (2005) studied the recruitment process in UK accounting firms and identified that the demonstration of EI competencies enhanced the accounting graduate's performance in the interview process. He suggested that 'technical academic skills become less effective due to the speed of changes in the global business environment' (Chia 2005, p. 87).

Thus, published research advocates that recruiters are looking for EI skills and these competencies provide an excellent framework for assisting accounting and other business graduates to find a job and succeed in the workplace. However, counselors working with undergraduates 'usually focus on career management and job search skills and neglect the development of EI skills' (Liptak 2005, p. 171). Similarly, the need for EI training as a part of university education has been given only limited attention in recent calls for change to the accounting curricula, with the main focus being on content and delivery change (see for example, Albrecht and Sack 2000; Siegel and Sorensen 1994). Nevertheless, it is essential that universities produce graduates who have 'the right mix of soft-skill competences and knowledge needed to perform well in the changing economy' (Chia 2005, p. 87).

This recommendation is supported by Emmerling and Goleman (2005) who argued that although EI may be learnt to some extent through life experience, 'without sustained effort and attention, people are unlikely to improve their emotional intelligence' (Emmerling and Goleman 2005, p. 9). They contended that 'completing rigorous graduate programs, passing testing, and gaining credentials ensure that those who pass such hurdles are of above-average intelligence. ... However, simply having a superior IQ does not guarantee that they will be superior doctors, accountants or leaders' (Emmerling and Goleman 2005, p. 9).

EI SKILLS AND UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

It is appropriate that academic development be the prime goal of universities. However, a tertiary education should also be provide graduates with the skills to succeed in the workplace and in their personal lives. Furthermore, there is a significant body of research which indicates that EI and other non-traditional measures are just as predictive of success as traditional IQ tests (Lomax, Jackson and Nelson 2004; Low and Nelson 2005; Stottlmyer 2002).

A comprehensive search of the academic literature concerning EI and university students only produced journal articles published since 2000, which demonstrates the increasing recent interest in the area. The literature itself fell into two categories. The largest of these consisted of studies which have concerned the measurement of students' EI skills, all of which concluded that EI skills should be incorporated into university education in order to prepare students for success in the workplace. The second group of articles, and by far the smaller, concern the actual assimilation of these skills into courses. This group can be further sub-divided into two: those proposing how EI skills can be integrated and those reporting on the actual integration. Table 1 shows these studies divided by category and discipline.

The published studies measuring the EI skills of business students all concluded that these skills should be incorporated into the university courses. For example, after evaluating the EI of undergraduate business majors, Rozell, Pettijohn and Parker (2002) concluded that 'emotional intelligence should be included within the core skills taught in training and development programs' at university (Rozell et al 2002, p. 287). In addition, Vela (2003), who studied the role of EI in academic achievement for his doctoral dissertation, asserted that 'it is imperative that students are provided with early interventions that involve emotional intelligence skills building' (Vela 2003, p. 130).

A study of the EI levels of business students found that the non-accounting majors demonstrated significantly higher levels of EI than the accounting majors, even though accounting majors had significantly higher grade point averages (Esmond-Kiger, Tucker and Yost 2006). The researchers suggested that this may mean that particular attention should be paid to improve EI competencies of accounting students and accounting graduates in early employment. This is consistent with the growing recognition within the accounting profession of the need to develop a good interpersonal and EI skills base at university.

One of the three studies which reported on the integration of EI skills was Esmond-Kiger and Kirch (2003). They described the implementation of the 'Business Activity Model' in their intermediate accounting course. This involved adopting a problem-based learning approach which enabled teachers to provided students with 'rich opportunities to gain the interpersonal skills currently demanded by the accounting profession' (Esmond-Kiger and Kirch 2003, p. 53). Apart from more motivated students, two other results were reported. First, that the changes were noticed by recruiters as evidenced by more offers of employment opportunities for the

accounting graduates and secondly, the university as experienced an increase in the number of students choosing to do an accounting major.

Table 1
Summary of Articles focused on Emotional Intelligence and University Students

Discipline	Measurement of EI skills	Proposals for integration of EI skills	Reports on integration of EI skills
Accounting	Esmond-Kiger et al (2006)		Esmond-Kiger and Kirch (2003)
Business communication		Myers and Tucker (2005)	
Business education		Tucker et al (2000)	
Computing studies	Belanger et al (2005)		
Conflict management	Rahim et al (2002)		
Counselor education	Martin et al (2004) Miville et al (2006)		
Dentistry	Pau et al (2004)		
Engineering	Scott and Yates (2002)		
Entrepreneurship		Shepherd (2004)	
Health care management	Humphreys et al (2005)	Robbins et al (2001)	
Human resource management	Fatt (2002)		
Law		Reilly (2005)	
Leadership education			Ashkanasy and Dasborough (2003)
Management	Clark et al (2003)		Brown (2003)
Management and marketing	Rozell et al (2002)		
Mixed group	Yost and Tucker (2000) Barchard (2003) Fatt and Howe (2003) Lopes et al (2004)		

In the second of these studies, where EI skills were introduced in the assessment component, it was concluded that ‘students in leadership courses should be more than simply bystanders when studying the impact of emotions and emotional intelligence on performance’ but requires ‘active personal involvement’ (Ashkanasy and Dasborough 2003, p. 21). Similarly in the third study on the integration of the teaching of EI competencies, Brown (2003) found that understanding their own emotions allowed students to improve their interpersonal skills and build trust and empathy.

CONCLUSION

The research on emotional intelligence has indicated that training in appropriate skills is essential for preparing people for career success and fulfillment. Thus, it is important that students graduate with well-honed levels of emotional intelligence. It is a prime responsibility of educators to convert theories and research into practical applications in the courses (Myers and Tucker 2005). Therefore, as research has determined that university students need EI skills and ways of achieving this have been theorized, it is now necessary for educators to actually implement these changes into their educational programs.

Business educators, in particular, 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.

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