Organizational Management: A Study on Middle Managers, Gender, and Emotional Intelligence Levels

Abstract
As organizations continuously evolve, it is important to know who can lead and manage an organization to be effective, efficient, and productive. Managers with human skills are needed to help an organization mature and develop; just like a toddler needs a parent to help him or her mature and develop into an independent, sustainable, and self-sufficient adult. This study on 200 middle managers shows that female middle managers have higher emotional intelligence skills when compared to male middle managers, and that those who have more managerial experience have had more time to enhance their emotional intelligence skills. Implications for researchers, managers, and human resource professionals are considered.

Key Words: Managers, Emotional Intelligence, Gender, Glass Ceiling.

Introduction

The modern workplace for most firms can be very diverse as the workforce today is filled with people with different skills, attitudes, and characteristics. As such, public and private administrators must become effective managers of individuals with diverse cultures, backgrounds, and interests. Managers understand that the personnel (human resources) of an organization are its strongest asset that cannot easily be replaced. As a matter of fact, Robert Owen (late 1700s), Hugo Munsterberg (early 1900s), Mary Parker Follet (early 1900s), and Chester Barnard (1930s) are all early advocates of organizational behavior, and believed that people are the most important asset of the organization (Robbins & Coulter, 2005, p. 33). As the study of management continues to evolve, administrators are realizing what early researchers stated many years ago. Thus, the researchers of this study question who the optimum manager is based upon emotional intelligence.

Management, in basic terms, can be seen as the process of achieving organizational goals with and through people using available resources in the most efficient manner possible. Generally, people use the four functions of management which are planning, organizing, leading, and controlling (POLC) to achieve their organizational objective. Planning means defining an organization’s goals, establishing an overall strategy for achieving these goals, and developing comprehensive plans to integrate and coordinate activities. Organizing includes determining
what tasks must be done, who will do them, how the tasks will be grouped, who will report to whom, and where decisions will be made. Leading includes motivating and directing employees, and communicating and resolving conflicts. Controlling, on the other hand, means monitoring performance, comparing results and goals, and making corrections and adjustments as needed in a timely manner. Managers must have human skills to manage employees effectively which relates to emotional intelligence.

**Emotional Intelligence**

Since it was first put forward by Salovey and Mayer (1990), emotional intelligence (EI) has been a topic of great interest to scientists researching non-cognitive factors that may contribute to intelligence. EI as a construct was further developed by Goleman (1996, 1999) and made popular by his bestseller, *Emotional Intelligence*, published in 1995 (Goleman). It is often suggested that people equipped with EI have a competitive edge in both their personal and professional lives and as a consequence are happier and more successful (Murphy & Janeke, 2009). While the subject of EI, in recent decades, has become an area of much study and debate, it should be noted that the underlying concepts of emotional intelligence are not entirely new ideas and, in fact, have a history dating to the nineteenth century. The work of the English naturalist, Charles Darwin, emphasized the role of “emotional expression in survival and adaptation” (1872/1965).

For success in the modern workforce, which is mostly practiced in an increasingly stressful and emotionally taxing environment characterized by high competition, constant transformation and looming uncertainty, EI skills provide an advantage. One researcher views “The outcome of emotionally intelligent behavior in Darwinian terms of effective adaptation” (Bar-On, 2010, p. 54). In other words, EI assists an individual in adjusting and adapting to the emotions present in their environment and to effectively solve problems in a productive manner to survive. In fact, EI expands on Darwin’s manifesto on the primitive laws of survival because it allows those equipped with the trait to not only survive, but to thrive in today’s world (Bar-On, 1997; Goleman, 1998). It is important to note, that the ability to recognize and respond to emotions are not limited to personal emotions, but to the emotions of others, as well.

Theories of intelligence in isolation fail to explain individual differences of personal success and professional success. Therefore, much of the interest in EI is a response to the lack of theories that can unify and integrate intelligence and personality with emotional awareness and emotional expression “to yield an understanding of successful adaptation in occupational environments” (Murphy et al., 2009, p. 357). Several definitions, most of which are nearly identical, have been developed to define emotional intelligence. Keaten and Kelly (2008) define emotional intelligence as “The ability to recognize, understand, manage, and utilize one’s emotions and the emotions of others” (p. 105), and according to Elfenbein *et al.* (2007), EI implies that “The emotional expressions of others provide information that we can use to make social interactions more predictable and easier to manage” (p. 206). For the purposes of this study, however, the authors will make particular reference to the Mayer and Salovey (1997) model of EI which is characterized by four major competencies:

1. Accurately perceiving emotions.
2. Using emotions to aid thinking.
3. Controlling emotions.
4. Understanding emotions.

In their examination of the convergence of managerial thinking styles and EI, Groves and Vance (2009) reported positive associations between linear and non-linear thinking styles and EI. They “Define linear thinking style as a preference for attending to external data and facts and processing this information through conscious logic and rational thinking to form knowledge, understanding, or a decision for guiding subsequent action” (Groves & Vance, 2009, p. 346). When processed information or an empirically driven decision conflicts with emotions or internal feelings, linear thinkers will rely on the former for decision making. Groves and Vance (2009) further “Define nonlinear thinking style as a preference for attending to internal feelings, impressions, intuition, and sensations, and processing this information to form insight or understanding for guiding subsequent action” (p. 346). In other words, a nonlinear thinker will often rely on their “gut feeling” to make a decision. In the context of today’s business world, adopting a thinking style that is strictly linear or nonlinear presents limitations for managers. Groves and Vance (2009) demonstrated that decision makers adopting a balanced use of linear and nonlinear thinking styles provides them with greater overall EI. In this manner, individuals make rational, analytical decisions based on logic and empirical data while perceiving emotions in co-workers and harnessing those emotions to instill productive enthusiasm onto co-workers.

Controlling personal feelings is a skill that allows an individual to perceive and better address the emotions of those around them. Furthermore, detecting shifts in the emotions of co-workers is an important first step to transforming attitudes from negative to positive. In a business context, high EI is demonstrated to have roles in both moderating conflict resolution and enhancing organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) (Salami, 2010). Whatever the leadership style, EI enables a leader to create interpersonal trust and improve communication, thereby increasing “workplace climate and business outcomes” (Rao, 2006, p. 316). Ward and Schwartzmann (2009) reported that EI is a necessary component to successful consultations by allowing consultants to empathize with clients and build a relationship based on trust and care. Through EI, communication is improved and made more productive because “clients are able to see their consultants more as partners in building supportive relationships rather than as superiors dictating instructions” (p. 371).

The present paper seeks to demonstrate the importance for managers in organizations to have the faculties of emotional intelligence to effectively lead their businesses. Many of today’s jobs involve high levels of interpersonal interactions that can be emotionally taxing for workers. An emotion-laden work environment can produce a negative mindset and lead to psychological outcomes like depression (Ross & Mirowsky, 1989). EI development will allow a manager to recognize emotion immediately and respond by interjecting positive mood to maintain constructive performance. Furthermore, people with high EI can generally balance multiple tasks without losing sight of priorities, have the ability to solve new problems in unique and creative ways, and work well in group-oriented tasks (Murphy & Janeke, 2009). Leaders with EI can recognize and control their personal emotions and may benefit from lower levels of anger (Yilmaz, 2009). The findings will show that emotional intelligence skills have a significant impact on developing managers into successful leaders that can create a work culture of effective communication, sustained performance, organizational commitment, and occupational happiness. The following model illustrates the relationship between emotional intelligence and career success.
Figure 1. Theoretical Model of Emotional Intelligence and Career Success Relationship.

**Study Methodology**

A total of 200 middle managers working for the same organization located in the San Francisco, Bay Area filled out a short survey relating to emotional intelligence. As a part of the survey, each participant also answered questions relating to demographic. Table 1 represents the demographic nature of the population.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>&gt; six years of Mgmt. experience</th>
<th>&lt; six years of Mgmt. experience</th>
<th>MBA Degree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The information above illustrates several key points. A total of 100 males and 100 females participated in this survey. A total of 63 or 63% of the males who participated in this study have earned an MBA degree and a total of 41 or 41% of the females who participated in this study have earned an MBA degree. Furthermore, a total of 44 or 44% of the males who participated in this study have at least six years of management experience and a total of 84 or 84% of the females who participated in this study have at least six years of management experience. Additional background information on the organization includes: There are four ranges for age group: 323 employees (56.5%) are 25 and under; 146 employees (25.5%) are between 26 and 34; 74 employees (12.9%) are between 35 and 45; and 29 employees (5.1%) are over age 45. The ethnicity distribution is: 113 employees (19.7%) self-identified as African-American (non-Hispanic origin); 2 employees (0.3%) self-identified as American Indian or Alaskan native; 31 employees (5.4%) self-identified as Asian or Pacific Islander; 72 employees (12.5%) self-identified as Hispanic; 19 employees (3.3%) self-identified as Multi-ethnic background; 175 employees (30.5%) self-identified as Unspecified Race Code; and 159 employees (27.7%) self-identified as White, non-Hispanic.

The participants were requested to take the survey as a part of an organizational behavior training. The participants were told that the results would be shared with the entire group in a follow-up meeting. Participants were given 10 minutes to complete the short survey. Each question on the survey was measured using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from “Never” to
“Always”. For example, one question asked, “I am sensitive to the feelings and emotions of others.” Participants were asked to answer the statement based upon the scale below:

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>5-point Likert Scale Key</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The sum of the answers would then be used to yield the participant’s level of emotional intelligence. As such, this study proposes the following hypotheses:

**Hypothesis 1**: Females will have higher scores than males for self-awareness.

**Hypothesis 2**: Females will have higher scores than males for other-awareness.

**Hypothesis 3**: Those with more management experience (6 or more years) will have higher scores for other-awareness.

**Results**

Hypothesis one predicted that females will report higher scores than males when it came to self-awareness, and as presented in Table 3, this study supports the hypothesis because male self-awareness scores were significantly lower than female self-awareness scores.

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Sample Size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>3.56</td>
<td>1.066</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>4.54</td>
<td>0.626</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$t = -7.923; p = 0.001$

The second hypothesis predicted that females will have higher scores than males for other-awareness and, as presented in Table 4, this study shows this hypothesis to be true since female respondents had a higher mean than male respondents at a significant level.
Table 4
Females will have higher scores than males for other-awareness.
Descriptive Statistics and T-test of Two Means

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Sample Size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>2.68</td>
<td>1.324</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>3.97</td>
<td>0.717</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$t = -8.563; p = 0.001$

The last hypothesis predicted that those with more management experience (6 or more years) will have higher scores for other-awareness and, as presented in Table 5, this study showed that there was a statistically significant difference between the means of those with one to five years of management experience and those with six or more years of experience, as presented in table five.

Table 5
Those with more management experience (6 or more years) will have higher scores for other-awareness.
Descriptive Statistics and T-test of Two Means

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Sample Size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-5 years</td>
<td>3.01</td>
<td>1.305</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 or more years</td>
<td>4.05</td>
<td>0.9825</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$t = -5.891; p = 0.001$

Pragmatic Implications and Recommendations

A manager or leader can increase his or her emotional intelligence through self-awareness, managing emotions and having self-control, motivating others, showing empathy, and handling relationships (Mujtaba, 2008). Self-awareness means observing oneself, learning and gaining relevant values and behaviors. Managing emotions means handling feelings correctly so that they are appropriate for the situation and people involved. Motivating oneself requires channeling emotions in the service of a goal; motivating oneself requires having emotional self control. Empathy requires showing sensitivity to other’s feelings and concerns and their perspective; it also means appreciating the differences in how people feel about things. Finally, handling relationships effectively means managing emotions in others; as well as gaining social competence and social skills on a continuous basis. Emotional intelligence is basically a type of social intelligence that requires the ability to monitor one’s own feelings as well as other’s emotions, while using factual information and other situational variables to guide
one’s thinking and decisions (Mujtaba, 2008). These characteristics associated with emotional intelligence are the essence of effective leadership and coaching. Emotional intelligence is an assortment of noncognitive skills, capabilities, and competencies that influence a person’s ability to succeed in coping with environmental demands and pressures. It is composed of four dimensions:

- **Accurately perceiving emotions.** The ability to perceive how others are feeling.
- **Using emotions to aid thinking.** The ability to be aware of what you are feeling.
- **Controlling emotions.** The ability to manage one’s own emotions and impulses.
- **Understanding emotions.** The ability to handle the emotions of others.

Although, both men and women can increase their emotional intelligence levels, this study has shown that women have higher levels of emotional intelligence which may make them the better manager of the 21st century. Unfortunately, in many organizations, women deal with the glass ceiling phenomenon. The glass ceiling is a concept popularized in the 1980s to portray a barrier so subtle that it is transparent, yet so solid that it prevents women and minorities from moving up in the management hierarchy (Morrison & Glinow, 1995, p. 169). The glass-ceiling phenomenon has haunted women for many years and has become a focal point in many research studies (Babcock, 2008; Beckman & Menkhoff, 2008, Lantz, 2008; Cabrera, 2009). Throughout the years, many theories explaining why women have been marginalized have emerged. One explanation is, “Women’s absence from executive positions is simply a function of not having been in managerial positions long enough for natural career progression to occur” (Northouse, 2004, p. 274). A different explanation is that: “Men are more likely than women to negotiate for resources, training, and other factors that boost job satisfaction and success. It stands to reason that men who seek out career opportunities will advance more quickly in their organizations than equally qualified women who do not” (Babcock, 2008, p. 1). In the workforce, women are also considered to be conservative and less competitive which can hinder an organization from reaching its goals and objectives. “Women are significantly more risk averse, tend to be less overconfident and behave less competitively oriented” (Beckman & Menkhoff, 2008, p. 379). Research shows that women in developed nations throughout the world are also facing the same trials and obstacles in management. Beckman and Menkhoff state, “we find that women hold significantly lower positions than men in Germany, and Italy, a fact which goes hand in hand with significantly lower personal assets under management and shorter working hours” (2008, p. 370). The disparity between men and women in management has been referred to as racism and sexism. “The rate of upward movement of women and minority managers provides clear evidence of nothing less than the abiding racism and sexism of the corporation” (Morrison & Glinow, 1995, p. 169). Some even claim that “women leaders are themselves the problem, whether because they are simply less suited to executive demands than men, unavailable because so few are sufficiently qualified, or lacking in self-confidence” (Northouse, 2004, p. 274). Women also face employers who do not want to take the risk of hiring a top manager who may have to take time off due to a maternity leave. For example, “If a businessman is required to choose between a man and a woman possessing the same qualification levels, he would opt for the man, due to some misconceptions widespread among businessmen, such as the idea that women involve a cost when they take a maternity leave, that they create controversial relationships with their colleagues or they do not meet the necessary skills to be good executives” (Lopez-Fernandez et al., 2009, p. 42). The new workforce has been described as a
“political arena” full of different groups, behaviors, beliefs, and attitudes (Bolman & Deal, 2003). With globalization, women and minorities are continuously striving for managerial positions where they can use their conceptual, technical, and human skills to complete tasks and build healthy relationships. “Management and executive positions, along with professional and technical jobs, are among the fastest growing occupations. However, these occupations include jobs not traditionally held by women and minorities, who comprise the new workforce” (Morrison & Glinow, 1995, p. 168). Minority women, such as Indians and Japanese are also a significant part of the new workforce but “research on certain minority women, particularly Asians and American Indians, has essentially slipped through the cracks” (Morrison & Glinow, 1995, p. 170).

Lantz writes that “Survey results suggested that women executives are much more likely than males to be a department head or to fill some other staff position, whereas men are much more likely to be chief executive officer (CEO), chief operating officer (COO), president, or vice president” (Lantz, 2008, p. 292). Many believe that the glass ceiling phenomenon continues to play a role in today’s workforce. For example, Babcock explains that “Rather than intentional acts of bias, second-generation gender biases reflect the continuing dominance of traditionally masculine values in the workplace” (Babcock, 2008, p. 2). Women are perceived to be too emotional and less competitive than men. Overall, there is a disparity between the equal promotion of men and women to higher positions: “Despite high-profile success stories of female CEOs such as Meg Whitman of eBay, only a handful of Fortune 500 firms in 2008 have a woman in the top spot. Consequently, concern remains about the progress women are making” (Wylde, 2008, p. 83). Some of the biases are very subtle and not necessarily as blatant as they used to be, which may be a result of human resource professionals doing a more effective and meticulous job of making their managers aware of the existing equal opportunity employment laws in the United States. However, “Workplace inflexibilities and lack of organizational support are driving women away, creating a leaky pipeline of female talent” (Cabrera, 2009, 45). If there are biases in the promotion of female candidates, there will be fewer role models for others to follow who are interested in following in their footsteps. “In gender studies of public administration, there is significant evidence that women have less organizational power than men, measured in lower pay, fewer career opportunities, and underrepresentation at the highest leadership levels” (Portillo & Dehart-Davis, 2009, p. 339).

**Limitations of the Study**

There are some limitations to this study and one is the limited amount of responses from each group. This survey can be combined with other more comprehensive instruments to enhance and confirm the results. Future studies can duplicate the research with a greater number of participants that are compared to other organizations. Also, all of the participants in this study are middle managers. Perhaps different population groups (higher and lower management levels) and people working in various industries can be studied separately to see if emotional intelligence is truly a factor in the management skills of female and male professionals. Finally, future researchers should consider translating the survey instrument into other languages to see if the same results are true in organizations throughout the world.
**Conclusion**

Theoretically, it is important to understand how and why emotional intelligence affects people’s success in the workplace. Practically, it is important for managers to know whether emotional intelligence affects performance because it proxies self-confidence and persuasiveness. Kaifi (2009) states, “Being able to deliver a warm style of leadership and paying attention to all staff members are key elements of gaining the trust and respect of employees” (p. 92). The study presented in this article clearly suggests that emotional intelligence affects people’s careers and workplace interactions (Figure 1) and therefore is worthy of continued scholarly investigation.

**References**


Author Biography

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