

# The Role of Emotional Intelligence towards the career success of Hotel Managers in the Northern States of Malaysia

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**Abstract.** As Malaysia is facing the brain drain phenomenon, researchers start to pin down the issues of career success in the spotlight. As a growing industry in Malaysia, hotel industry is at stake if the issue of career success is not well study. By using managerial level employees as the sample, this study intended to understand the role of emotional intelligence in determining career success. Using a quantitative method, questionnaires were designed as the research instrument. The results were drawn from 267 respondents. Overall, this study concluded that emotional intelligence plays a role as found by many previous researchers. However, this study found interesting findings between the dimensions of emotional intelligence and career success which were highlighted in the discussion section.

**Keywords:** Career Success, Emotional Intelligence.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Research on career success benefits and concerns not only to individuals but also to organizations because employees' personal success can eventually contribute to organizational success (Judge, Higgins, Thoresen, & Barricj, 1999). Career success is also a way for individuals to fulfil their need for achievement and power because it improves people's quantity and quality of life. Scholars are noting that employees may remain committed and productive members of an organization as long as they believe that the organization helps them achieve positive career experiences, or intrinsic career success (Gaertner & Nollen, 1989; Igbaria, 1991; Lee & Maurer, 1997). Career paths become increasingly ambiguous and individuals must take on increased responsibility for managing their own careers as organizations are facing more complex business environments (Hall & Mirvis, 1995). Managers in public and service sectors are experiencing substantial transformation in organizations via organizational as well as career changes which affects long-term relationship and psychological contract between organizations and employees. As referring to the study, we have to look upon the growth and performance of the Malaysian hotel industry which depend heavily on the growth and performance of the other Malaysian economic sectors, especially services. The recent five years saw the Malaysian hotel industry going through drastic changes, with regard to its external environment, largely due to the greater extent of volatility in the environment and the increasing level of uncertainties in the world's economy. The hotel industry is one of the most promising industries in Malaysia, which requires a few key strategies to align it to meet the economic agenda of the nation.

Understanding the role emotional intelligence plays in career satisfaction will benefit organizations and individuals interested in identifying high potential employees. In many of the writings on emotional intelligence, the components and competencies underlying this construct have been touted as important determinants of life and career success (Goleman, 1995). Goleman (1998) asserts that emotional intelligence, not IQ, predicts workplace success and who transpires as a leader. Emotional intelligence scholars (Goleman, 1995) suggest that emotional intelligence is a crucial determinant of job and career success. Emotional Intelligence may even be more important than general mental ability for determining career success.

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Therefore, this study sought to examine the effect of a set of emotional attributes on career success using an objective indicator (salary progression) as well as a subjective indicator (career satisfaction) of career success.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1. Career Success**

Judge et al. (1995) defined career success as the positive psychological outcomes or achievements one has accumulated as a result of experiences over the span of working life. Lau and Shaffer (1999) viewed career success as a means to fulfil a person's needs and desire through achievements, accomplishment, power acquisition (Lau & Shaffer, 1999). Seibert, Kraimer and Liden (2001) defined career success as the accumulated positive work and psychological outcomes resulting from one's work experiences. More recently, researchers (Judge et al. 1995; Sagas & Cunningham, 2004) have begun to measure career success from both an extrinsic (objective) and intrinsic (subjective) perspective which links individuals and the organizations for which they work.

Extrinsic success is relatively objective and observable, and typically consists of highly visible outcomes such as pay and ascendancy. Research confirms the idea that extrinsic and intrinsic career success can be assessed as relatively independent outcomes, as they are only moderately correlated (Judge & Bretz, 1994). Judge et al. (1995) defined extrinsic success in terms of salary and number of promotions. The objective career is publicly accessible, and concerned with social role and official position. Objective career success reflects shared social understanding rather than distinctive individual understanding.

Conversely, intrinsic success is defined as an individual's subjective reactions to his or her own career, and is most commonly operationalized as career or job satisfaction (Judge et al., 1995). In terms of intrinsic success; it would appear that job satisfaction is the most relevant aspect. Individuals who are dissatisfied with many aspects of their current jobs are unlikely to consider their careers, at least at present, as particularly successful. Thus, consistent with previous career success research (Judge 1994), it is considered job satisfaction as the most relevant aspect of career success. Subjective career success can be measured in terms of individual's feelings of success with reference to intrinsic indices such as perceptions of career accomplishments and future prospects. It is now believed that an individual who is objectively successful by getting a very high pay, got promoted or empowered with supervision authority, may still be unhappy. This is due to the fact that individual's perspective on success is actually affected by life situations such as family commitments, dual income and health. Since in Malaysia, hotel industry is categorized as a growing industry, the employees are having limited opportunity to achieve extrinsic success; therefore, this study will only measure their subjective career satisfaction.

### **2.2. Emotional Intelligence**

Historically, the issues of Emotional Intelligence (EI) are being stressed by Salovey and Mayer (1990) as the ability of individual to understand his own and other's emotions and feelings, to distinguish between them and to use this knowledge in his decision making process and actions. Emotional Intelligence are also refers to the ability to perceive, access and generate emotions so as to assist thought, to understand emotions, and to regulate emotions and further more as to promote better emotion and thought of individuals (Mayer and Salovey, 1997, p.22).

Emotional intelligence is a crucial determinant of job and career success which have been suggest by emotional intelligence scholars (e.g., Cooper and Sawaf 1997; Goleman, 1995). According to Mayer et al. (2001), individuals need to be able to identify their emotions as well as the emotions of others. Using and understanding those emotions, and having the ability to manage those emotions are also required to be successful. It is been proved that individuals with high levels of emotional intelligence experience more career success, build stronger personal relationships, more effective and enjoy better health than those with low levels of emotional intelligence (Rahayu Imrani, 2004). Particularly according to Huy (1999) people who are emotionally intelligence are more successful in their careers than those low on emotional intelligence because they are able to recognize and use their own and others' emotional states to regulate behaviour and deal with the environment. The ability to manage feelings and handle stress is another aspect

of emotional intelligence that has been found to be important for success. In predicting individual career success, previous studies strongly supported that emotional intelligence may also be a factor in determining success in life (Cherniss, 2000). Few researchers have done research regarding emotional intelligence and found that emotionally intelligence of senior managers will perform the job better than senior managers with low emotional intelligence (Abraham 2003). While research done by Wong and Law (2004) on the effects of the emotional intelligence of both leaders and followers on job outcomes has indicated that emotional intelligence of followers affect job performance and job satisfaction while the emotional intelligence of leaders affects their career satisfaction and extra-role behaviour. The elements of emotional intelligence comprised of a broad range of abilities, this, in turn, has generated considerable discussion among researchers regarding the precise definition and domain of EI, with a general consensus emerging that EI is an individual's ability to deal with emotions and includes the following four domains (e.g, Law, Wong, & Song, 2004b; Mayer, Caruso, & Salovey, 2000a) which are (1) Appraisal and expression of emotion in the self. (2) Appraisal and recognition of emotion in others. (3) Regulation of emotion in the self. (4) Use of emotion to facilitate performance.

### 2.3. RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

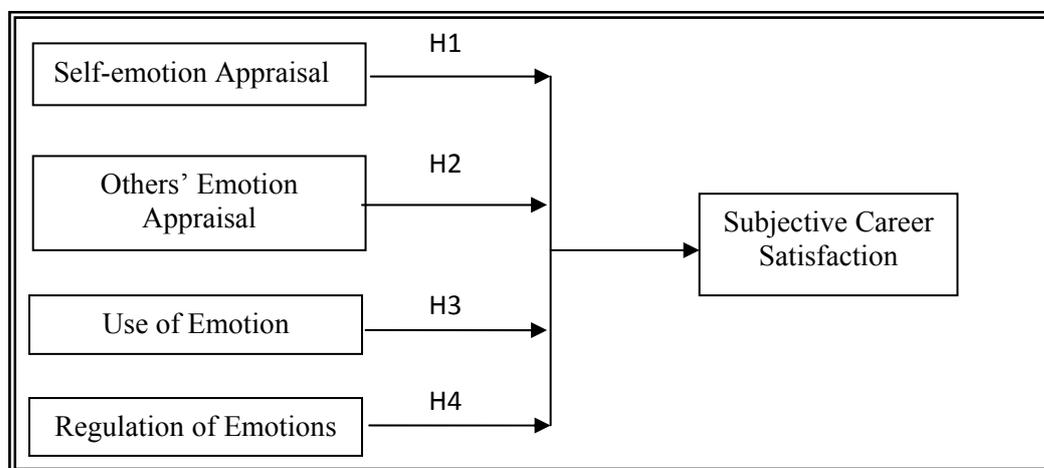


Fig 1: Framework for Emotional Intelligence towards Career Success

### 2.4. HYPOTHESES

On the basis of the above discussion, we propose the following hypothesis (graphically represented in a model in Figure 1).

Hypothesis 1: Self-emotion Appraisal is positively related to career success.

Hypothesis 2: Others' emotion appraisal is positively related to career success.

Hypothesis 3: Use of emotions is positively related to career success.

Hypothesis 4: Regulation of emotions is positively related to career success.

### 2.5. METHODOLOGY

The sites for this study encompassed the state of Penang and Kedah. The hotel managers were from various managerial grades. A quantitative survey was designed to answer the research questions. The selection of the hotel industry of the island was because Penang and Kedah have flourished tremendously over the past decade as a tourism destination. Respondent were identified using stratified random sampling procedures.

Respondents were asked to self-administer a 64-item questionnaire comprising three sections which included items to examine managers; subjective career success, emotional intelligence, and their socio-demographic details. As for subjective career success, it concerns with the individual managers' perceptions of career success and was measured using 8 items, taken and modified from Greenhaus et al.'s (1990) and Turban and Dougherty's (1994) measures, were used to gauge respondents' level of career satisfaction. All the 8-item scale had been used previously to measure career success and was reported to have good internal reliabilities of .83. Three of the items were reversed coded to prevent common response bias. Respondent were asked to indicate on a 5-point scale of (1) never to (5) always, the extent of their frequently to how each

of the given statements relates to them. For example, “I am satisfied with the progress I have made toward meeting my overall career goals.” An average of all the items would be computed to arrive at the career satisfaction score. A higher score would suggest higher level of career satisfaction. In addition, the socio-demographic variables such as age, gender, marital status, educational attainment and work as well as organizational tenure were also taken to describe the sample.

The Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS, Wong & Law, 2002) is a popular self-report measure of emotional intelligence. The WLEIS consists of 16 items with each subscale measured with 4 items. The Self Emotion Appraisal dimension assesses individuals’ ability to understand and express their own emotions. A sample item is “I really understand what I feel.” The Others’ Emotion Appraisal dimension measures peoples’ ability to perceive and understand the emotions of others. A sample item is “I always know my friends’ emotions from their behaviour.” The Use of Emotion dimension denotes individuals’ ability to use their emotions effectively by directing them toward constructive activities and personal performance. A sample item is “I always tell myself I am a competent person.” The Regulation of Emotion dimension refers to individuals’ ability to manage their own emotions. A sample item from this dimension is “I have good control of my own emotions.” The WLEIS was measured with a 5-point likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (always).

### 3. RESULTS

This section discusses the result derived from the study. Out of 1000 questionnaires sent, only 267 questionnaires were received and usable for data analysis. This indicates the rate of return is at 27%. The profile of the respondents is depicted in Table 1.

Table 1: Profile of the Respondents.

| Demographics | N   | %    |
|--------------|-----|------|
| Sex          |     |      |
| Male         | 149 | 55.6 |
| Female       | 117 | 43.7 |
| Age          |     |      |
| 30 and below | 66  | 24.6 |
| 31 to 40     | 124 | 46.3 |
| 41 to 50     | 56  | 20.9 |
| 50 and above | 17  | 6.3  |

Test of hypotheses

Cronbach’s alpha for the multi-item measures ranged between .84 to .93, which exceeded the threshold level of 0.70 stipulated by Nunnally (1978). Table 2 below shows the correlation analysis.

Table 2: Correlations Analysis

|                              | F1  | F2   | F3  | F4  | F5  |
|------------------------------|-----|------|-----|-----|-----|
| Career success (F1)          | .87 |      |     |     |     |
| Self emotions appraisal (F2) | .23 | .88  |     |     |     |
| Other emotion appraisal (F3) | .30 | .57  |     |     |     |
| Use of emotion (F4)          | .26 | .611 | .65 | .88 |     |
| Regulation of emotion(F5)    | .27 | .92  | .32 | .52 | .91 |

Note: N = 267

The results of the regression depicted in Table 3 was undertaken to not only test the hypotheses of this study but also to show the improvement in explanatory power of the model.

Table 3: Regression Analysis Results.

| Variables | Model |
|-----------|-------|
|-----------|-------|

|                              |        |
|------------------------------|--------|
| Self emotions appraisal (F2) | -.002  |
| Other emotion appraisal (F3) | .250** |
| Use of emotion (F4)          | -.005  |
| Regulation of emotion(F5)    | .202** |
| R2                           | .130   |
| Adj. R2                      | .117   |
| F Change                     | 9.771  |

Note. N = 267, \*p<0.1, \*\*p<0.05, \*\*\*p<.001

The result of regression undertaken to test the hypothesis of this study is depicted in Table 3. As shown in Table 3, only other emotion appraisal and regulation of emotion are significant towards career success. As for emotion appraisal the  $\beta$  reported to be at .250 and the  $\beta$  for regulation of emotion is .202. The R2 is .130 and the Adjusted R2 is .117. This indicates that about 70% of subjective career success determines by emotion intelligence.

#### 4. DISCUSSION

Result shows that in shaping the subjective career success among the hotel manager, the role of emotional intelligence should be taken into consideration. In the context of Malaysia, interestingly result shows that in order to achieve the career satisfaction, the managerial level employees are concerned about other emotional appraisal and regulation of emotion. In another words, the employees in Penang and Kedah are very much concerned what other people think and feel towards them. This might due to the nature of their job which requires them to manage many non managerial and clerical level employees. In addition, since hotel industry is one of the growing industries in Malaysia, these groups of employees are very mobile from one hotel to another which will lead to a high turnover at the hotel. This is not a good indication as a high turnover will damage the hotel image as well as the profit generation process. Surprisingly, the hypothesis for self emotions appraisal and use of emotion are not supported. This indicates that the managerial level is so concerned about their employees until they are willing to scarify their own feeling. Like other study, this study also bound to have it own limitations. Amongst the limitation such as this study is qualitative in nature. In future, qualitative method should be applied in order to have more open feedback.

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