

Leadership and Communication Skills towards Emotional Intelligence: A Case of a Malaysian Private University

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Abstract

Purpose:

To identify an association between leadership skills and communication skills towards level of emotional intelligence among accounting students in a Malaysian private university.

Design/methodology/approach:

Questionnaire surveys were conducted to third and fourth year accounting students. Instruments for leadership skills, communication skills and emotional intelligence are measured based on previous studies using five points Likert scale.

Findings:

The accounting students has acceptable level of leadership, communication skills and emotional intelligence. Leadership and communication skills are significantly positively related to emotional intelligence, signifying that students with better leadership and communication skills has a greater level of emotional intelligence.

Research limitations/implications:

The results could not be generalized to all accounting students in Malaysia, as it only covers third and fourth year accounting students in a private university. Perhaps, with larger sample size in future, more parametric tests can be performed and the results would be more attractive.

Practical implications:

Further steps can be taken by universities, professional bodies or organizations to inculcate the leadership and communication skills which may cultivate students' emotional intelligence as they are the future accountants.

Originality/value:

Only few researches are conducted in Malaysia. The findings contributes to literatures on the factors affecting emotional intelligence among accounting students in a Malaysian private university.

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence, Leadership Skills, Communication Skills, Private University, Malaysia

Introduction

Recently, there has been a great attention on how emotional intelligence can predict work performance related to behaviors such as leadership potential, career development, communication skills and self-confidence. In Malaysia, most people realize about the existence of emotional intelligence to be important part of human life as a student, employee, manager or any profession and characters (Rozman, 2007; Najeemah & Nik Rosila, 2012; Aminuddin, Tajularipin & Rohaizan, 2009). However, many are unaware about factors that may affect the development of emotional intelligence.

Emotional intelligence is an ability of an individual to detect and control his own and other people's emotion. According to Mayer, Salovey and Caruso (2000), emotional intelligence makes an individual proficient to identify his own emotions as well as others. Despite of using and understanding those emotions, the ability to manage those emotions are also required to develop a strong personality. In managing emotions, an individual must understand and aware of others differences. Individual differences can be seen in characteristics and behaviors owned by a person and that can be described as personality (Maccoby, 2009). The relationship between personality traits and emotional intelligence are interlinked as personality construction is relevant to control emotions which are very important in emotional intelligence. An accountant needs a good emotional intelligence and it was evidenced that personality traits have an affect towards emotional intelligence. Previous researchers found a strong relationship existed between personality traits and emotional intelligence (Nurul Hudani, Ma'rof, Shazia & Anuar, 2015; Matthews, Zeidner & Robert, 2002).

Employers demand fresh accounting graduates who possess effective and efficient level of emotional intelligence. However, many students lack in leadership and communication skills that will improve their level of emotional intelligence during their student's life. Individual with good level of emotional intelligence will take actions appropriately in order to solve problems efficiently and effectively. In addition, roles of an accountant are to prepare financial statements, evaluate financial performance, communicating with clients and making business decisions. Hence, there is a need for accounting students to have good leadership and communication skills that affect their emotional intelligence as they are the future accountants. Therefore, this study generally aims to explore the relationship between leadership skills and communication skills towards level of emotional intelligence among accounting students in a Malaysian private university (MPU).

Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

Leadership is a process of social interaction where leaders attempt to influence the behavior of their followers or team members (Dasborough & Ashkanasy, 2002). Someone who has leadership skills are expected to positively respond to discipline, work load, handle stress, communicate organisation goals or within working group by bringing innovation, polishing the performance of their subordinates or team members. While many believe that reliance on emotions is destructive for leaders, producing tendencies of weakness and bad decisions that initiate their downfall, some believe that the connection and efficient use of emotions may be substantial for leaders to build and maintain valuable relationships and achieve goals (Phipps, Prieto and Ndinguri, 2014). The need for emotional intelligence is necessary for a leader especially when dealing with people (Goleman, Boyatzis & McKee, 2002). Thus, emotional intelligence has been linked to leadership, in fact leadership is among the most often concept connected with emotional intelligence (Badae & Pana, 2010; Henry, 2011; Dulewicz & Higgs, 2010).

Earlier leadership theory emphasized that in order to be more effective, anybody who wants to become a leader need to perform certain behaviors and do so in whatever situations (Arnold,

Silvester, Patterson, Robertson, Cooper & Burnes, 2005). However, in this real world, employees or team members need those managers or leaders that could adapt to different situations which require some flexibility from them.

Mandell and Pherwani (2003) established that transformational leadership style of thirty-two managers was highly correlated with their level of emotional intelligence. Apart from that, similar study conducted by Gardner and Stough (2002) through 110 high level managers prove the existence of significant relationship between emotional intelligence and leadership. They use Swinburne University Emotional Intelligence Test as their emotional intelligence measurement inventory and concluded that there is a strong positive relationship between emotional intelligence and leadership. This could be explained in fact that leadership involves understanding, challenging, inspiring and motivating followers or team members and all these characteristics enhance the level of emotional intelligence. Nazem and Gheytsi (2014) also found a significant positive relationship between leadership and emotional intelligence, whereby emotional intelligence is increased by enhancing individuals' transformational and transactional leadership styles. Certain individuals are able to achieve some specific goals using their own abilities like leadership skill or their special knowledge but one important qualification that they should possess is high emotional intelligence. Therefore the following hypothesis is posited:

H1: There is a significant relationship between leadership skills and level of emotional intelligence among accounting students in MPU.

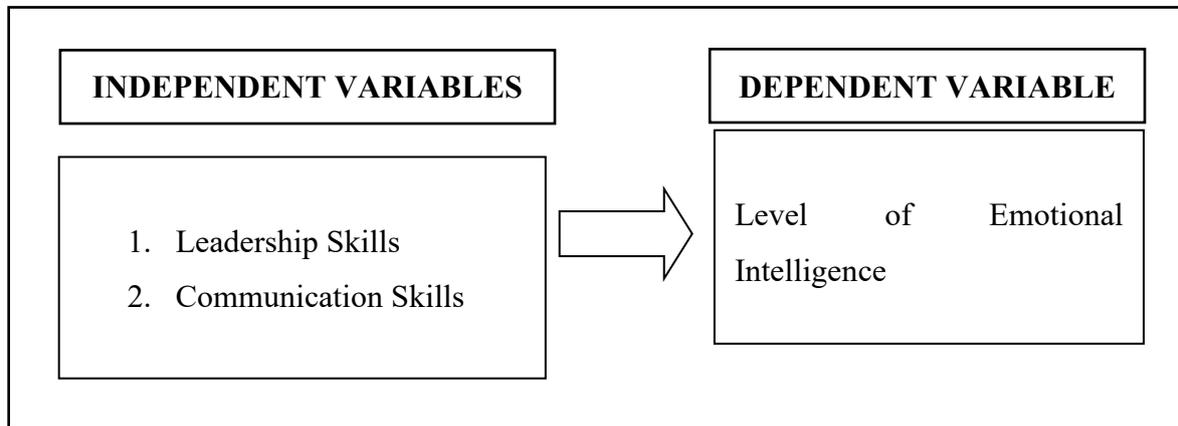
Communication is generally defined as interaction or process of exchanging information between parties. Jadhav and Gupta (2014) stated that communication skills is simply the process in which people share information, ideas and feelings. It can be either in the spoken word, written word or in non-verbal ways such as facial expressions, gestures or body stance. Moreover, communication involve the concept of developing a relationship with surroundings and other people besides identifying how to react with problem effectively (Kuzu & Eker, 2010).

A good communication skill is necessary for individuals to have a good and effective interaction with related parties. Communication is the key role for a success indeed it is essential to develop a healthy relationship in an organisation. Freshman and Rubino (2004) argued that, in order to have a healthy relationship, both communication skill and EI should be applied. In the service providing sector such as accounting, having effective communication skills and emotional intelligence are necessary. Therefore, as accounting students, it is important to develop good communication skills for better involvement in organisation and to assist in collecting information as they are the future accountants.

Student with high communication skills is an individual that have the ability to understand and share the feeling of others and can control his emotion (Gulsun & Serap, 2013). Heeyoung and Scott (2012) proved that a person possess a good relation with his friends or good interaction with other people have a high ability in maintaining their own emotion and other people's emotion, hence, show a positive relationship between communication and emotional intelligence. Apart from that, individual that communicate better may provide better social live and this help to develop their emotional intelligence (Jadhav & Gupta, 2014). The study also shows that good communication skill develop emotional intelligence comprehensively because good communication skills create overall communication which helps a person to understand emotion even with a different language or culture. Amalia and Tatiana (2013) stated that developing communication skills also enhance emotional intelligence through one's ability to

understand emotion and convert it into interaction to control the emotion. Based on the previous studies, a hypothesis is developed as follows:

H2: There is a significant relationship between communication skills and level of emotional intelligence among accounting students in MPU.



Method

Purposive sampling is used as the sample covered third and fourth year accounting students in a Malaysian Private University, MPU, which shall remain anonymous. The third and fourth year accounting students are chosen because they are currently taking advanced subjects, more matured and closer to industrial training and real working life compared to their counterparts. A total of 278 questionnaires were distributed to the accounting students by referring to Krejcie and Morgan (1970). About 89% questionnaires is usable for the data analysis, and this is considered ideal by (Sekaran & Bougie, 2013).

Instruments on leadership, communication skills and emotional intelligence are adopted from Azizi and Jamaludin (2009), Northouse (2013), and Petrides and Furnham (2006), respectively, using five points Likert scale, ranging from 1 “strongly disagree” to 5 “strongly agree”. The demographics comprise of race, gender, year of study, current CGPA and hometown location.

Findings

The main objective of the study is to investigate the relationship between leadership and communication skills towards emotional intelligence among accounting students in MPU. Statistical Package of Social Sciences Version 22 was used to analyse the data.

Table 1: Results of Reliability Test and Normality Test

Variable	Cronbach’s Alpha	Kolmogorov-Smirnov (p-value)
Leadership Skills	0.736	0.000
Communication Skills	0.751	0.000
Emotional Intelligence	0.867	0.000

Reliability test was conducted to measure reliability of the instruments. Cronbach’s Alpha for all the instruments ranging from 0.751 to 0.867, which indicate that the instruments are reliable to be used for the study (Sekaran & Bougie, 2013). The result also indicates that all the variables data are not normally distributed as the p-values are less than 0.05, hence, this study employed non-parametric test to test all the hypotheses (Sekaran & Bougie, 2013).

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Respondents

	Category	Number	Percentage
Race	Malay	186	75.3
	Chinese	8	3.2
	Indian	49	19.8
	Others	4	1.6
Gender	Male	79	32.0
	Female	168	68.0
Year of Study	Third year	162	65.6
	Fourth year	85	34.4
CGPA	<2.00	1	4.0
	2.00-2.49	13	5.3
	2.50-2.99	53	21.3
	3.00-3.49	103	41.7
	>=3.50	77	31.2
Hometown Location	Urban	166	67.2
	Rural	81	32.8

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics of respondents. Majority of the respondents are Malay (75.3%), female (68%) and third year students (65.6%). Most of them obtained a CGPA between 3.00-3.49 and come from urban area.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics of Variables

	Mean	Variance	Std. Deviation
Leadership Skills	40.8421	87.199	9.33802
Communication Skills	33.0445	28.961	5.38158
Emotional Intelligence	99.3887	149.889	12.24292

As viewed in Table 3, the students have a mean score of 40.8421 for leadership skills and 33.0445 for communication skills, indicating that the students have acceptable level of leadership and communication skills. Given the four domains in emotional intelligence, these students are able to perceive, express, use, manage and understand their emotions through a mean score of 99.837.

Table 4: Results from Spearman's Rho Correlation Coefficient

Independent Variable	Correlation Coefficient	p-value
Leadership Skills	0.398**	0.000
Communication Skills	0.512**	0.000

The correlation analysis provides evidence that there is a significant positive relationship between leadership and communication skills with emotional intelligence among the accounting students in MPU. Students with higher leadership and communication skills have better emotional intelligence. The moderate relationship for both factors with emotional intelligence, perhaps due to leadership and communication skills are developed through students social participations in university activities or programs, besides their ability to manage their emotions to cope with challenges in campus life.

Discussion and Conclusion

The findings confirmed the hypotheses about the relationship between leadership and communication skills with emotional intelligence. As for the leadership skills, the result indicates that leadership skills positively influenced emotional intelligence among accounting students in MPU. Thus, the greater the leadership skills possess by individuals the higher their level of emotional intelligence. In other words, someone who has abilities to understand, inspire and motivate his followers possess good level of emotional intelligence. Hence, effective leaders may excellently control their own and other people's emotion. The result supports Nazem and Gheytsi (2014) who documented a significant positive relationship between leadership skills and level of emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence is increased by enhancing the individuals' leadership skills. Besides that, findings by Mandell and Pherwani (2003) also showed that leadership skills and styles were significantly correlated with emotional intelligence.

In terms of communication skills, the result reveals that accounting students with better communication skills retain higher level of emotional intelligence and it is consistent with Jadhay and Gupta (2014) who also found a positive relationship between the two variables. Perhaps with decent communication skills enable individuals to express and control their own emotions besides influence others. Individuals that communicate well with other people may have excellent emotional intelligence, whereby they are able to manage their emotions through their communication skills. The result supports Gulsun and Serap (2013) who stated that students with good interaction with other people have the ability to control his own emotion. The significant relationship found between leadership and communication skills with emotional intelligence among the university students denotes important information for future studies. Students with greater leadership and communication skills possess better emotional intelligence, reveals that personality traits influence individual's emotional intelligence. As the accounting students are the future accountants, further steps can be taken by universities, professional bodies or organisations to inculcate the leadership and communication skills which may cultivate students' emotional intelligence. Future studies may extend to other private universities, provide a comparison between public and private universities, as well as consider other personality traits.

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