Emotional Aptitude, Career Commitment, and Career Success
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ABSTRACT

This study examined whether attributes of emotional intelligence and career commitment predicted career success using both objective and subjective indicators of career success. Survey results from 60 adult education students with full-time employment indicated that career commitment predicted salary attainment and career satisfaction. Career commitment was also found to mediate the relationship between emotional aptitude and salary attainment.

INTRODUCTION

The general topic of careers has been studied for many years. Career success in particular has attracted a lot of attention among both academic and practitioners. An examination of the relevant literatures reveals several individual difference variables that influence career success.

Emotional intelligence refers to the ability to perceive, access, and generate emotions so as to assist thought, to understand emotions, and to regulate emotions so as to promote better emotion and thought.

This study sought to examine the effect of a set emotional intelligence attributes (which we term emotional aptitude) on career success using an objective indicator (i.e., salary earned) as well as subjective indicator (i.e., career satisfaction) of career success.

In addition, the study examined the relationship between career commitment and career success and the potential mediating role of career commitment in the emotional aptitude-career success relationship.

CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND

Objective career success comprises visible outcomes such as pay and promotion, whereas subjective career success refers to one's feelings of accomplishment and satisfaction with one's career and is conceptualized as consisting of current job satisfaction with one's career satisfaction.

Emotional intelligence scholars suggest that emotional intelligence is a crucial determinant of job and career success and may even be more important than general mental ability for determining career success. Why should people high on emotional intelligence be more successful in their careers than those low on emotional intelligence?
One possible explanation that people who are emotional intelligent are able to recognize and use their own and other's emotional states to regulate behavior and deal with the environment.

Another important determinant of career success is career commitment. Career commitment refers to identification with and involvement in one's occupation. Finally, career commitment should also be related to emotional intelligence in that people high on emotional intelligence are likely to be more committed to their career than those low on emotional intelligence.

HYPOTHESIS

Hypothesis 1a: Emotional Aptitude will be positively related to salary attainment.
Hypothesis 1b: Career Commitment will be positively related to salary attainment.
Hypothesis 1c: Emotional aptitude will be positively related to career commitment; therefore, career commitment will mediate the relationship between emotional aptitude and salary attainment.
Hypothesis 2a: Emotional aptitude will be positively related to career satisfaction.
Hypothesis 2b: Career commitment will be positively related to career satisfaction.
Hypothesis 2c: Emotional aptitude will be positively related to career commitment; therefore, career commitment will mediate the relationship between emotional aptitude and career satisfaction.

METHODOLOGY AND SAMPLE

- The sample comprise 60 adult education students (32 male, 18 female).
- From three large public universities who were enrolled in business courses.
- Only student who had full-time employment were included in the study.
- 78% had an undergraduate degree or higher.
- 58% were married.

- Questionnaires were distributed and collected by the researchers or course instructors.
- Cover letter stated the purpose to examine people’s attitude towards their job, career, and life in general.
- Participants were informed that the study was for academic purpose.
- Questionnaires were completed anonymously.

MEASURES

The major measures for the study were emotional aptitude, career commitment, and career success. Except for the salary attainment measure, participants responded to all questionnaire items for these measures, using a rating scale that ranged from 0 (totally disagree) to 10 (totally agree).
Emotional Aptitude was assessed using 20 items selected from an assessment instrument developed by Cooper and Sawaf.

Scale assessed aspects related to emotional self-awareness (e.g., “I relax myself when tension builds up”).

Career commitment was measured using Colarelli and Bishop’s 17-item career commitment scale (e.g., “I am proud to tell others that I am working in this career”).

Career success was measured by salary attainment where participants indicated their monthly salary.

The control variables have previously been found to be education, experience and effort, all affecting objective career success.

RESULTS

Hypotheses 1 and 2 predicted that emotional aptitude (1a, 2a) and career commitment 1b, 2b) would be positively related to career success, and career commitment would mediate the relationship between emotional aptitude and career success (1c, 2c).

In the case of Hypothesis 2, the results indicated that emotional aptitude significantly predicted career satisfaction, beta = .19, t (218)=2.86, p<.01. Thus, Hypothesis 2a was supported.

Furthermore, the results indicated that, with career commitment partialed out, the effect of emotional aptitude on career satisfaction was no longer significant. Thus, career commitment can be said to have mediated the effect of emotional aptitude on career satisfaction, giving support to Hypothesis 2c.

DISCUSSION

The study examined the relationship among emotional aptitude, career commitment, and career success and attempted to establish career commitment as a potential mediator of the emotional aptitude-career success relationship. Overall, the findings suggest that career commitment is a predictor of both objective career success (as indicated by the amount of salary earned) and subjective career success (indicated by career satisfaction).

Emotional aptitude, however, was found to be unrelated to one's career success when an objective indicator in the form of salary earned was used to measure career success and after controlling for educational attainment, work experience, and number of hours worked.

The results of the study have implications for the career management of employees. If organizations want their employees to experience career satisfaction, attention must be given to developing employees emotionally and enhancing employees' commitment toward their career. The issue of whether people can be trained to be more emotionally competent or not, however, is still under debate. Should future research show this to be possible, organizations can then enhance the level of emotional intelligence of their employees through training and development programs.
Finally, the findings of the study need to be interpreted with the following study limitations in mind.

First, given the cross-sectional nature of our study and correlation data used, casual inferences are premature because interpretations based on a different line of reasoning cannot be ruled out. More research is needed on this issue.

Second, the emotional aptitude measure used in this study attempted to measure certain attributes of emotional intelligence. A valid and reliable measure of emotional intelligence is critical for research in this area; therefore, more research efforts need to be made on developing and validating such measure.

Finally, for practical reasons, only a limited number of control variables were included. Future research needs to address this limitation.