Intelligence 53 (2015) 65–71

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Intelligence

A model of department chairs' social intelligence and faculty members' turnover intention

M. Afzalur Rahim [a], Ismail Civelek [a,b,*], Feng Helen Liang [a,b]

[a] Department of Management, Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green, KY 42101, USA
[b] 1906 College Heights Blvd. #11058, Department of Management, Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green, KY 42101, USA

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Received 2 April 2015
Received in revised form 7 August 2015
Accepted 2 September 2015
Available online xxxx

Keywords:
Intelligence
Social intelligence
Academic leadership
Turnover intention

ABSTRACT

This study presents a structural equations model for the relationship between department chairs' social intelligence (SI) and faculty members' turnover intention (TI) at a state university in the United States. SI is defined as the ability to be aware of relevant social situations, to manage situational challenges effectively, to understand others' concerns and feelings, and to build and maintain positive relationships in social settings. We test our model with questionnaire data from 406 faculty belonging to 43 departments in this university. Our data analyses with LISREL 9.2 suggest that department chairs' SI is negatively associated with TI. Implications for management, directions for future research, and limitations of the study are discussed.

1. Introduction

Intelligence is certainly one of the major constructs in management and other social sciences which is susceptible to rigorous analysis. Many scholars and leaders associate this construct with cognitive intelligence and they take it for granted that IQ is the measure for it. Hence, grade point average, SAT, GRE, GMAT, and other admission tests are used in academic institutions as surrogates of IQ. However, the literature on management shows that cognitive intelligence is inadequate to predict one's effective leadership or success throughout life (Judge, Colbert, & Ilies, 2004).

As a result of the inadequacy of cognitive intelligence in predicting a manager's success, scholars are now discussing other dimensions of intelligence: emotional intelligence, social intelligence or practical intelligence, and cultural intelligence—what scholars refer to as "street smarts" (cf. Bass, 2002; Boyatzis, 2009; van Dyne, Ang, & Koh, 2008; Gardner, 1999; Sternberg, 2002). The value-added contribution of the present study is that it explores the relationships of academic department chairs' social intelligence (SI) components to each other and to turnover intention (TI) of faculty members. This is done by providing a clear definition of the SI construct, collecting data with a new SI instrument, and showing to what extent department chairs' SI is associated with faculty members' TI at a state university.

Social intelligence (SI) is different from emotional and cultural intelligence, but there are some overlaps among these constructs. Considering the previous research discussed in the preceding paragraph, it is hypothesized that leaders' social intelligence is negatively associated with turnover intention of followers. Next, we discuss the SI and TI constructs and discuss the study results.

1.1. Social intelligence construct

Scholars generally agree that intelligence is the ability to interact with the environment effectively to be successful in life or in an organization. Generally, social intelligence (SI) is considered as a different construct from cognitive intelligence. For example, John Dewey (1909) is the first scholar to suggest that the "ultimate moral motives and forces are nothing more or less than *social intelligence*—the power of observing and comprehending social situations" (p. 43). Later, in an article published in *Harper's Magazine*, Thorndike (1920) proposed three components of intelligence: abstract (the ability to understand and manage ideas and symbols), mechanical (the ability to learn, understand, and manage things), and social (the ability to manage and understand people, and act wisely in human relations) (p. 228). This definition of SI includes both cognitive and behavioral components. As Sternberg (2009) pointed out, success in career is associated with three types of intelligence: creative, analytical, and practical. Sternberg's practical intelligence is similar to social intelligence. Recent studies have investigated other related concepts such as intrapersonal (emotional) and interpersonal (social) intelligence (Gardner, 1999), emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1998; Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2008), and cultural intelligence (van Dyne et al., 2008).

Although there is no agreement on the construct of social intelligence (SI), many scholars agree that SI is associated with one's ability

* Corresponding author.
E-mail addresses: afzal.rahim@wku.edu (M. Afzalur Rahim), ismail.civelek@wku.edu (I. Civelek), fenghelen.liang@wku.edu (F.H. Liang).

http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.intell.2015.09.001
0160-2896/

to understand the thinking, feelings, and behaviors of other people; to interact with them properly; and to act effectively in various situations (Ford & Tisak, 1983; Kihlstrom & Cantor, 2000; Sternberg, 2002; Thorndike, 1920). In this study, we build on these definitions and broaden the concept of SI. For the present study, we have adopted the definition of SI suggested by Rahim (2014) as "the ability to be aware of relevant social situational contexts; to deal with the contexts or challenges effectively; to understand others' concerns, feelings, and emotional states; and to speak in a clear and convincing manner knowing what to say, when to say it, and how to say it and to build and maintain positive relationships with others" (p. 46). This definition consists of four categories of abilities—situational awareness, situational response, cognitive empathy, and social skills. This four-category SI nomenclature has been used in the present study.

The first two abilities, situational awareness and situational response, are necessary for one's career success and effective leadership. Situational awareness refers to one's ability to collect information for the diagnosis and formulation of problem(s) and situational response refers to one's ability to use this information to make effective decisions to obtain desired results. The other two abilities, cognitive empathy and social skills, refer to the abilities to understand the feelings and needs of people, to communicate with them effectively, and to build and maintain relationships. These two abilities can help a leader to remain aware of various social situational contexts, thus improve their situational response competence. Next, we describe theoretical basis of the four SI components and interrelationships among them in detail.

1.1.1. Situational awareness

This is associated with one's *ability to comprehend or assess relevant social situational contexts* and is also known as contextual intelligence (Bennis & Thomas, 2002). This ability enables leaders in organizations to collect relevant information and diagnose situations in a timely manner and to formulate a problem correctly. The ability to diagnose a problem is very important, and shouldn't be taken for granted. Contingency theories of leadership usually neglect situational awareness, implicitly assuming that leaders understand the relevant situational variables and are able to formulate their problems correctly. But not all leaders possess the capability to make an appropriate assessment of situational variables. When the leaders formulate a problem wrongly, it could lead to Type III error, defined as the probability of solving a wrong problem when one should solve the right problem (Mitroff, 1998; Mitroff & Silvers, 2010). Leaders who possess this ability are able to collect necessary information and formulate a problem correctly thereby avoiding this error.

In case the leaders do not have adequate information on a problem or a potential business opportunity, they are likely to engage in internal and/or external environmental scanning behavior. In addition, the leaders may seek help from experts to gain an overall understanding of the problem. When experts have different and even contradictory assessments of a problem, it is up to the leader to decide which problem formulation reflects social reality and is to be accepted. O'Brien and O'Hare's (2007) found that participants in training programs with high situational awareness performed well irrespective of the training conditions; hence, we suggest that leaders with higher situational awareness ability are better able to recognize patterns associated with their work environment. Albrecht (2007) suggests that situational awareness is one of the five components of SI, the other components including presence, authenticity, clarity, and empathy. Albrecht defines situational awareness as the ability to read situations and comprehend social context influencing behavior, and to choose effective strategies to deal with these situations. Mayo and Nohria (2005) suggest that a leader's ability to understand and adapt to different situational contexts is associated with leadership effectiveness.

1.1.2. Situational response

This is associated with one's *ability to adapt to or deal with any social situations effectively*. This is essentially the decision-making competence of leaders described by Bennis and Thomas (2002) as adaptive capacity. Most existing researches do not distinguish between situational awareness and situational response and lump them into situational awareness (Albrecht, 2007; Mayo & Nohria, 2005). In this study, we make a distinction between the two components. These two components have overlaps, but are conceptually independent. Both are essential for effective leadership. It is possible for leaders to recognize or diagnose a situation or problem correctly, but not be able to make a decision leading to desirable outcomes. In other words, it is possible for a leader to have high or low abilities associated with these two components. A high–high leader is more effective than a high–low, low–high, or low–low leader.

To illustrate this point further, consider two processes in organizational learning: *detection* and *correction* of error (Argyris & Schon, 1996), diagnosis and intervention in conflict (Rahim & Bonoma, 1979), and capabilities "to diagnose an issue and its causes" and "to decide on the best course of action" (Schmidt & Tannenbaum, 1960). The two processes—diagnosis or detection of error and intervention or correction of error—correspond with the two components of SI—awareness of and responses to situational contexts.

Existing literature on leadership has been proficient in prescribing how to match leadership styles with situational variables to improve job performance and satisfaction of followers, but so far has been inadequate in identifying the unique situations for which creative responses (leadership styles) would be needed to improve outcomes. Related to this limitation, leadership theories so far have not investigated the need for leaders to possess both situational awareness and response competencies to define the situational variables and respond to them appropriately. Even if a leader can diagnose a situation correctly, he or she may not possess the necessary ability to make an effective decision to deal with it.

Now that we have made it clear that situational awareness and situational response are two essential abilities for effective leadership, we continue in the following sections to discuss how the other two components, cognitive empathy and social skills, can help leaders to improve their effectiveness.

1.1.3. Cognitive empathy

Empathy refers to one's ability to understand others and taking active interest in them, recognizing and responding to changes in their emotional states, and understanding their feelings (cf. Goleman, 2005; Albrecht, 2007; Ang & Goh, 2010). Empathy includes several components, cognitive, intellectual, affective, and behavioral. Specifically, cognitive empathy is associated with one's *ability to recognize the thinking, feelings, intentions, moods, and impulses of people inside and outside the organization*. Kaukiainen et al. (1999) suggested that "the cognitive component of empathy forms an essential part of social intelligence" (p. 83).

Cognitive empathy should help to improve a leader's awareness of the feelings and needs of supervisors, subordinates, and coworkers as well as people from outside the organization. This ability to connect with people should help to improve a leader's social skills. In other words, cognitive empathy should be positively associated with social skills.

1.1.4. Social Skills

This component is associated with *one's ability to speak in a clear and convincing manner that involves knowing what to say, when to say it, and how to say it*. Social skills also involve building and maintaining positive relationships, to act properly in human relations, to deal with problems without demeaning coworkers, and to manage conflict effectively (Rahim, 2011).

Social skills ability enables a leader to interact with their relevant internal and external environments which is essential for enhancing their