



Relationships between emotional intelligence and sales performance in Kuwait



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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the relationship between emotional intelligence (EI) and Total Sales Performance (TSP), and whether EI contributes to predicting the performance of sales professionals in Kuwait. The sample was 218 sales professionals working for 24 different car dealerships. An ability model of EI was measured using the Assessing Emotions Scale (AES) developed by Schutte et al. (1998) and its Arabic version. The trait model of EI was assessed using the Effective Intelligence Scale (EIS). The findings showed a negative but weak correlation between TSP and the AES and all its subscales. No correlation was found between TSP and the EIS. A weak positive correlation existed between Objective Sales Performance and each of total EIS, Accuracy, and Patience subscales.

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Relación entre inteligencia emocional y productividad en ventas en Kuwait

RESUMEN

Este estudio indaga en la relación entre inteligencia emocional (IE) y productividad en el total de ventas (PTV) y si la primera contribuye a predecir la actuación de los comerciales profesionales en Kuwait. La muestra estaba compuesta por 218 comerciales profesionales que trabajaban en 24 concesionarios diferentes de automóviles. Se siguió el modelo de habilidades de inteligencia emocional, utilizándose la versión árabe de la Escala de Evaluación de Emociones (EEE) de Schutte et al. (1998). La IE de rasgo se evaluó mediante la Escala de Inteligencia Eficaz (EIE). Los resultados indican una correlación negativa débil entre PTV y la EEE y todas sus subescalas. No se obtuvo correlación entre PTV y EIE. Se dio una correlación positiva débil entre ventas objetivas y cada una de las subescalas del EIE, precisión y paciencia.

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Emotional Intelligence (EI) continues to receive considerable attention from researchers in the fields of psychology, organizational behavior, and human resource management. Salovey and Mayer (1990) defined EI as “the ability to understand emotions and feelings in oneself and others and to use this understanding as a way to direct actions”. Specifically, they postulated that EI

consists of three abilities: (1) appraisal and expression of emotions, (2) regulation of emotions, and (3) utilization of emotions. They proposed that EI is a newly classified type of intelligence and that it affects job performance.

Recent research indicates that interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligence, two key components of EI, may be more essential to success in life than IQ (Cooper & Sawaf, 1997; Mayer & Salovey, 1995, 1997; Salovey & Mayer, 1990; Weisinger, 1998). Unlike IQ, which is considered to be relatively stable and unchangeable, EI skills can be improved through learning and practice (Goleman, 1998). These studies and others have encouraged researchers

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to investigate the relationship between EI and success at work, defined as the degree to which an individual helps the organization reach its goals (Motowidlo, Borman, & Schmit, 1997).

Rooy and Viswesvaran (2004) conducted the first meta-analytic study to provide a comprehensive understanding of EI's power to predict performance outcomes. The study assessed the overall influence of EI on performance. Results indicated that, across criterion domains (employment, academic, and life), emotional intelligence had an overall operational validity of .23 as examined across 59 independent samples involving 9,522 participants. The results revealed that EI measures have predictive validity in most situations but that the exact magnitude varies by situation. EI measures have an operational validity of .24, 0.1, and .24 for predicting performance in employment, academic, and life settings, respectively. Moreover, the meta-analysis examined the performance criterion measurement method as another moderator of the predictive validities. The study analyzed two criteria: (1) organizational records and (2) ratings. The use of ratings criteria yielded a higher operational validity compared to the use of organizational records (.26 and .14, respectively). Supervisor and self-ratings had comparable validities (.25 and .27, respectively).

In a recent meta-analysis, O'Boyle, Humphrey, Pollack, Hawver, and Story (2011) investigated whether EI measures incrementally predict job performance when measures of personality and cognitive ability are also used as predictors. Their meta-analysis included the three main streams of EI measures available in the literature, namely, (1) ability-based measures defined in Mayer and Salovey (1997), (2) self-report measures based on the Mayer-Salovey model, and (3) measures that go beyond the Mayer-Salovey definition. The researchers found that the three streams have corrected correlations ranging from .24 to .30 with job performance and that they correlated differently with cognitive ability and with neuroticism, extraversion, openness, agreeableness, and conscientiousness. Streams 2 and 3 have the largest incremental validity beyond cognitive ability and the Five Factor Model (FFM). Using dominance analysis, they found that the three streams of EI exhibited substantial relative importance in the presence of FFM and intelligence when predicting job performance. They concluded that the results support the overall validity of EI. The researchers found that the overall relation between EI and job performance is positive and significant, that the three streams of EI relate to job performance at similar levels, and that no significant differences exist between the streams. The data strongly supported the predictive validity of EI in terms of job performance, and was higher than the influence of personality and cognitive ability.

However, Cote, Christopher, and Miners (2006) found that while EI is a predictor of job performance, it does not have a linear effect. They found that EI becomes a stronger predictor of task performance as cognitive intelligence decreases, which supports their argument that a compensatory model exists in which cognitive intelligence moderates the association between EI and job performance.

Sales personnel work in an environment where social and emotional skills are of importance. Their performance is related to their ability to manage social and emotional problems and to maintain high level of motivation to face problems arising due to negative feedback and failures (Brown, Cron, & Slocum, 1997). A salesperson high in EI should be resilient and able to handle the emotionally threatening consequences of failure which is common in the life of the salesperson. In-depth interviews with high performing salespeople conducted by Deeter-Schmelz and Sojka (2003) revealed that these workers often and unknowingly used EI to be effective. These salespeople, for example, all reported using the ability to empathize with customers, and some indicated the importance of putting themselves in their customers' shoes. They also understood the importance of perceiving others' emotions,

which influenced how they adapted their approach to specific customers and sales calls. Self-awareness was also seen as important in influencing the impression they created with the customers. The ability to control their emotions, i.e., self-regulation, was seen as important in keeping them focused on key issues and working to resolve customers' problems.

Studies conducted specifically with salespeople found that EI is positively related to sales revenues. Kidwell, Hardesty, Murtha, and Sheng (2011) found that real estate and insurance salespeople with higher EI generate higher annual sales revenue and are better at retaining customers. Moreover, Jennings and Palmer (2007) reported improvements in sales revenue resulting from EI development in a large pharmaceutical company. The EI and sales revenue of participants were measured before and after the program and were compared to a control group that was given no development. Participants' EI improved by a mean of 18% while the control group's EI decreased by 4%. Additionally, the total sales revenue of the participants was found to increase by an average of 12% compared to the control group. The enhanced sales results were not simply a result of market influences.

While the above mentioned studies provide evidence that EI is a predictor of job performance, one study conducted specifically with car salespeople found no relationship. Bryant (2005) used Multifactor Emotional Intelligence Scale (MSEIT v2) with car and consulting services salespeople from 17 automotive retail stores in Denver, Colorado, and found no relationship between EI and objective sales performance.

There is a fair amount of research on emotional intelligence and studies on sales performance, but not in the car sales arena. Thus, the present study attempts to address this knowledge gap. Moreover, the issue of sales performance within Kuwait has not been examined in any internationally published research. Accordingly, the present study was undertaken to explore these issues. The researchers have selected the automotive industry as the work environment to examine. Kuwait has a small population of 3,065,850 as per the Kuwait Central Statistical Bureau (2011). However, it has one of the highest rates of cars per 1,000 people, reaching 439 in 2010 (vs. 403 in 2008 and 412 in 2009), as per the World Bank (2013). The automobile trade is among Kuwait's most prosperous commercial activities. As the automotive industry contributes significantly to Kuwait's economy and culture, the sales activity within this industry is worth investigating. The stimulant factors of sales performance are a focus of many HRM, psychology, and organizational behavior researchers seeking to optimize performance. One such stimulant is EI.

In this study, the AES scale was used to assess Emotional Intelligence. This scale was developed by Schutte et al. (1998) with participants from the United States. Upon review of the scale by Schutte, Malouff, and Bhullar (2009), the researchers reported that AES scale was used in several studies, mainly in English speaking countries including Canada, Australia, Poland, and Malaysia. The scale was found to have good psychometric properties. Therefore, conducting a study about EI in Kuwait using this scale is an opportunity to experiment its psychometric properties in an Arabic culture. Not all scales developed in Western countries are necessarily applicable in Eastern ones. Cultural factors might affect the perception of scale items, and hence its psychometric properties. However, this study showed good scale properties.

This study was concerned with unleashing factors fundamental to successful sales performance in the automobile industry in Kuwait. Kuwait has one of the highest figures per capita automobiles reaching 439 in year 2010 (vs. 403 in year 2008, and 412 in year 2009), as per The World Bank (2013). And the fact that 30 car dealerships operate in this competitive market means working in the cars sales is a challenging job. From a human resource management point of view, this makes the recruitment

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