

EXPLORING THE IMPORTANCE OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE IN RETAILING

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ABSTRACT

This is dynamic, ultra-competitive, fast-paced and customer sensitive business environment now it's not enough for salespeople to meet deadlines, be adept at tactical skills but knowing and interacting with each consumer is a must, as is the ability to sense, analyze and respond immediately to the needs of the customers. To really succeed, they must develop and apply their soft and relational skills or what is known as emotional intelligence to help them connect with customers, recognize their needs and wants, and build strong, lasting relationships. The concept of emotional intelligence was coined in the late 1990s, and later linked to individual performance and workplace success. Researches show that a person's emotional intelligence has an 80 to 85 per cent influence on his success in the workplace, while his or her IQ has at best a 25 per cent influence. The current paper is a theoretical investigation of emotional intelligence with its importance, applications and relationship with performance in retailing, how it can be used as a soft tool in developing sales force and helping organization to gain competitive advantage via excellent people skills or emotional intelligence skills of salespeople and proposing "ENCORE" approach which can be instrumental in enhancing emotional intelligence skills of salespeople in retailing.

KEYWORDS

Retailing, emotional intelligence, emotional labor, emotional dissonance.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of emotional intelligence was firstly introduced by Salovey & Mayer (1990) as a type of social intelligence, separated from general intelligence which involves the ability to monitor one's own and others' emotions, to discriminate among them and to use the information to guide one's thinking and actions. Building on the Salovey & Mayer's model Goleman (1995), who was responsible for the popularization of the concept, viewed EI as "the capacity for recognizing our own feelings and those of others, for motivating ourselves, and for managing emotions well in ourselves and in our relationships.". He also identified the four elements as the components of emotional intelligence: **Self-awareness, Self-management, Social-awareness and Relationship-management**, to them he called as **Emotional competencies**.

In last few years EI received very much research attention especially its impact on work performance. So many researches worldwide attempted to explore the relationship between EI and workplace performance, they suggest that people with higher levels of EI lead more effectively (Barling et al., 2000; Bass, 2002; Caruso et al., 2002; Higgs and Aitken, 2003; Kerr et al., 2006; Palmer et al., 2001; and Rosete and Ciarrochi, 2005); are efficient job performers (Abraham, 2000; Carmeli, 2003; Loundsbury et al., 2003); feel satisfied with their job (Carmeli, 2003); and are committed both to their career and to their employing organization (Carmeli, 2003).

Emotional intelligence also has been shown to be related to enhanced customer satisfaction (Kernbach and Shutte, 2005; Langhorn, 2004). Walker (1995) pointed out that all elements of a service encounter, including the physical surroundings, waiting time, and importantly, the behavior and performance of service providers, can influence customers' level of satisfaction. Barlow and Maul (2000) theorized that high emotional intelligence in service providers contributes to customer satisfaction. They posited that customer satisfaction relates to a customer's emotional experience during the service encounter, and that service providers with high emotional intelligence should be better able to create a positive emotional experience for customers. Therefore the EI is an important quality of service provider (Muchinsky, 2000; Weisinger, 1998).

Theoretical research in sales suggests EI may also be an essential quality of successful salespeople. As Walker, Churchill, and Ford (1977) explained in their work that personal variables such as EI are considered antecedent variables influencing the salesperson's motivation, aptitude, and role perceptions that, in turn, are linked directly to performance.

RETAILING TODAY; NEED FOR EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

The consumer of the 21st century is a different beast to that of the previous century. There is a huge shift in customer values, coupled with the influence of recent market dynamics such as ultra competition, market saturation and wider issues like global recession have resulted in an extremely challenging retail environment. Where it once seemed easy to pigeonhole 'the consumer' as a homogenous entity, nowadays the consumer segments are now heavily fragmented and disparate, today's customers are more stressed, more demanding and they hungry for personal attention so the old rules for retailers no longer apply.

Today success in retail requires the empathic ability to gauge a customer's mood and the interpersonal skill to decide when to pitch a product and when to keep quiet. Customer service representatives who are emotionally resilient, avoid over-personalizing negative interactions, and tend to keep their focus on solving the problem together with the customer. The ability to manage feelings and handle stress is another aspect of emotional intelligence that has been found to be important for success. A study of store managers in a retail chain found that the ability to handle stress predicted net profits, sales per square foot, sales per employee, and per dollar of inventory investment (Beaudan, 2002; Freshman and Rubino, 2002). A survey of retail sales buyers found that quality sales professionals were valued primarily for their empathy. The buyers reported that they wanted a person who could listen well and really understand what they wanted and what their concerns were (Armstrong and Seng, 2000; Jamal and Naser, 2002).

The importance of emotionally intelligent salespeople becomes more apparent while examining the today's sales environment. When the buying process was based on product/service differentiation, buyers' purchases were based upon which product/service most closely fit their specific needs. However, with reverse engineering, reduced product development lead times, increased information flow among all parties, and technological advancements, many products that were formerly differentiated between brands have now become commodities (Rackham 1999). When products become commodities buyers are no longer able to select products based on differences between brands and, instead, are likely to search for other areas of differences upon which to make a final purchase selection (Rackham 1999). One variable upon which to compare product/service offerings is the salesperson selling the product; differences between salespeople become a critical attribute for comparison and the salesperson preferred by the buyer is likely to be the one closing the sale (Berry, Zeithaml, and Parasuraman 1985). Furthermore, in service industries where there is no "tangible" product to evaluate, buyers frequently evaluate the salesperson selling the service because it simplifies the decision process (Berry, Zeithaml and Parasuraman 1985).

Now success in retail is the way customers perceive sales services. That largely depends upon organization's ability to attract and retain customers. Almost every organization is seeking long-term relationships with customers as a sales maxim is that "relationships are everything." According to Dwyer, Schurr (1987) all relationship, including business and personal, contain emotional facets. That shows Emotional intelligence is at the core of relationships, consequently, salespeople who understand emotional intelligence and how to use it will be at an advantage during the sales process and are likely to perform better than salespeople lacking emotional intelligence (Spencer & Spencer, 1993; Spencer, McClelland, & Kelnor, 1997).



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EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE; DEFINITION AND DIMENSIONS

The study of emotional intelligence evolved from works by such theorists as Gardner (1983) and Williams and Sternberg (1988), who proposed broader approaches to understanding intelligence. However, the term of 'emotional intelligence' (EI) owes its origin to Salovey and Mayer (1990). Thereafter, it was the work of Goleman (*Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ*, 1995) which globally popularized the concept of emotional intelligence and as a result of that both business world and academia have started believing in its importance in the organization.

Denial Goleman (1995) describes EI in his book as "abilities such as being able to motivate oneself and persist in the face of frustrations; to control impulse and delay gratification; to regulate one's moods and keep distress from swamping the ability to think; to empathize and to hope." Thus, Goleman define EI as all encompassing view that covers traits, values, personality, motivation, and character

Goleman (2001) identified the four elements as the components of emotional intelligence: **Self-awareness, Self-management, Social- awareness and Relationship-management**, to them he called as **Emotional competencies**. This range of skills can be divided into two key areas within an emotional competence framework, namely: Personal Competences (how a person manages himself/herself) and Social Competences (how a person manages relationships); these two groups also feature sub-competences as given in *figure 1*.

FIGURE 1: GOLEMAN'S (2001) EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE COMPETENCIES

	SELF Personal Competence	OTHER Social Competence
RECOGNITION OF EMOTIONS	Self-Awareness Emotional Self-Awareness Accurate Self-Assessment Self-Confidence	Social Awareness Empathy Service Orientation Organizational Awareness
REGULATION OF EMOTIONS	Self-Management Self-Control Trustworthiness Conscientiousness Adaptability Achievement Drive Initiative	Relationship Management Developing Others Influence Communication Conflict Management Leadership Change Catalyst Building Bonds Teamwork and Collaboration

These four essential components of emotional intelligence and the competencies based on these abilities are crucial for success in personal, social and work life. Each of these dimensions can be directly related to the skills needed by salespeople who want to be successful in identifying, building, and maintaining customer relationships. Here is the brief discussion of each

SELF-AWARENESS

Self-awareness knows one's internal states, preferences, resources, intuitions, etc. It indicates the ability to recognize, understand and accept one's own moods, emotions, drives, strengths and shortcomings as well as to see how these affect other people. According to Goleman, self-awareness includes *Emotional Self-Awareness, Accurate Self-Assessment, and Self-Confidence*. These competencies have their unique importance in sales as due to the fierce competition, demanding customers the performance pressures is very high on salespeople high and it toll on them as work stress which is inevitable (. To deal with the stress the first step to understand and analyze stressors and become familiar with the nature of the stress response. A salesman self-aware will be able to recognize and manage stress responses (Slaski & Cartwright, 2002).

Too often, salespeople are assumed that they are 'jacks-of-all-trades', while that is not always true one person can be expert in one area may be average in others. A salesperson who can not accurately assess him/herself will never come to know in what is his strength which should be emphasized and what is his weakness which should be improved.

SELF-MANAGEMENT

Self-management refers to managing and handing impulses, distressing feelings and upsets rather than denying or repressing these feelings. It implies making a choice as to how to express feelings. It helps in staying compose, focused, calm and helps think clearly even under pressure. Self-management includes *Self-Control, Trustworthiness, Conscientiousness, Adaptability, Achievement Drive and Initiative*.

Usually salespeople are subject to display emotions demanded by their job the need to adhere with display rule of their job while hiding their true emotions. This implies stress for them. A salesperson who possesses emotional self-control will neither be discouraged nor will be able to handle stress very well in comparison to others. Several other studies found that salesperson qualities such as civility, concern, attentiveness, and trustworthiness were associated with customer satisfaction (Kernbach & Schutte, 2005).

SOCIAL AWARENESS

It refers to the ability to understand others and look at things or think from their point of view. It can be called the foundation skill for all the social competencies. It covers *Empathy, Service Orientation and Organizational Awareness*.

Salespeople who can empathize with others are able to recognize the buyers' emotions and then link those feelings with their own experiences (Jolson 1997; Pilling and Eroglu 1994; Spiro and Weitz 1990). If an emotional bond is created between the buyer and seller, products are matched with customers' needs; this increases the customer satisfaction and loyalty (Schneider et al.1998, Johnson 1996; Zeithaml, Parasuraman & Berry, 1990).

RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT

It is an ability to build rapport with others and create network of people. It includes the competencies like *Developing Others, Influence, Communication, Conflict Management, Leadership, Change Catalyst, Building Bonds, Teamwork and Collaboration*.

The researches show social skills such as winning people, build consensus and support is a crucial required quality of salespeople (Kernbach and Shutte, 2005; Langhorn, 2004).

And the importance of understanding the non-verbal cues of the client (Ostell, 1996), verbal communication, influence of salesperson during the buyer-seller interaction is widely recognized (Bonoma and Felder 1977; Slesinski 1986; Williams, Spiro and Fine 1990).

Emotional intelligence is what determines our potential for learning practical skills which are based on these emotional competences which shows how much of this potential is translated into on-the-job capabilities, as in case of providing good customer service is an emotional competence based on empathy. Similarly, trustworthiness is a competence based on self-regulation. Emotional competence is a learned capacity based on emotional intelligence that leads to outstanding performance at work. It refers to the harmonious combination of head and heart. The four essential components of emotional intelligence and the competencies based on these abilities are crucial for success in personal, social and work life.

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE IN RETAILING; IMPLICATIONS

Let's examine why emotions are important for sales people? Sales people are crucial members of an organization. They are the interface with the customer and if the customer doesn't like them - or trust them - the company won't make sales. Being a successful organizations in today's dynamic retail world are likely those that take a proactive approach to deliver "great service" (Goodman, 2000). Excellent service, with positive emotional content, is most likely to be facilitated by service providers who are emotionally self-aware and who understand others on a more emotional level (Bardzil and Slaski, 2003).

In a study of more than 2,000 salespeople conducted by *Hay/McBer Research and Innovation Group*, designed to measure the EI competencies among those salespeople that were successful vs. those that were unsuccessful, the following **five Emotional Intelligence competencies** were found the most critical to success in sales.

EMPATHY: This is the salesperson's awareness of the prospect's feelings, needs, and concerns. empathy has long been known as a critical component of relationship selling as salespeople work to identify prospects, understand customer problems, develop them as customers, adapt to their needs, and keep them satisfied (Jolson 1997; Pilling and Eroglu 1994; Spiro and Weitz 1990).

SERVICE & RESULTS ORIENTATION: Service orientation means reorienting the service aspects by anticipating, recognizing and meeting the consumers' needs, using effective tactics and techniques for persuasion and desired results. An emotional bond is created between the buyer and seller. This skill is especially relevant to sales. Salespeople must identify and understand customers' needs and beliefs if they are to successfully adapt their message to specific customers (Weitz, Sujan and Sujan 1986); helping buyers communicate their feelings effectively plays a key role in this process. Moreover, sensitivity to the expressive behavior of others has been linked with perceived performance in buyer-seller interactions (Goolsby, Lagace and Boorum 1992).

SELF CONFIDENCE: This is the salesperson's level of courage and self-esteem that helps to persevere through various obstacles as handling rejection while not taking it personally, be able to recover and restart quickly to try again, to dealing with the **emotional dissonance**, *the conflict between required and true emotions, it is normal feature in retails as job involve a great deal of emotional labor* (sales people are often required to display organizationally desired emotions which the individual may not inwardly feel, known as "**emotional labor**" (Hochschild.1993; Morris & Feldman. 1996; Zeithaml and Bitner, 2000) etc which they encounter throughout the sales cycle.

SELF AWARENESS: It is about knowing one's internal states, preferences, resources, strengths, and limitations. This concept is similar to what other researchers have identified as self-monitoring: the salesperson's predisposition to control the images and impressions of buyers in buyer-seller interactions (Goolsby, Lagace and Boorum 1992; Snyder 1979). Self-awareness is critical if salespeople are to adapt their behaviors to the specific needs of their buyers (Hallén, Johanson and Seyed-Mohamed 1991; Weitz, Sujan and Sujan 1986) and perform effectively (Caldwell and O'Reilly 1982; Spiro and Weitz 1990).

SELF MOTIVATION: The ability to self-motivate is especially critical for field salespeople. In fact the performance of salespeople is a function of their level of motivation (Walker, Churchill and Ford 1977). Salespeople who are internally driven are interested in the work itself, i.e., sales, and try to develop expertise in this area (Pittman, Emery and Boggiano 1983). Intrinsically motivated salespeople are more likely to focus on learning more about selling by varying their behavior from one customer to the next in an attempt to adapt effectively to each customer's needs (Weitz, Sujan and Sujan 1986).

DEVELOPING EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE OF SALES PEOPLE

Developing emotional intelligence of salespeople could be a four-step process:

1) IDENTIFICATION OF CRUCIAL EI COMPETENCIES REQUIRED

First the crucial EI competencies need to be recognized. This can be done with reviewing the literature available in the field (Weitz, Castleberry, and Tanner 2000; Spencer & Spencer, 1993; Spencer, McClelland, & Kelnor, 1997). Some other sources can also be used, for example as mentioned above in the current paper is the finding of a recent survey conducted by leading EI consultancy and research firm (TalentSmart, Hay/McBer Research and Innovation Group etc). These finding are generalized and with the help of these a baseline can be established.

2) ASSESSING THESE COMPETENCIES OF SALESPEOPLE

Although no single EI testing tool has emerged as the dominant favorite for assessment purposes, there are several assessment scales available, the most popular tests include the following: EQ-I (Reuven Bar-On 1997), Emotional Competency Inventory (Goleman, 1998), Multi-factor Emotional Intelligence Scale (Mayer, Caruso and Salovey, 1998) and others (Feldman 1999; Schutte et al. 1998; Weisinger 1998). Each scale has benefits and drawbacks depending upon time factors, ease of use, parsimony, and scoring simplicity. EQ-I (Reuven Bar-On 1997) assessment tool is particularly helpful because this is a self-report questionnaire.

With this the crucial EI competencies can be assessed.

3) IDENTIFICATION OF EI GAP

Once the crucial EI competencies are identified and these are assessed, each individual salesperson will have an idea as to which aspects of EI he/she needs to improve the most or help of expert can be taken to identify the gap between required competencies and the actually possessed by sales force in the organization. Gap could be as some salesperson may be very strong in the intrapersonal dimensions of self-regulation and self-awareness, but may need to improve the interpersonal skill of perceiving others' emotions. This can actually help in constituting a good training program or approach to enhance EI of salespeople.

4) BRIDGING THE GAP / IMPROVING EI OF SALESPEOPLE

Once salespeople have assessed their EI strengths and weaknesses, exercises to enhance their EI can be used. While there are a number of literature is available with ideas on how to improve emotional intelligence at workplace (e.g. Epstein 1998; Feldman 1999; Weisinger 1998) none speak specifically to the needs of the salespeople. Here the author present **ENCORE**, a six step self development approach, which can be instrumental in enhancing EI of salespeople.

- **E- "Emotional Awareness"**, let's start with self-evaluation, looking honestly deep inside. What are the weaknesses and strengths? Accepting short comings and working on some areas to make them better.
- **N- "Neutralizing emotional dissonance"** Examine how you to react to stressful situations which demands higher emotional labor. The ability to stay calm and in control in difficult situations is highly valued - in the business world and outside it. Means understanding the required and felt emotions and trying to bridge the gap in between i.e. neutralizing emotional dissonance.
- **C- "Constraint"** - watching emotional responses, put a check on negative emotions that can damage relationships, inflict pain in others especially customers and colleagues.
- **O- "Observation"** - Observe how to react to people, develop emotional radar. Do not rush to judgment before all the facts are clear. Look honestly at interaction with other people, be a better listener and observer.
- **R- "Realization"** - Examining how one's actions affect others before taking those actions. Try to put yourself in their place, and be more open and accepting of their perspectives towards decision.
- **E- "Establishing Rapport with Others"** (*social skills/relationship management*) -communication openly with others. Accepting the point of view of others in conflict resolution, giving others a chance to shine.

SCOPE FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This paper has been an attempt by researchers to investigate the need and applications of EI in retailing from which future research can be generated. More research needs to confirm the applicability of this approach in different arena of business. New researches might investigate importance of each single dimension of emotional intelligence such as self management, relationship management etc in retailing. Also researches focusing on specific areas for example the impact of ability to recognize customers' emotions, capacity to handle emotional labor, ability to deal with emotional dissonance etc on their performance. Even the importance of EI competencies from buyer point of view can also be studied.

CONCLUSION

Today's retailing is dynamic in nature characterized by highly segmented market, stressed consumers who are hungry for personal attention. Now a primary measure of success in sale is the way customers perceive it. To create loyal customers, organizations must endeavor for "customer delight." In this process

individual competencies as Emotional Intelligence of sales force of any organization are strong determinant of success in retail. This paper has been an attempt by researchers to investigate the need and applications of EI in retailing from which future research can be generated.

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