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Tour guides' emotional intelligence in relation to demographic characteristics

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Emotional Intelligence (EI) is being recognized as a significant factor in academic work and general life experiences. Due to the fact that tour guides act as intermediaries between tourists and an unfamiliar environment, they play a significant role in the success or failure of a tour experience. The aim of this paper is therefore to explore the relationships of demographic variables, including social demographics (e.g. gender, age, education, and marital status) and work variables (e.g. primary languages used and work experience) with tour guides' EI. The sample consisted of 380 tour guides. The results indicated that there were differences between the individuals' EI in relation to the variables of gender and length of service. Implications and recommendations of the results are given, and future research possibilities discussed.

Key words: Tour guide, Emotional Intelligence (EI), tourism, emotional skills.

INTRODUCTION

Emotional Intelligence (EI) has attracted increasing attention and enjoyed a robust resurgence across a wide range of disciplines of psychology, education, and management over the last decade. In 1990, Peter Salovey and John Mayer first introduced the term EI and defined it as the mental ability to monitor one's own and other's feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this to guide one's thinking and actions (Salovery and Mayer, 1990, p.189). Later, the authors revised the definition of EI to its current, widely accepted characterization as a set of cognitive abilities to perceive emotion, integrate emotion to facilitate thought, understand emotions, and regulate emotions to promote personal growth (Mayer and Salovey, 1997). EI initially emerged as a concept referring to intelligent behaviors in dealing with emotional-related issues such as problem solving or behavior regulation (Mayer et al., 1999). Emotionally intelligent individuals may be more aware of their own feelings and the feelings of others, as well as being better able to identify and communicate them. It has been suggested that there are individual differences in our ability to employ emotions and emotional information (Mayer and Salovey, 1993).

In his 1995 best-selling book "*Emotional intelligence: Why it can matter more than IQ*," Daniel Goleman explains that Intelligence Quotient (IQ) is considered to account for approximately 20% of the factors that determine life success, and he argues that EI can account for the remaining factors. EI can thus be considered as a significant factor in success at home, at work, and in the school. In the same year, EI appeared on the cover of *TIME* magazine (Gibbs, 1995), and the corresponding article claimed that "Emotional Intelligence may be the best predictor of success in life, redefining what it means to be smart". Since then, the usefulness of the EI construct has led researchers to examine its potency in various aspects of human functioning in the work environment. Numerous studies have found that EI is associated with a number of positive outcomes in the workplace, affecting variables such as leadership (Scott-Halsell et al., 2008), resistance to stress (Bar- On et al., 2000; Mikolajczak et al., 2007), work attitude (Carmeli, 2003), job satisfaction and performance (Kafetsios and Zampetakis, 2008; Law et al., 2008; Wong and Law, 2002), employees' creativity (Zhou and George, 2003) and career achievements (Dulewitz and Higgs, 1999).

While considerable evidence of the importance of EI has been acknowledged in the work environment, rather surprisingly, research into the EI skills of professionals in the tourism field is lacking in the literature (Carvelzani et al., 2003; Langhorn, 2004). The ability to manage, regulate and control one's emotions in order to interact

with others effectively is one of the most essential skills in the tourism industry, which involves high-contact encounters and significant interaction among customers (Carvelzani et al., 2003). According to Goleman (1998), customer service providers with EI skills are very adept at influencing positive responses in the people with whom they interact. Due to the fact that they act as interme- diaries between tourists and an unfamiliar environment (Hughes, 1991), tour guides play an important role in the success or failure of a tour experience (Leclerc and Martin, 2004). Their performance even influences a tourist's perception of the host destination (Jiang and Tribe, 2009; Zhang and Chow, 2004). Because tour guides have such responsibility for the overall satisfaction and impressions of tourists, a thorough understanding of EI formation and composition is crucial for tour guides.

Much previous research has investigated the gender- based differences in EI and found that females have higher EI than male (Brackett et al., 2006; Ciarrochi et al., 2000; Day and Carroll, 2004; 2000; Mandell and Pherwani, 2003; Mayer et al., 1999; Palmer et al., 2003; Schutte et al, 1998; Slaski and Cartwright, 2002). A study by Palmer et al. (2003), for instance, found that women score higher than men on general EI, scoring especially high in terms of interpersonal skills and emotional self- awareness. Regarding the relationship between EI and age, Goleman (1995) argues that EI increases with age and maturity. However, Mayer et al. (2004) caution that there is limited evidence suggesting that EI increases with age. Hence, the aim of this paper is to explore the relationships of demographic variables, including social demographic (e.g. gender, age, education, and marital status) and work variables (e.g. primary languages used and work experience) with tour guides' EI. The goals of this paper are twofold: to evaluate the EI levels of tour guides and to investigate whether specific demographic variables are correlated with EI. Because EI plays an integral role in interactions with others and success in daily life (Goleman, 1995), examining tour guides' EI may help them in understanding the areas of life that are influential to EI formation.

THEORETICAL BASES OF THE CURRENT

STUDY EI history

Among researchers and practitioners, EI is considered a relatively recent psychological construct. However, the concept of EI can be traced to early studies in the 1920s (Bar-On and Parker, 2000). The concept of 'social intelligence' was introduced by Thorndike (1920), who defined it as the ability to understand and manage people to act wisely in human relations. The concept of EI grew out of this particular definition, which influenced how EI was understood and conceptualized. For example, Wechsler argued in 1940 that non-intelligence abilities are essential for predicting ability to succeed in life, and in

1959 Guilford put forth a view of intelligence as a complex construct composed of several different types of intelligence.

Shanley et al. (1971) hypothesized that social intelligence was distinct from academic intelligence, but few empirical findings supported social intelligence as a separate construct. In the early 1980s, scholars began to systematically conceptualize the idea of EI. Notably, Gardner (1983), a psychologist at Harvard University, initiated the theory of multiple intelligences and proposed that intrapersonal and interpersonal intelligence are as important as the type of intelligence typically measured by Intelligence Quotient (IQ) and related tests. In 1990, Salovey and Mayer coined the term EI and defined it as the ability to deal with emotions. Since then, EI has been developed, adapted, and embraced by both the popular literature and within academia.

Two main conceptualizations of EI are explored: the ability-based and the trait-based (or mixed) models. The first model, conceived by Salovey and Mayer, perceives EI as a form of pure intelligence that is, EI concerns an individual's capacity to reason about emotions and to process emotional information to enhance cognitive processes and regulate behavior. The conceptualization involves three mental processes: (a) the appraisal and expression of emotions in oneself and others, (b) the regulation of emotion in oneself and others, and (c) the utilization of emotions to facilitate thought. The above three processes were further divided into subcomponents within the model. Although the model is general in nature, it also focuses on individual differences in mental processes and abilities (Mayer and Geher, 1996; Mayer and Salovey, 1993).

A second model by both Goleman (1995; 1998) and Bar-On (1997) regards EI as a mixed intelligence, consis- ting of cognitive ability and personality aspects. Goleman (1998) has expanded Mayer and Salovey's model by incorporating what he terms personal and social competencies. In his model, EI consists of five variables which are categorized in two dimensions: personal competencies (self-awareness, self-regulation, and motivation) and social competencies (empathy and social skills). Building on Goleman's model, Bar-On (1997) conceptualized EI as a non- cognitive ability, involving five broad skill areas that help an individual become more effective in dealing with environmental demands and pressures: *intrapersonal skills, interpersonal skills, adaptability, stress management,* and *general mood.* However, unlike the model proposed by Bar-On, Goleman's model focuses on how cognitive and personality factors determine workplace success.

Nelson and Low's emotional learning system

Although, most researchers follow the two models of EI as earlier referred to, the present study prefers a third model of EI - Nelson and Low's emotional learning system.

system. In keeping with other models, Nelson and Low (2003) believe that EI is the most important variable that influences personal achievement and career success. In their model, EI can be learned and developed by means of self-directed coaching, mentoring, and visualization. Thus, Nelson and Low developed the Emotional Skills Assessment Process (ESAP) to help fill a perceived gap in the documented skill and mixed-bases models by offering a psychologically sound yet practically sequential EI measure appropriate for academic use and career development. EI, as defined in the present study by Nelson and Low, is a learned ability to identify, experience, understand, and express human emotions in healthy and productive ways. This definition leads to a practical, comprehensive, and skills-based approach to developing emotional abilities: (1) knowing and valuing self, (2) building and maintaining a variety of strong, productive, and healthy relationships, (3) getting along and working well with others in achieving positive results, and (4) effectively dealing with the pressures and demands of life and work (Nelson and Low, 2003) . Initially, Nelson and Low developed ESAP including 10 emotional skills and 3 problematic indicators, which requires responses of up to 213 items and takes over an hour to complete. The ESAP- CV was then introduced with six EI variables. They include the skills of *Assertion, Drive Strength, Time Management, Commitment Ethic, Change Orientation* and *Stress Management.*

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Procedure

This study involves the collection and analysis of quantitative data in order to examine whether the EI of tour guides differs across socio-demographic and work variables. The Taiwan Tourist Guide Association granted permission for the research because they would benefit from the research findings. Surveys were provided to the association, which subsequently distributed them to tour guides. Tour guides were informed that they were participating in a voluntary study on an EI project and the instructions were then given. Participants were permitted to complete the survey after on-the-job training activities. The instrument was a self-report measure, including 6 variables and 104 items, and took approximately 30 to 40 min to complete. Upon completion of the survey, every respondent was given a Swiss Army Knife (Victorinox) as a gift, and data collection was completed between February and August of 2009.

Instrument

In this study, tour guides' EI levels were measured by the Chinese version of ESAP-CV. Permission to use this scale in the current study was granted by its authors. The 104-item ESAP-CV contained 6 variables using a 3-point Likert-type scale: (1) most often, (2) sometimes, and (3) least often. The 104 skill statements constitute six EI variables which are categorized as three dimensions: interpersonal skills (*Assertion*), self management skills (*Drive Strength, Time Management, Commitment Ethic,* and *Change Orientation*) *and* intrapersonal skills (*Stress Management*). Brief

descriptions of each variable and a sample question used are provided in Table 1.

Even if previous work provided preliminary evidence for the construct reliability and validity of the instrument (Tang et al., 2010; Min et al., 2009), both the reliability and validity need to be further established through independent research. The reliability and validity of methods used in this study were established through quaitative and quantitative research approaches. With regard to the applicability of each item to the current study, interviews were conducted to collect eight experts' opinions. They include two seasoned tour guides (one is the pre-chairman of the association; another is on the board of the association), each of whom have over 25 years of experience. The experts also included five university professors in the field of travel management, and one senior government officer who was in charge of tourism affairs. Expert opinions from academics, practitioners, and a government official were collected, common agreements were reached, and the revisions were made in order to make items applicable to tour guides. Cronbach alpha reliability coefficients for *Assertion* (0.821), *Drive Strength* (0.899), *Time Management* (0.851), *Commitment Ethic* (0.865), *Change Orientation* (0.896) and *Stress Management* (0.849) were considered acceptable, and they were likewise deemed acceptable for all 104 items (0.886). All variables had acceptable reliabilities with their alphas above 0.7 (Vogt, 1999).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

All data entry and analyses were conducted using SPSS version 14.0 (SPSS, 2005). Descriptive statistics were employed to obtain a representation of the sample. The demographic variables tested were gender, age, education level completed, marital status, primary languages used, and years in the profession of tour guide. In total, 466 questionnaires were distributed to respondents, and 402 were returned—an 86.26% response rate. Of the returned surveys, 22 questionnaires were incomplete and eliminated from the final sample. The final sample consisted of 380 tour guides, of whom 215 were males (56.6%) and 165 were females (43.4%), reflecting similar gender proportions represented by the tour guide population in Taiwan (60% : 40%) reported in 2009.

The main age group was 41 to 45, representing 28.7% of the respondents. The next five groups were 36 to 40 (28.2%), 31 to 35 (18.4%), 25 to 30 (11.6%), 46 to 50 (9.2%), and above 51 (3.2%). The remaining age group, below 25 years old, only accounted for 0.8% of the participants. In terms of education, more than three quarters of respondents (77.9%) had completed college or university, including 43.4% from university and 34.5% from college. Those with a postgraduate degree (13.4%), and vocational school (8.7%) followed. The groups of marital status included married (58.7%), single (35.5%), and divorced or windowed (5.8%), respectively. Regarding the primary languages used, 82.1% of the respondents were working in Mandarin Chinese, 12.6% in English, and 2.4% in Japanese, with 2.9% working in other languages. Eighteen tour guides (4.7%) indicated that they were using more than one language. The work experience of the respondents was as follows: 16.8% had

Table 1. Variables of ESAP-CV questionnaire.

Dimension/Variable	Description	Sample Item
Interpersonal skills		
Assertion	The ability to clearly and honestly communicate personal thoughts and feelings to another person in a comfortable, direct, appropriate, and straightforward manner	When I communicate to an "Authority" person, I usually behave comfortably and at ease with the person.
Self management skills		
Drive Strength	The ability to effectively direct personal energy and motivation to achieve personal, career, and life goals	I set specific goals for my career and my life.
Time Management	The ability to achieve and productively manage the valuable resource of time rather than responding or reacting to the demands of time	I organize my responsibilities into an efficient personal time schedule.
Commitment Ethic	The ability to complete tasks, projects, assignments and personal responsibilities in a dependable and successful manner, even under difficult conditions	When I decide to do something, I carry through and do it.
Change Orientation	The degree to which a person is motivated for change. This is converted into the emotional skill of Positive Personal Change. It is also a reflection of a person's acceptance of their current behavior	One of the things that I need to change most is how I feel about myself as a person.
Intrapersonal skills		
Stress Management	The ability to choose and exercise healthy self-control and self-management in response to stressful events	If I really relaxed and enjoyed life the way I wanted to, I would find it hard to feel good about myself.

16.8% had less than 2 years experience working as tour guides, 6.8% had 3 to 4 years, 20.5% had 5 to 6 years, 24.7% had 7 to 8 years, and 18.7% had 9 to 10 years, with 12.9% having more than 10 years experience. As many as 87.1% of the respondents had less than 10 years on the job, whereas 12.9% had more than 10 years experience. The demographic profile of the respondents is presented in Table 2. Table 3 shows the descriptive statistics and Cronbach's alpha.

An independent sample t-test, one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and two-way ANOVA were conducted to investigate if differences were present between tour guides' EI based on demographic variables. Linear regression analysis was further employed to determine which independent variables were predictive of tour guides' EI. First, a Kendall's tau-b correlation test demonstrated that no significance was found between EI and age, education level, marital status and primary languages used, but EI scores were significantly impacted by gender and work experiences. Table 4 displayed the results of correlations between demographics and EI.

In order to establish gender differences, an independent t-test was conducted, the results of which are displayed in Table 5. The findings show that females (M=142.81, SD=12.893) scored significantly higher than males (M=121.82, SD= 15.312) on overall EI. In addition, an inspection of the mean scores shows that females reported higher levels at $p<0.001$ on the variables of *Assertion* (M=26.48 vs. M=22.44, t=-7.378), *Drive strength* (M=41.09 vs. M=34.77, t= -8.397), *Time Management* (M=19.46 vs. M=16.27, t=-7.626), *Commitment ethic* (M=20.90 vs. M=17.91, t=-7.428), and *Stress management* (M=22.70 vs. M=19.24, t=-3.641*)*. The variable *Change orientation* (M=12.31 vs. M=11.25, t=-1.952) is the only exception.

Five one-way ANOVAs were conducted to

Table 2. Demographic profile of respondents.

Variable	Frequency (N=380)	Percentage
Gender		
Male	215	56.6
Female	165	43.4
Age group (years)		
Under 25	3	0.8
26 to 30	44	11.6
31 to 35	70	18.4
36 to 40	107	28.2
41 to 45	109	28.7
46 to 50	35	9.2
51 and above	12	3.2
Education		
Vocational school	33	8.7
College	131	34.5
University	165	43.4
Postgraduate	51	13.4
Marital status		
Single	135	35.5
Married	223	58.7
Divorced or Widowed	22	5.8
Language		
Chinese	312	82.1
English	48	12.6
Japanese	9	2.4
Others	11	2.9
Work experience (years)		
under 2	64	16.8
3 to 4	24	6.3
5 to 6	78	20.5
7 to 8	94	24.7
9-10	71	18.7
Above 11	49	12.9

evaluate the relationships between EI and age, education level, marital status; primary languages used, and work experiences. Examinations of the results show a statistically significant difference in terms of work experience (F (5, 374) = 49.757) at p<0.001 level, but no relationships between EI and the others were discovered. Post-hoc comparisons using the LSD for each tenure group indicated that those with longer length of service report higher levels of EI than those with shorter length of service. A further assessment conducted to explore the impact of work experience on all the EI variables had a statistically significant effect: *Assertion* (F (5, 374) =14.820, p<0.000), *Drive Strength* (F (5, 374) = 25.272,

p<0.000), *Time Management* (F (5, 374) = 15.325, p<0.000), *Commitment Ethic* (F (5, 374) = 20.122, p<0.000), *Change Orientation* (F (5, 374) = 3.700, p<0.003) and *Stress Management* (F (5, 374) = 4.035, p<0.001). It is clear that differences do exist in total EI and each variable between work experiences, and the EI scores apparently rose with increasing with length of service. Moreover, the interaction "gender x work experience" was assessed by two-way ANOVA, and there was a significant effect on the total EI scores (M=26.48 vs. M=22.44, F (5, 368) =4.437, p<0.000). This was also true of the variables of *Drive Strength* (M=34.77 vs. M= 41.09, F (5, 368) =4.672, p < 0.000), *Time Management*

Table 3. Mean, standard deviation, and Cronbach's alpha (N=380) for ESAP-CV.

Dimension	Items	M	SD	Range Minimum	Maximum	Cronbach
General Score	104	130.94	17.69	78	175	0.886
Assertion	18	34.20	5.72	6	36	0.821
Drive Strength	25	37.51	7.92	15	50	0.899
Time Management	12	17.66	4.34	4	24	0.851
Commitment Ethic	12	19.21	4.16	7	24	0.865
Change Orientation	12	11.71	5.24	1	24	0.896
Stress Management	25	20.74	9.33	1	48	0.849

Table 4. Correlations between demographics and EI.

Variable	r	N	p	Kendall©s tau_b
Gender	0.589	380	0.000	0.509*
Age	-0.036	380	0.479	-0.111
Education	-0.022	380	0.666	-0.015
Marriage status	0.069	380	0.180	0.051
Language	-0.008	380	0.856	-0.018
Work experience	0.490	380	0.000	0.494*

*$p < 0.001$

Table 5. Mean EI and gender t-test.

Gender	Mean EI	N	SD	df	t	p
Male	121.82	215	15.312			
Female	142.81	165	12.893			
Total	130.93	380	14.260	378	-14.169*	< 0.001

*$p < 0.001$

Management (M=16.27 vs. M=19.46, F (5, 368) =3.367, p<0.01), *Commitment Ethic* (M=17.91 vs. M=20.90, F (5, 368) =2.712, p<0.05), *Change Orientation* (M=12.25 vs. M=12.31, F (5, 368) =2.447, p<0.05) and *Stress Management* (M=19.24 vs. M=22.70, F (5, 368) =2.815, p<0.05*)*. Both male and female tour guides with more work experience performed higher on total EI and on *Drive Strength*, *Time Management*, *Commitment Ethic*, *Change Orientation* and *Stress Management.*

Finally, regression analysis was carried out to test the predictability that EI scores could have on the demographic variables. Regression analysis results confirm the previous results, as two independent variables (gender and work experience) remained significantly predictive of tour guides' EI, showing correlation greater than 0.4. The regression model explained the 54.2% variance among the 380 tour guides' EI scores, which indicates that a statistically significant result was obtained from the regression model (Table 6).

In this study, the six personal variables (gender, age, education level, marital status, primary languages used

and work experience) were examined in relation to the EI of tour guides. Gender and work experience were found to have associations with the tour guides' EI. For gender, the female tour guides reported higher levels of EI than the male tour guides. These findings are consistent with the results reported earlier, indicating that women generally have higher scores in EI than men. Not surprisingly, tenure was found to have strong associations with EI as well. The results indicated that the longer a tour guide worked in the industry, the higher his or her levels of EI. These differences could possibly be due to particular work experiences or different levels of maturity among individuals. Those with a service mentality are often attracted to the tourism industry, and those who are service- oriented tend to remain in the industry and achieve success (Varca, 2004).

Conclusion

EI can be defined as the ability to recognize and regulate

Table 6. Regression analysis for variables predicting EI.

	Independent variable	Standardized coefficients Beta	t	p
Total EI	Gender	0.433	11.323*	0.000
Adjusted R^2 = 0.542	Age	-0.114	-1.135	0.122
	Education	-0.033	-0.953	0.341
	Marriage status	0.086	1.401	0.117
	Language used	0.015	0.440	0.660
	Work experience	0.457	12.053*	0.000

*p < 0 .001.

emotions in ourselves and others. EI contributes in a variety of areas of an individual's personal and professional life (Goleman, 1998). The aim of this study is therefore to examine the demographic characteristics of tour guides in relation to EI. The results indicated that there were differences between the individuals' EI in relation to the variables of gender and length of service.

Although EI alone is not a predictor of success, it is an important foundational component of success (Goleman, 1998). While earlier research established the relationship between EI and job factors, the present study investigated the differences in EI depending on the specific variables. In light of the lack of research of tour guides' EI, the importance of this study is evident. The results of this study contribute to existing literature by indicating what EI levels tour guides currently posses and provide new insight into the relationships that exist between tour guides' EI and their gender and work experience. EI research is still in its infancy and our knowledge about it is thus limited. This study attempts to make a small step towards increasing our understanding of it. Although this study's focus is on the profession of tour guides, the theoretical reasoning outlined in the previous discussions has its roots in many other studies, and the methodology should therefore have wide applicability.

LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This study is the first attempt to introduce the EI concept and explore the relationship between EI and demographic and work variables for tour guides. During the study, some limitations of the research became apparent. These limitations relate to the research instrument and the sample generalization. First, the validity of questionnaire methods of measuring EI has been criticized. Because the EASP-CV constitutes self-report measures, tour guides' assessments likely reflect a perceived efficacy rather than demonstrated ability, and the accuracy of respondents' scores are influenced by respondents' truthfulness. This study can be replicated

using different approaches to evaluate tour guides' EI level, such as a 360 degree feedback instrument (e.g. Emotional Competence Inventory or ECI) from multiple raters or by combining self-administrating measures with other EI scales. This would provide a more complete evaluation of individuals' EI skills.

Second, the sampling necessarily restricts the generalizability of the results. The majority of the participants were junior tour guides (with less than 10 years' experience). As noted previously, participants completed the survey after on-the-job training activities provided by the Association, and junior tour guides may have a greater tendency to take part in training than more senior or longer -serving tour guides. Sampling extending to guides with different levels of experience will be conducted for further investigation in order to yield more objective evaluations. Third, the ESAP-CV used in this study consists of 104 items which requires at least 30 min to complete, depending on the individual response style. Many respondents complained that the test was too lengthy and caused exhaustion, loss of concentration and impatience when responding. Whether the instrument might be modified into a shorter version for measuring tour guides' emotional competencies could provide a basis for further study.

Despite the limitations discussed above, this study has some meaningful managerial implications. Due to the importance of EI in career and personal success, the development of EI skills is essential (Nelson and Low, 2003; Goleman, 1998). In this regard, different EI training programs can be designed focusing on different gender and length of service groups based on the findings. The Taiwan Tourist Guide Association can incorporate the EI learning programs into the current on-the-job training for tour guides in order to improve their EI skills and provide them with benefits in both the personal and interpersonal realms. In addition, a course on EI or integrating the development of EI skills into the curriculum of the tourism-related departments in universities would help students to be more aware of their emotional competencies before they entered the tour guide profession. Whether the EI factors will be included in the criteria in

selecting tour guides in Taiwan as opposed to written test results in the future merits further consideration and scrutiny.

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