

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Relationship between emotional intelligence and non verbal behaviour in enhancing workplace relationship

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ABSTRACT

The recent Covid 19 pandemic has disrupted the operations of many organisations around the world. Many employees had to change their work arrangements, by working at home. This was the work arrangement for about 1 and half years from 2020 until 2021. Towards the end of 2021 and beginning of 2022, many employees are happy to be able to resume their almost normal work arrangements. After working from remote places, the transition to return to normal would need some changes in habits and behaviour. The purpose of this paper is to examine the contribution of emotional intelligence and non verbal behaviour in enhancing the workplace relationship. A successful organisation has been chosen for this study. All of their executives took part in this analysis. The Genos emotional intelligence questionnaire has been used to collect the data from the respondents. From the analysis, it was found that both emotional intelligence and non verbal behaviour enhances the workplace relationship.

Keywords: productivity; teamwork; harmonious

1. Introduction

In March 2020, Malaysia's Prime Minister announced a total lockdown in a bid to control the spread of the corona virus which was named as Covid-19. The virus was first discovered in 2019. The Prime Minister had many movement control orders all across the country and across industry-wide. Some industries had to stop their operations as their industry was considered as non-essential. This scenario painted for the most part of the country. Businesses and individuals have all been affected one way or another by the Coronavirus pandemic. During this unprecedented time, some companies and employees have embraced new skills and develop new behaviours which have improved the way they operated. In the past, employees perceived that a "9 to 5", office-centric work was the best thing for business. As employees have been forced to work from home, and businesses have had to embrace this change, they experienced a change in productivity and employee freedom. This shift in working life has encouraged businesses to take only the best parts of office culture, and free employees from inefficient processes and bad habits. Leaders are switching their focus from office culture to a more supportive culture, with a new focus on how to improve the lives of their employees while still getting the best from them. Having a good level of emotional intelligence supports workplace relationships. Communication keeps the coordination in an organisation working well. A good understanding and usage of good non verbal behaviours strengthens the workplace relationship. It was found that 90% of communication relates to non verbal^[1]. The purpose of this paper is to examine the relationship between

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emotional intelligence and nonverbal skills in enhancing workplace relationships.

2. Literature review

The shifts in the work operations from working in the office to remote work and hybrid work, has affected the nature of social capital in organisations. These shifts may not be necessarily for the better. While employees report more meetings than ever, they also report more isolation and less connection. Working remotely affected the behaviours of office colleagues, they became distant. While working in a hybrid mode improved workplace relationships. It is hoped that organisations will try to improve the workplace relationships to ensure their organisation can overcome the challenges that lie ahead. This paper will examine the relationships of emotional intelligence and non verbal behaviours to workplace relationships.

2.1. Emotional intelligence

It has been claimed that individuals with a higher level of emotional intelligence are more successful than those with lower levels of emotional intelligence^[2]. Based on a study conducted in Australia^[3], emotional intelligence has 5 dimensions. These dimensions are emotional recognition and expression, understanding others emotions, emotions direct cognition, emotional management and emotional control. Emotional recognition and expression refer to the ability to identify one's own feelings and emotional states, and the ability to express those inner feelings to others. The ability to correctly expresses oneself enables others to understand them and this improves communication among everyone at the workplace. Understanding others emotions refers to the ability to identify and understand the emotions of others and those that manifest in response to workplace environments. To understand others is not an easy task, colleagues need to know each other well at the workplace. Knowing each other strengthens workplace relationships. Emotions direct cognition refers to the extent to which emotions and emotional knowledge are incorporated in decision-making or problem-solving situations. Emotional management relates to the ability to manage positive and negative emotions both within oneself and others. Emotional control is described as the ability to control strong emotional states experienced at work such as anger, stress, anxiety, and frustration effectively.

2.2. Non verbal behaviour

Verbal and non-verbal communication occur simultaneously. According to the 7-38-55 rule, 7% of the meaning of feelings and attitudes takes place through the words people use in spoken communications, while 38% takes place through tone and voice and the remaining 55% of communication of these factors take place through the body language people use (specifically the facial expressions)^[4]. 55% of essential and important communicative elements are transmitted via non verbal behaviour. Non verbal behaviour include facial expressions, gestures, paralinguistics such as loudness or tone of voice, body language, proxemics or personal space, eye gaze, haptics (touch) and appearance. Facial expressions are responsible for a huge proportion of nonverbal communication. Deliberate movements and signals are an important way to communicate meaning without words. Common gestures include waving, pointing, and using fingers to indicate numeric amounts. Paralinguistics refers to vocal communication that is separate from actual language. This includes factors such as tone of voice, loudness, inflection, and pitch. Posture and movement can also convey a great deal of information. Proxemics refers to the amount of distance people need and the amount of space people perceive as belonging to them is influenced by a number of factors including social norms, cultural expectations, situational factors, personality characteristics, and level of familiarity. The eyes play an important role in nonverbal communication and such things as looking, staring and blinking are important nonverbal behaviors. When people encounter people or things that they like, the rate of blinking increases and pupils dilate. Normal, steady eye contact is often taken as a sign that a person is telling the truth and is trustworthy. Shifty eyes and

an inability to maintain eye contact, on the other hand, is frequently seen as an indicator that someone is lying or being deceptive. Communicating through touch is another important nonverbal behaviour. Women tend to use touch to convey care, concern, and nurturance. Men, on the other hand, are more likely to use touch to assert power or control over others. The choice of colour, clothing, hairstyles, and other factors affecting appearance are also considered a means of nonverbal communication. Different colours can evoke different moods. Appearance can also alter physiological reactions, judgments, and interpretations. Appearances can play a role in how people are perceived and even how much they earn.

2.3. Workplace relationships

Workplace relationships are unique interpersonal relationships with important implications for employees and the organisations in which the relationships exist and develop. Workplace relationships directly affect an employees' ability and drive to succeed. There are 4 types of workplace relationships^[5], they are targeted relationships, tentative relationships, transactional relationships and trusted relationships. Targeted and tentative relationships are established due to its purpose. Tentative relationships are different from targeted relationships because the meeting did take place. Transactional relationships are less personal and typically used by managers to accomplish specific business objectives. Trusted relationships are the most personal, valuable and often the "longest-lasting" relationships.

Forging good quality workplace relationships are considered as an important element to the survival and future of the organisation^[6]. A good quality workplace relationship requires a good team spirit which needs the element of trust and respect among everyone in the team. Teams also needs to have a good form of communication – verbally and non verbally. Non verbal communication plays an important role in forging the team spirit. A lack of trust in the workplace is the virus that can create a diseased workplace culture^[7]. Lack of trust is often at the core of dysfunctional office environments. Once trust is lost, it can take time and a lot of work to turn around a negative culture. Trust among employees is critical to the health of a company's culture and ultimately to its bottom line.

It has been suggested that emotional intelligence is a valuable skill that helps improve communication, management, problem-solving, and relationships within the workplace^[8]. Many of these studies were carried out in the west but very little studies were conducted in the east. Furthermore, studies conducted during the post Covid-19 is rather scarce. There is a need to further determine the influence of emotional intelligence in forging a good quality workplace relationship. Non verbal behaviour was suggested to improve workplace relationships. Studies relating non verbal behaviour to workplace relationships have not been comprehensively reviewed^[9].

The purpose of this paper is to examine the relationships between emotional intelligence and non verbal behaviour to workplace relationships. There are 2 research questions and 2 research objectives, as follows:

The research questions are as follows:

- 1) What is the relationship between the dimensions of emotional intelligence to performance of an organisation?
- 2) What is the relationship between non verbal behaviour to performance of an organisation?

The research objectives are as follows:

- 1) To determine the relationship between the dimensions of emotional intelligence to performance of an organisation.
- 2) To study the relationship between non verbal behaviour and performance of an organisation.

The hypotheses for the study can be written as follows:

- 1) There is a relationship between emotional recognition and expression and performance in an organisation.
- 2) There is a relationship between understanding others emotions and performance of an organisation.
- 3) There is a relationship between emotions direct cognition and performance of an organisation.
- 4) There is a relationship between emotional management and performance of an organisation.
- 5) There is a relationship between emotional control and performance of an organisation.
- 6) There is a relationship between non verbal behaviour and performance of an organisation.

3. Methodology/Materials

For the purpose of analyzing the relationships, a successful organisation in Malaysia has been selected to participate. The organisation has been in operations for more than 50 years and the organisation is also one of the main players for plastic manufacturing.

3.1. Target and sample

A successful manufacturing organization in Selangor, Malaysia has been chosen for the study. This organization has been in existence for more than 50 years. The organization started from a 2 men team to a team of more than 1000 employees with branches in Penang, Selangor and Melaka. A total of 110 executives in the organization took part in the study. Until to date, the organization has not retrenched any of their employees. 3 sets of questionnaires were distributed to all the executives with the help of the Human Resource personnel. The Genos Emotional Intelligence questionnaire^[3] has been used to examine the level of emotional intelligence among the executives in the organization.

A case study approach was used for this study. A case study is an appropriate research design when the objective of the study is to acquire precise, contextual, in-depth knowledge about a particular real-world subject. The researcher can then consider the case's key characteristics, importance, and implications. Each organisation is unique. The value, rareness, imitability, and organisation (VRIO) framework rates the distinctiveness of organisational resource characteristics using these four mechanisms. Therefore, in order to create successful business strategies, it is essential to be aware of the relevant company resources and capabilities.

3.2. Respondents

A majority of the executives are males and about 60% of them are more than 40 years old. 58.18% of them have worked in the organisation for more than 10 years. This may indicate that the employees are satisfied with the management style. 56 executives are in the production area (Production = 21; the Engineering = 30; Store and Logistics = 6), while 54 are with the administration side (Human Resource = 21; Finance and Accounts = 12; Sales and Marketing = 20). Based on the manpower distribution, it was found that the management focused on 2 departments; i.e., engineering and sales and marketing. They need the 2 sets of departments to ensure that there is sales and the product meets the quality standard set by the customers.

4. Results and findings

A multiple regression analysis was done to determine the relationship between emotional intelligence, non verbal behaviour and workplace relationships. The *R* square value obtained is 0.73, this means that 73% of the variance is due to the dimensions of emotional intelligence and non verbal behaviour. All of the dimensions of emotional intelligence were found to have a positive significant relationship to workplace relationship, their *p* values are less than 0.05. The *p* value for non verbal behaviour were found to be less than 0.05 and the relationship is positive. This is seen in **Table 1**. The findings showed that emotional intelligence

and non verbal behaviour does improve workplace relationships. There could be other factors that could influence the workplace relationships, this can be explained by the 27% balance of the earlier variations.

The *t* values for all the dimensions are above 2. This shows the significant impact of the variable to workplace relationships. The higher the values, the higher the effects of the variable. Emotional recognition and expression showed a higher effect than the others. Based on the findings it would seem that if employees were able to recognize and express their emotions correctly, the workplace becomes better. In general, Asians are very much conservative and are not very good at expressing their true feelings. Asians are ‘culturally trained’ to down-regulate emotional processing when required to suppress emotional expressions^[10]. In the case of the current organisation, their executives are being trained to improve their soft skills. Emotions direct cognition had the second highest *t* value. Emotion has a substantial influence on the cognitive processes in humans, including perception, attention, learning, memory, reasoning, and problem solving^[11]. Emotion has a particularly strong influence on attention, especially modulating the selectivity of attention as well as motivating action and behaviour. This attentional and executive control is intimately linked to learning processes, as intrinsically limited attentional capacities are better focused on relevant information. Emotion also facilitates encoding and helps retrieval of information efficiently. The ability to encode the messages improves the workplace relationships. The ability to control oneself especially in stressful situations at the workplace improves the inter relationships among colleagues. The *t* value for non verbal behaviour is fairly high. Positive nonverbal communication helps colleagues in the workplace build positive business relationships, whereas negative nonverbal communication can cause conflicts and other negative disturbances in the workplace.

Table 1. Regression analysis of emotional intelligence, non verbal behaviour and workplace relationships.

Model	Unstd Coefficients		Std Coeff	t	Sig.	Hypotheses Result
	B	Std. Error	Beta			
(Constant)	0.023	0.331		0.069	0.945	
ERE	0.320	0.070	0.325	4.565	0.000	Significant and accepted
UOE	0.158	0.082	0.149	2.031	0.006	Significant and accepted
EDC	0.250	0.072	0.263	3.477	0.001	Significant and accepted
EM	0.164	0.076	0.168	2.155	0.033	Insignificant and rejected
EC	0.178	0.069	0.167	2.596	0.011	Significant and accepted
NVB	0.463	0.182	0.433	2.539	0.013	Significant and accepted
Model Summary	R	R square				
	0.898	0.73				

Dependent Variable: WP
Key: ERE—Emotional Recognition and Expression; UOE—Understanding Others Emotions; EDC—Emotions Direct Cognition; EM—Emotional Management; EC—Emotional Control; NVB—Non verbal behaviour; WP—Workplace Relationships.

Based on the table, all hypotheses are accepted except for one. Emotional management is one of the dimension of emotional intelligence. The hypothesis has been rejected as the significant value is greater than 0.05.

Implications of findings

Nonverbal communication is very important in being able to have a high level of empathy. Being able to read their colleague’s body language, facial expressions, and tone of voice helps them to be able to determine more of what that person is feeling about a situation. Communication is a core leadership skill, and there is a

deep connection between one's ability to successfully communicate and one's ability to successfully lead. Emotional intelligence impacts the employees' ability to present key corporate issues with integrity and authenticity. It is about being able to listen well, to motivate and inspire others, to control their reactions, and to build strong relationships. Developing the communication skills is essential. One effective way to improve the communication skills is to strengthen the level of emotional intelligence. Good verbal communication skills allow employers to share information across the company, and help them reinforce relationships with their employees.

Manage emotions is a very effective way of improving the communication skills. Employees who have yet to develop sufficient emotional intelligence tend to react to situations without filtering their responses verbally and tonally; as well, they may exhibit inappropriate body language.

Many emotional reactions happen subconsciously. Through training and coaching, employees can begin to recognize how to control—and better yet, leverage their emotions—to be more effective with their business and personal communication. Ultimately, improving their emotional intelligence will allow them to be heard more accurately, inspire and motivate others, and augment their overall leadership presence.

5. Conclusion

The purpose of this paper is to examine the relationship between emotional intelligence, non verbal skills or behaviour and workplace relationships. A successful manufacturing organisation has been chosen to participate in this survey. Based on the findings, it was found that all dimensions of emotional intelligence and non verbal skills have a positive and significant relationship with workplace relationships. Emotional recognition and expression, emotions direct cognition and emotional control have a high t value, this proves that these dimensions are critical to the development of a better workplace relationship. Having a good workplace relationship improves the level of productivity and also decreases the rate of employee turnover.

Area of future study

This study examined only 2 variables, i.e., emotional intelligence and non verbal skills. Although the R square is 0.73, there are also other variables that could improve the workplace relationship. For future study, it would be beneficial to the growing knowledge to include more variables in the study. The study used a successful manufacturing organisation in the plastic industry. The results and findings are specific to this organisation and all other organisation with almost similar characteristics. For future study, it would be interesting to replicate the studies to other industries. The findings would increase and improve the theoretical knowledge of the subject matter.

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Conflict of interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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