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The impact of emotional intelligence on improving team-working: the case of Public Sector (National Centre for Public Administration and Local Government - N.C.P.A.L.G.)

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Abstract

The purpose of the paper is to examine two dimensions of Emotional Intelligence (E.I.), awareness and management of emotions, among the public sector's working groups and specifically in National Centre for Public Administration and Local Government (N.C.P.A.L.G.) and their impact on improving the way they work. The participants in a convenience sample are the employees of N.C.P.A.L.G. The E.I. proved to be an important factor in achieving the organization's goals, cooperation and level of trust between team members. It wasn't found a correlation between the two dimensions E.I. the punctual and accurate implementation of tasks. The concept of E.I. can be incorporated into certain activities of Human Resource Management as recruitment and working groups' composition. Furthermore, educational programs aimed at improving E.I. could be designed and implemented in order public administration to be efficient. N.C.P.A.L.G. is the national strategic agent for the development of the Human Resources of the Public Administration and Local Government and delivers specialized officers of rapid promotion. Its mission is to improve the efficiency of public sector services and it was considered the appropriate organization to conduct the survey both in terms of work organization and due to the institutionally strong N.C.P.A.L.G.'s position in promoting and implementing changes.

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1. Introduction

As emotional intelligence is increasingly associated to the improvement of organization's efficiency, on one hand and on the other teamwork as a modern form of work, is constantly gaining ground, it is of special interest to study the effect of emotional intelligence on the public sector's team works which will be and purpose of the present study.

The crisis and not only the economic that we are strongly experiencing in recent years has highlighted chronic pathologies and dysfunctions of the public sector. Therefore the need for removal of old attitudes and tactics becomes increasingly urgent and in order the nations to become competitive in a globalized world, they have to change, to adapt and become more flexible and efficient.

Except for the adoption of new technologies, which should be at the top of priorities of the state, the transformation of public administration has begun, changing gradually the way of working, as is attempted to pass from the personal way of working in team working. Surveys (Cross & Travaglione, 2003; Gantt & Agazarian, 2004) have concluded that teamwork produces multiple and multilevel benefits.

But as changes take place with incredibly fast pace, we must be open to new concepts and ideas which could contribute positively to enhance the efficiency of teamwork. One such concept is the emotional intelligence, as studies have shown that a high degree of team's emotional intelligence brings the desired results and makes the team successful and profitable.

Therefore, having in mind the above data, it was important to study the effect of emotional intelligence in the public sector working groups. Furthermore, the investigation of this issue in a key public organization, such as National Centre for Public Administration and Local Government (N.C.P.A.L.G.) assumes even greater value and significance as firstly, this is a very important institution with key government priorities to upgrade the quality of public policies, development of human resources, strengthening of equality policies across public sector and secondly, the empirical research was first applied to the organization and highlights important findings for both current situation and essentially measures-steps that could be implemented to improve the efficiency of the public administration (www.ekdd.gr; National Centre for Public Administration and Local Government, 2012, 2013).

2. Literature review

2.1. Emotional intelligence

The term "emotional intelligence" was first used in 1990 by Salovey and Mayer, who have defined emotional intelligence as the ability to recognize, understand and manage emotions both our own and others.

As research progressed and more scholars start dealing with the concept of emotional intelligence, various models, more or less known, were developed. The basic models that developed fall into two categories: the models that consider emotional intelligence as ability (ability EI) which is associated with the ability to control emotions, how to deal with situations/challenges and those who consider emotional intelligence as a characteristic (Trait EI) which is directly associated with the personality traits.

Finally, there are researchers that consider emotional intelligence a mixture of these models and provide a more broad interpretation of the concept, so in this case we refer to mixed models (Pappas, 2013).

The main difference between the two dominant models of emotional intelligence (Ability Model & Trait EI) lies to the way of measurement. The measurement of emotional intelligence as ability displays similarities to the traditional measurement of intelligence in which the "right" answers are set objectively and absolutely. In the measurement of emotional intelligence as a trait the "right" answers have not been determined in advance, the respondent is asked to use a scale (e.g. 1 to 5). On this basis a profile is created which is completely subjective and reflects more the way in which someone sees himself rather the way others do. The two main models of emotional intelligence differ both conceptually and empirically. As stated above the ability model is associated with the traditional way of measurement intelligence, academic success, how to deal with different situations and managing emotions. The model of emotional intelligence as a trait is related more to the personality and the way we choose to react (Jensen, Kohn, Rilea, Hannon, and Howells, 2007).

The concept of emotional intelligence despite their supporters there are scholars who strongly opposed to this concept as they do not consider it intelligence according to their opinion there is not enough empirical evidence supporting the existence of separate, distinct factors between the emotional intelligence of the actual (cognitive)

intelligence and logic. In 2005, Locke argues that long ago Salovey and Mayer (1990), Thorndike (1920) introduced the concept of social intelligence, a term that included all the dimensions and aspects of the definitions of emotional intelligence that followed. The fact also that the definition of the concept is constantly changing creates problems in scientific documentation. The same scholar argues that the definition of emotional intelligence concept is so much enlarged that it is impossible to incorporate all the reported data to a single concept as most of them (e.g. the ability to perceive the emotions of others) do not require some kind of intelligence but depend on the willing of the individual to focus on something as well as the individual's ability to manage his emotions or reactions requires the use of logic. Locke, strong supporter of logic, proposes the replacement of the emotional intelligence concept from the introspection ability or the redefinition of the concept as a personality trait and even different from what has already been developed.

2.2. *Emotional intelligence in the work place*

In an era where speed is the key feature, enterprises as living organisms are forced through reorganization to constantly adapt to global business scene. The need for a new, different intelligence that will help managers perform better and leaders to guide and lead the Corporation/organization on new successful paths is more than ever necessary.

The expanded emotional intelligence of a person's in the workplace is reflected through its ability to remain calm and focused in crisis situations, to choose the altruistic behavior towards the atomistic. Finally the person with high emotional intelligence pervaded by an optimistic approach to life in general (Brinia, 2008). The ability to recognize, understand and respond to the feelings of others might say that it requires a level of emotional "education", which grows only through one's ability to recognize his own emotions and determines the cause. The way we think and act is influenced by our emotions, e.g. having positive mood we become more creative, open-minded, find solutions to problems rather than create more. On the contrary, while we are experiencing negative emotions trying more to identify the mistakes of others, we are more focused in details and apply sterile criticism. In the literature it is suggested that people with high emotional intelligence can better communicate their ideas, intentions and goals, are crisp, positive, sensitive, features that are proved to be very important in the workplace.

Emotional intelligence can contribute much in the workplace as more and more researches connect it with the creation of strong bonds and interpersonal relationships among employees in the workplace and scientifically documented the positive correlation of emotional intelligence with the successful results of an organization (Clarke, 2010; Rozell & Scroggins, 2010). According to Tarricone and Luca (2002) creating a progressive and supportive working environment requires a combination of technical skills and developed emotional intelligence. Specifically they link the motivation with the organization's objectives achievement and argue that people who work with passion and perseverance, take initiatives, show dedication, are committed to the objectives, set common goals above personal, make decisions, insist and their interest in team achievements is sincere.

H1: Emotional Intelligence is correlated with the organization's goals achievement

2.3. *Emotional intelligence in teams*

As far as it concerns the theoretical context of group emotional intelligence two basic conceptual approaches have been developed a) by Druskat and Wolff (2001) and (b) by Gantt and Agazarian (2004). The above researchers believe that there are two different ways in which teams can build group emotional intelligence.

Druskat and Wolff (2001) chose two (2) dimensions of emotional intelligence in order to explore at group level, the knowledge and management of emotions, as these are common in models that have been developed. Team emotional intelligence is the ability of the group to develop norms (e.g. understanding among members, creating a positive working environment, developing proactive behavior about solving problems, building relationships with groups outside the Organization) that enhance awareness and management of emotions in order to achieve the desired results. The norms are developed on three levels: individual, group and cross boundary, creating awareness of emotions which arise from the interaction of team members and setting group behavior.

Gantt and Agazarian (2004) approach the Group Emotional Intelligence as a human system, which can be either a person or a group of individuals that uses the thought, knowledge and his instincts in order to take decisions

relating to the tasks. Consequently, the emotional intelligence of the system/group is its ability to distinguish and incorporate energy information (cognitive and affective) in order to serve the goals of the organization.

According to Druskat and Wolff (in press), there are two key features of emotional intelligence that make it relevant to the desirable and effective management of emotions in Group: Firstly, they argue that feelings can be early indicators of problems that may be faced by the group. Therefore, the attention given to the feelings of individuals can result in timely resolution of problems long before they become larger. Secondly, the emotional intelligence allows individuals to manage their negative feelings as the appearance of such emotions in teams is inevitable. In short we can say that the emotional intelligence can be an asset in the context of a group as people with high emotional intelligence are able to effectively manage the negative behaviors and use this knowledge to create a supportive, positive environment, which in turn will contribute to the cooperation, to improve processes of decision-making and the results of the group.

H2: Team members' Emotional Intelligence affects the cooperation between them.

2.4. Team working

Team working has emerged as dominant factor of organizational learning by changing the conditions in organizations with traditional hierarchical structures (Kozlowski & Bell, 2003).

The Team concept according to the Ayoko and Callan (2009) as stated by Naseer, Chishti, Rahman, and Jumani (2011) is a set of autonomous individuals who share the same responsibilities and are accountable for achieving their duties specified by the organization. Team definitions found in the literature are numerous, nevertheless converge on some common characteristics such as: each team is a system and has its own structure and its functions, the people who make up have skills, capabilities and meet different objectives and practices within them (Kozlowski & Bell, 2003).

The working groups, both face-to-face and virtual with ally technology constitute an effective way of work organization as the organization or the company saves time and ensures reduction of cost. Even in the case of virtual teams, technology by itself cannot produce the desired results. In both cases, groups of officers are invited to create a successful team and face common challenges (Lipnack & Stamps, 1999).

According to Barric et al. (1998) and George (2000) as reported by Prati, Douglas, Ferris, Ammeter, and Buckley (2003), a team is successful when there is cohesion which depends on the ability of its members to build very strong relationships and a strong support system. These researchers concluded that the ability of the individual to control his own emotions contribute to the cohesion of the group. Also, the sensitivity displayed by a person to the feelings and concerns of others, is the crucial factor as regards the cohesion of the group because it creates strong bonds among members who operate as a deterrent to the appearance of conflicts. Moreover, the high level of trust developed between the members of a group is the result of member's interaction which are brought into contact, in order to share knowledge, experiences, and emotions. The process of cooperation within the group is dynamic and requires that team members know how to respond to various situations that are emerged and how these reactions are perceived by the other members of the group. Consistency in behavior, shown by the members of a group, makes them reliable and trusted.

H3: Emotional Intelligence affects the level of trust between team members

The trust that has developed between team members encourages the free and unfettered exchange of information processing and puts aside members' personal needs and egoism and so the team is led faster at higher standard and valid results (Sy & Côté, 2004).

H4: Emotional Intelligence is related to the valid task performance

Since emotions play a major role in problem solving and decision-making thus it can be argued that emotional intelligence is likely to play an important role in determining the procedures related to the identification of objectives, allocation of individual processes and roles and responsibilities, task scheduling and monitor progress of work. People with higher emotional intelligence are more capable to be aligned with the objectives of the Group, to clarify roles and responsibilities, to focus on objectives, to promptly find out when the team revising its goals and

are able to re-align showing a parallel sensitivity towards the feelings of the other members of the Group (Clarke, 2010).

H5: Emotional Intelligence is related with the in time task performance

3. Research methodology

The research was conducted at the National Centre for Public Administration and Local Government (N.C.P.A.L.G.), which is a national strategic human resource development agency, its mission is the creation of specialized officers and has the task of improving the efficiency of public sector services. In addition, N.C.P.A.L.G.'s strategic objective is the improvement of the quality of governance through enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of public organizations, and the strengthening of accountability and business ethics through the revision of social consultation and social partner's participation.

The survey involved 131 employees of the institution attended nineteen (19) groups. Regarding demographics (gender) 65% of respondents were female and 35% male. Regarding the age, the majority of respondents (51.1%) ranged from 41-54 years, 37.4% belong to the age group 31-40, only 3.1% are under 30 years old and 8.4 % are over 55 years old. This can be understood as the organization to which the survey contacted belongs to public sector which has stopped hiring and there was a large wave of retirements due to the uncertainty in the pension regulations. The level of education is high as 40% of respondents hold masters and PhDs, 38% have university education and only 22% of secondary school. Regarding the level of experience it was recorded that 76,3 % of respondents have considerable experience, more than 10 years. Finally, regarding liability position of the respondents 76% are employees, 19% Head Department and 5% Managers.

The design of the questionnaire used in this research was based on three (3) questionnaires

- Short Version of the Workgroup Emotional Intelligence Profile (WEIP-S, 2009)
- Wong & Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS, 2002)
- MSCEIT V2.0 (2002)

The first and second developed by Jordan and Lawrence (2009) and by Wong and Law (2002), respectively, to measure teamwork emotional intelligence and group performance. The third developed by Mayer, Salovey, and Caruso (2002) to measure emotional intelligence. These research tools have been used in several studies and have reviewed both the validity and the reliability (Clarke, 2010; Jordan & Lawrence, 2009; Naseer et al., 2011). From the above questionnaires a careful selection of questions took place that was judged to serve best the objectives of the current research and every effort was made to meet the basic principles of a questionnaire. More specifically, it is a short - structured questionnaire of thirty-nine (39) questions divided into three (3) sections: The 1st explores the degree of emotional intelligence of the members of the groups using Likert scale, the second section is an attempt to study the impact of the two dimensions of emotional intelligence (awareness and management) in the working groups and the last section contains questions related to the demographic characteristics.

Before data processing, the reliability and validity of the questionnaire were tested. The values were satisfactory a Cronbach 0,867 and KMO measure 0,747 respectively.

4. Results

1st Research Objective: To explore of emotional in intelligence degree of people involved in working groups on two (2) dimensions: awareness and management of emotions

Data processing showed that team members are distinguished by a high degree E.I. as the average of the variables ranged at high levels, significantly above the average. The variable “*I carefully listen to others' aspects and ideas*” recorded the highest average value (Upper Mean = 4,64) while the variable “*I find it hard to adapt my behavior accordingly to circumstances*” presented the lowest average value (Lower Mean = 2,31).

2nd Research Objective: The study of these dimensions' impact of emotional intelligence in working groups.

The 2nd Research Objective includes the exploration of the five (5) hypotheses mentioned above. In order to proceed to the analysis of the second objective of the research and look into these Hypotheses, it is necessary to implement Factor Analysis to items related to emotional intelligence and make data processing easier. From Varimax Rotation Matrix six components were obtained. The first and the fourth are related to the recognition of

emotions both our own and others, and correspond to a dimension of emotional intelligence, the "awareness" of emotions (Bar-On, 1997; Clarke, 2010; Druskat & Wolff (in press); Feyerherm & Rice, 2002; Furnham, 2012; Jordan, Ashkanasy, Härtel, and Hooper (2002); Jordan & Lawrence, 2009; Salovey & Mayer, 1990).

H1 : Emotional Intelligence is correlated with the organization's goals achievement

The research showed that emotional intelligence affects significantly the goals' achievement of the organization and mostly by the ability to manage difficult situations in the workplace ($x^2 = 162,395$ p-value = 0,000), by the commitment of team members to organization goals ($x^2 = 181,692$ p-value = 0,003) and finally by the fact that one can encourage the other team members to try for the best ($x^2 = 129,224$ p-value = 0,022).

H2 : Team members' Emotional Intelligence affects the cooperation between them.

The application of Factor Analysis highlighted five (5) factors. The 1st and the 3rd are relating to how team members perceive both their own emotions and the others (Bar-On, 1997; Clarke, 2010; Druskat & Wolff (in press); Feyerherm & Rice, 2002; Furnham, 2012; Jordan et al., 2002; Jordan & Lawrence, 2009; Salovey & Mayer, 1990). The 2nd, 4th and 5th components refer to the way team members choose to behave and the social skills they develop (Furnham, 2012; Naseer et al., 2011; Petrides & Furnham, 2001; Prati et al., 2003). Furthermore, *Anova test* showed that Cooperation is significantly affected by Emotional Intelligence (Sig : ,000). The data processing also showed another important finding, that the high degree of emotional intelligence coexists with a high level of cooperation, while this does not seem to occur at low levels. Regarding whether emotional intelligence affects the cooperation between team members or not the results of *this research showed that emotional intelligence affects the cooperation of members* ($p < 0, 05$) and is mainly affected when members observe team members' emotions ($x^2 = 208,917$ p-value = 0,000), when they show sensitivity to others' feelings ($x^2 = 221,607$ p-value = 0,000) and when they listen carefully to all the views and ideas of members ($x^2 = 149,682$ p-value = 0,001).

H3 : Emotional Intelligence affects the level of trust between team members

Based on the results statistically significant correlations were observed in five (5) of the six (6) items. Therefore, the null hypothesis H_0 : variables are independent is rejected and *we conclude that emotional intelligence affects the level of trust.*

The items proved to affect more are:

- *Team members' effort to keep good relationships between them*
- *Team members encourage the other to feel precious and valuable and*
- *Team members are sincere* ($x^2 = 173,423$ p-value = 0,009).

H4: Emotional Intelligence is related to the valid task performance

No statistically significant correlations observed as only one of the three items was confirmed, accepting therefore the null hypothesis we conclude *that emotional intelligence is not related to the valid task performance.* It was found that emotional intelligence relates only to whether the group members share information that they consider relevant ($x^2 = 232,563$ p-value = 0,000). Under the same results found that the search of valuable information and use of common base is not associated with emotional intelligence (p-value = 0, 20 & p-value = 0,35).

H5: Emotional Intelligence is related to the in time task performance.

Similar to the results of H4 processing, statistically significant correlations were observed in only two of the seven items (the ability to control emotions in the workplace p-value = 0,002 and tendency of some members to give way even when they believe that they are right). *Therefore it is concluded that emotional intelligence is not related to timely task performance.*

5. Discussion

This research aims to explore the degree of emotional intelligence of team groups of the National Centre for Public Administration and Local Government and to study emotional intelligence's impact on their functioning. For this survey a sample of 131 employees working in teams was used.

The current research showed a high degree of emotional intelligence of team members as the average fluctuated at high levels, significantly above the average. The team members of N.C.P.A.L.G are particularly open to new

ideas, try to create and maintain a positive and progressive work environment, show interest in the feelings of other members, and understand the importance of their work while they appeared to be hesitant when it comes to express or discuss their feelings.

It was also attempted to explore the influence of emotional intelligence in the working groups and consequently in the context of the organization. Emotional intelligence has emerged to be an important factor in achieving the objectives as emotionally intelligent people can work better within an organization. The simultaneous achievement of multiple objectives, which is a requirement of every modern organization, is enabled by the management, awareness, empathy and the use of emotions in any interpersonal challenge (Sy & Côté, 2004).

In addition, emotionally intelligent groups are target focused, they are rarely distracted by personal issues as they are aware of the impact of negative feelings on group's results (Jordan et al., 2002; Tarricone and Luca, 2002). Moreover, it was observed that the high level of achievement of objectives coexists with the high degree of emotional intelligence while we cannot argue the same at the lowest levels of E.I. Cyprus University came to similar conclusions and its survey showed that emotional intelligence can be a predictor of academic achievement and coexists students with high academic performance while in underperforming found moderate or weak correlation (Neophytou, Koutselini, and Kyriakides, 2008).

Also, empathy and the ability to manage our own emotions operate favorably the group cohesion, encourage cooperation and teamwork promoting positive attitudes, which in turn affect the way the team members coexist and the group's effectiveness (Prati et al., 2003).

The emotionally intelligent people through the ability of emotions management can help the team members to feel safe around them. This emotional confidence in the group leads to the creation of a supportive and trustful workplace and as confidence blossoms in an environment where emotional conflicts are avoided and people feel comfortable to share their feelings and concerns. Trust finds fertile ground and grows where shared values, common attitudes, moods and emotions prevail, and for this reason team members with the above common points are expected to behave accordingly that is to say reliably and consistently (Ghosh, Shuck, and Petrosko, 2012; Prati et al., 2003).

Failing to confirm the relationship of emotional intelligence to the valid fulfillment of tasks was something unexpected as according to the existing theory emotionally intelligent people are led to valid results through higher quality decisions through a more thorough and accurate processing of information (Sy and Côté, 2004). Failure to confirm may be due to the fact that in this research only two dimensions of emotional intelligence model as ability (Ability Emotional Intelligence) are taken into account and possibly mixed models of emotional intelligence, which refers to more dimensions/features to be more suitable for the specific case. Also, emotionally intelligent people are willing to share useful information and the current research revealed the relationship of emotional intelligence to the exchange of information (Esfahani, Ordibehesht, & Zolfaghari, 2013).

Finally, although findings were expected to confirm the relationship of emotional intelligence to the timely task performance, as the emotionally intelligent groups consistently demonstrate high efficiency and effectiveness throughout the duration of the group's work (Jordan et al., 2002); it is proved that other factors affect the timely implementation of those. It is possible that factors such as the available financial resources of an organization, access to new technologies, the existing structure and even the culture of the organization play a catalytic role. But the results are consistent with the results of Clarke (2010) concerning the explore of the relationship of emotional intelligence to a particular process, Action Team Processes. The above researcher concluded that emotional intelligence is not related to the process, which include monitoring the progress of work towards the fulfillment of the group's objectives, observance of schedule, coordinating work, seeking possible and weaknesses of the members.

6. Implications

In the literature it is mentioned that organizations can derive several benefits from high emotional intelligence people such as lower stress levels, higher organizational commitment, creativity, etc. which likely lead to higher efficiency (Druskat & Wolff, 2001).

This study confirmed the influence of emotional intelligence cooperation between team members and highlighted its relationship with the achievement of the organization's goals. As New Public Administration's challenge includes

the need to strengthen organization's activity, to increase efficiency and adaptability, to incorporation of the emotional intelligence concept in processes such as working groups and recruitment of qualified persons, its implementation would lead to desirable results.

Finally in the literature emotional intelligence is associated with education as researchers argue that people with low emotional intelligence can obtain relevant training in order to help themselves to find their place in the group and thus the organization can obtain the maximum benefits (Prati et al., 2003). Therefore qualified staff N.C.P.A.L.G could undertake the design and implementation of similar training courses which may have application across the public sector staff making in such way, the public administration more effective.

7. Limitations

This study is subject to certain limitations that are important to mention. These limitations make their appearance once we choose the methodology and the type of research that will be followed. Having chosen positivism and quantitative research we focus in testing the existing theory, it does not contribute to the development of new theories as the quantitative data collection lags behind the qualitative data which are considered to be enriched as they provide us with information about experiences, feelings, motives etc. (Kyriazopoulos & Samanta, 2011; Samanta, 2010).

A second limitation stems from the size of the sample. As the sample is small there is concern about whether the results can be generalized throughout the public sector. But even in this case the survey results can contribute to the enrichment of existing ways of configuring a group and adopting new practices.

After the literature review it was found that the concept of emotional intelligence at a group level is applicable in many fields (EI & Group's procedures, EI & team learning) and it would be useful to be explored in these fields. This study does not take into account all the dimensions of emotional intelligence and also does not examine the team leader's affection on the effectiveness of a group as many scholars (Feyerherm & Rice, 2002; Koman & Wolff, 2008) noted its important role in the working groups.

Finally in this research is not taken into account either the duration or the frequency of team groups' meetings. The processing of this information would help us to see if team members were given adequate time to develop norms and build strong links between them (Prati et al., 2003).

8. Future research

It would be to our benefit to carry out researches in more organizations with a larger sample in order to further and deeper explore the impact of high degree of emotional intelligence on improving of public sector team working.

Also it would be useful if future research focuses more on the relationship of emotional intelligence in group processes e.g. investigating the relationship of EI with Transition process which involves concepts such as determination of goals, setting strategy or examining the relationship of EI with operation / action process which includes, coordinating work and monitoring the progress of the group's work.

Additionally, the separation of working groups and their individual study (e.g. a working group is charged with the development of new products while another group is responsible for their production) is considered useful in order to draw conclusions as it is likely the emotional intelligence to affect different groups in different ways.

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