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The Power of Emotional Intelligence in Mitigating the Effect of Peer Politics

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Abstract

Emotional Intelligence (EI) plays a vital role in helping employees manage workplace relationships and navigate peer politics, such as gossip, favouritism, competition, and power struggles. This study examines how EI enables employees to handle these challenges through emotional regulation, empathy, self-awareness, and effective communication. A mixed-method approach was adopted, combining survey data from 140 employees with workplace observations. Correlation and regression analyses were used to explore the relationship between EI dimensions and employees' ability to manage peer politics. The findings reveal a significant positive relationship between emotional intelligence and the ability to deal with peer-related challenges. Among the EI dimensions, empathy emerged as the strongest predictor of effective peer-politics management. In contrast, motivation showed a negative relationship, suggesting that highly motivated employees may experience greater stress in politically charged environments. The study highlights the importance of developing emotional intelligence within organizations to strengthen workplace relationships, reduce conflicts, and foster trust and collaboration. Employees with higher EI are better equipped to maintain positive interactions and contribute to a healthy work environment. The research concludes that emotional intelligence is a valuable and sustainable tool for managing peer politics and promoting a psychologically safe, productive, and supportive workplace.

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence, Peer Politics, Empathy, Self-Awareness, Self-Regulation, Motivation.

INTRODUCTION

In today's dynamic organizational environment, workplace relationships have become increasingly complex due to growing collaboration, teamwork, and interdependence among employees. One significant factor influencing these relationships is peer politics, which refers to the informal actions, behaviors, and influence tactics used by colleagues at the same organizational level to gain advantage, exert control, or shape decisions. Although often subtle, peer politics can negatively affect employee morale, trust, job satisfaction, teamwork, and overall organizational performance. As organizations become more team-oriented, the ability to navigate such political dynamics has become an essential professional skill.

The way employees respond to peer politics varies considerably. While some react through confrontation, avoidance, or compliance, others manage these situations more effectively and maintain positive workplace relationships. Such differences can largely be attributed to Emotional Intelligence (EI), which refers to an individual's ability to recognize, understand, manage, and regulate both their own emotions and those of others. Popularized by Daniel Goleman, EI comprises five key dimensions: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. These competencies enable individuals to handle interpersonal relationships effectively and respond constructively to workplace challenges.

Employees with high emotional intelligence are generally better equipped to manage workplace conflicts, build strong relationships, communicate effectively, and remain composed in politically sensitive situations. Through empathy and emotional regulation, they can understand diverse perspectives, minimize misunderstandings, and prevent conflicts from escalating. As a result, emotional intelligence serves as an important resource that helps employees cope with the negative effects of peer politics while maintaining professionalism and productivity.

This study aims to examine the relationship between emotional intelligence and peer politics in the workplace. Specifically, it investigates whether higher levels of emotional intelligence can reduce the adverse effects of peer politics on employee well-being, job performance, and team functioning. The study also seeks to identify which dimensions of emotional intelligence are most effective in helping employees deal with workplace gossip, favoritism, manipulation, and conflict.

The findings of this research are expected to contribute to the growing body of literature on emotional intelligence and workplace effectiveness. From a practical perspective, the study highlights the importance of integrating emotional intelligence into recruitment, training, leadership development, and organizational development initiatives. By fostering emotionally intelligent employees, organizations can create more transparent, collaborative, and supportive work environments characterized by trust, integrity, and mutual respect, ultimately enhancing both employee satisfaction and organizational success.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Bhatia et al. (2024) examined the relationship between emotional intelligence, organizational politics, and workplace behavior using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM). The study found that emotional intelligence acts as a significant mediator between workplace politics and employee behavior. Employees with higher emotional intelligence were better able to respond to peer manipulation, favoritism, and political pressures in a calm and professional manner. The findings confirmed that emotional intelligence helps employees maintain workplace harmony and reduces the negative consequences of organizational politics.

Dr. S. Ramesh (2024) investigated the role of emotional intelligence in political leadership and organizational settings. The study highlighted that emotionally intelligent individuals possess stronger self-awareness, empathy, and emotional regulation, enabling them to manage complex political situations effectively. The research concluded that emotional intelligence plays a vital role in reducing the adverse effects of workplace politics and fostering ethical decision-making and trust-building.

Carlsson and Finseraas (2024) explored workplace peer effects on political participation using Swedish administrative data collected between 2009 and 2022. The study revealed that employees are significantly influenced by the behaviors of their coworkers. A higher level of political participation among colleagues increased an individual's likelihood of voting, demonstrating the powerful role of peer influence in shaping employee attitudes and behaviors within workplace settings.

Herawati and Sulastri (2023) examined the impact of emotional intelligence and political skill on Job Involvement and Organizational Citizenship Behaviour (OCB). The findings showed that employees with high emotional intelligence displayed greater commitment to their work, maintained positive relationships, and continued exhibiting constructive behaviors despite workplace politics. The study also highlighted that political skills and emotional intelligence together help employees manage workplace challenges effectively.

Aldoghan and Elrayah (2021) studied the effectiveness of absenteeism management policies in Saudi Arabia's petrochemical sector. The research found that supportive attendance policies significantly reduced absenteeism and workplace accidents while improving employee satisfaction, productivity, and work-life balance. The study emphasized the importance of employee-centered HR practices for enhancing organizational performance.

Himmer (2016) investigated whether emotional intelligence and demographic factors could predict workplace bullying. The findings revealed no significant relationship between emotional intelligence, age, gender, or race and workplace bullying. Instead, organizational culture and leadership style emerged as the primary factors influencing bullying behavior. The study suggested that organizations should focus on creating healthy work environments rather than attributing bullying to individual characteristics.

Verma and Chaubey (2016) analyzed the causes and consequences of employee absenteeism. The study identified job dissatisfaction, poor supervision, stress, and health issues as major contributors to absenteeism. The authors concluded

that absenteeism negatively affects productivity, increases operational costs, and lowers employee morale. They recommended stronger attendance policies and improved workplace conditions to address the issue.

Chitescu and Lixandru (2016) examined the impact of socioeconomic and political changes on Human Resource Management practices in Romanian public institutions. Through focus-group interviews, the study found that HR departments must continuously adapt to legislative, demographic, and organizational changes to remain effective. The research emphasized the importance of aligning HR strategies with external environmental factors to achieve sustainable organizational growth.

McClellan, Levitt, and DiClementi (2014) explored the causes and effects of employee absenteeism and its relationship with job stress and satisfaction. The study found that inadequate supervision, low morale, and job dissatisfaction were major reasons for absenteeism. Absenteeism was shown to reduce productivity, increase costs, and weaken team cohesion. The authors recommended addressing workplace stressors and improving employee engagement to reduce absenteeism.

Lopes et al. (2004) investigated the role of emotional intelligence in social interactions across samples from the United States and Germany. The study found that individuals with strong emotion-management abilities reported more satisfying and successful social relationships. Even after controlling for personality traits, emotional intelligence remained a significant predictor of positive interpersonal outcomes. The research established emotional intelligence as a unique and valuable factor in managing relationships and navigating complex social environments.

Research Gap

All the existing research hinges on general outcomes such as job satisfaction, organizational citizenship behaviour (OCB), and leadership rather than peer politics within the workplace. Few studies explore how Emotional Intelligence assists workers in managing or minimizing peer politics. Not many studies investigate the separate dimensions of Emotional Intelligence as they relate to managing peer politics. The influence of Emotional Intelligence on work-related stress and conflict emanating from co-worker politics is not sufficiently explored. More empirical research is needed that specifically addresses Emotional Intelligence as a mechanism to deal with and counter peer political behaviour on an interpersonal level.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Objectives of The Study

1. To identify the relationship between Emotional Intelligence and workplace peer politics.
2. To analyse how emotional intelligence dimensions influence employee ability to navigate peer politics.

Hypotheses of The Study

(H01): There is no significant association between Emotional Intelligence and workplace Peer Politics employee performance

(H11): There is a significant association between Emotional Intelligence and workplace Peer Politics employee performance.

(H02): Emotional Intelligence dimensions have no significant effect on an employee's Peer Politics navigating capability.

(H12): Emotional Intelligence dimensions have significant effect on an employee's Peer Politics navigating capability

DATA ANALYSIS & INTERPRETATION

Objective 1: relationship between Emotional Intelligence and workplace peer politics

(Ho1): There is no significant association between Emotional Intelligence and workplace Peer Politics employee performance.

Correlations			
		Emotional Intelligence	Peer Politics
Emotional Intelligence	Pearson Correlation	1	.810**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		<.001
	N	140	140
Peer Politics	Pearson Correlation	.810**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	
	N	140	140
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

The correlation test establishes a high positive correlation between Emotional Intelligence and Peer Politics, with a Pearson correlation of 0.810. This means that employees with greater emotional intelligence are better able to recognize, manage, or react to workplace peer politics. The correlation is statistically significant at the 0.01 level, as indicated by the p-value < .001, establishing that the correlation is not coincidental. With a sample population of 140 respondents, the analysis yields valid evidence to defend the research hypothesis. Thus, the study concludes that there is a significant relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Peer Politics in the workplace.

Objective 2: To analyse how emotional intelligence dimensions influence employee ability to navigate peer politics.

H02: Emotional Intelligence dimensions have no significant effect on an employee's Peer Politics navigating capability.

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.841 ^a	.707	.698	1.83984
a. Predictors: (Constant), Empathy, Motivation, Self-awareness, Self-Regulation				

Source: Compiled Data

Anova						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	1103.566	4	275.892	81.504	<.001 ^b
	Residual	456.976	135	3.385		
	Total	1560.543	139			
a. Dependent Variable: Peer Politics						
b. Predictors: (Constant), Empathy, Motivation, Self-awareness, Self-Regulation						

Source: Compiled Data

Coefficients					
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta	
1	(Constant)	1.050	.552		1.903
	Self-awareness	.157	.093	.155	.094

Self-Regulation	.117	.088	.145	1.318	.190
Motivation	.410	.127	.292	3.229	.002
Empathy	.625	.080	.810	7.777	<.001
a. Dependent Variable: Peer Politics					

Source: Compiled Data

The regression was conducted to determine the impact of Emotional Intelligence dimensions such as Self-Awareness, Self-Regulation, Motivation, and Empathy on an employee's skills in handling Peer Politics. The model summary indicates an R value of 0.841 and an R Square value of 0.707, which means that 70.7% variance in Peer Politics is explained by the included emotional intelligence dimensions in the model. The Adjusted R Square measure is 0.698, which is adjusted for the number of predictors and indicates that even after model complexity adjustment, 69.8% of employees' variation in peer politics management is still explained by these variables. The standard error of estimate is 1.83984, representing the average distance by which the observed values deviate from the regression line.

The ANOVA table also evidences the significance of the model, with $F = 81.504$ and $p\text{-value} < 0.001$, indicating that the overall regression model is statistically significant. Empathy is identified from the coefficients table to have the most significant and strongest positive influence ($\beta = 0.810$, $p < .001$) on navigating peer politics, suggesting that employees with empathy are better able to deal with interpersonal dynamics. Alternatively, Motivation has a considerable negative correlation ($\beta = 0.292$, $p = .002$), indicating that very motivated people will have trouble in politically demanding environments. Self-Awareness ($p = 0.094$) and Self-Regulation ($p = 0.190$) were not significant statistically, but both add moderately to the model.

In general, H_1 Hypothesis is supported by the analysis, and emotional intelligence dimensions have an observable influence on employees' peer politics navigation ability, with Empathy playing the most significant role, as indicated by its high standardized beta and statistical significance.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

1. The study included a balanced mix of male and female employees, ensuring diverse perspectives on emotional intelligence and peer politics.
2. Most respondents were associate- and executive-level employees, who frequently encounter peer politics in their daily work environment.
3. A large number of employees reported regularly experiencing peer politics, indicating that it is a common workplace phenomenon.
4. More than half of the respondents agreed that emotional intelligence helps them remain calm, professional, and focused when dealing with workplace politics.
5. Empathy emerged as the most important emotional intelligence competency, helping employees understand others and manage political situations effectively.
6. Employees with higher emotional intelligence were better able to handle favouritism, gossip, conflicts, and other politically driven workplace behaviours.
7. Emotional intelligence enabled employees to stay goal-oriented and maintain positive workplace relationships despite political challenges.
8. Respondents believed that emotional awareness and understanding helped them avoid unnecessary conflicts and navigate complex social interactions more effectively.
9. Many employees reported that emotional intelligence strengthened trust, reduced misunderstandings, and improved communication and conflict resolution within teams.
10. Statistical analysis revealed a strong positive relationship ($r = 0.810$) between emotional intelligence and the ability to manage peer politics, with emotional intelligence significantly influencing employees' effectiveness in navigating workplace politics ($R^2 = 0.707$), particularly through empathy.

SUGGESTIONS OF THE STUDY

1. Organizations need to incorporate EI development into employee training programs with clear goals and measurable results.
2. Senior leaders must be engaged actively by HR departments to encourage emotionally intelligent behaviour in fostering a culture of respectfulness and inclusiveness.
3. Perform EI testing during recruitment and promotions to ensure hiring emotionally competent employees for key positions.
4. Develop frequent workshops in empathy, conflict resolution, and self-awareness to enhance employee ability to handle peer politics.
5. Foster open communication practices that minimize misunderstandings and discourage manipulative or politically charged behavior.
6. Reward and recognize emotionally intelligent workplace responses to establish positive peer influence and collaboration.
7. Establish mentorship programs under which emotionally intelligent staff lead others through the process of dealing with complicated interpersonal dynamics.
8. Monitor emotional climate and peer-to-peer interactions between departments using digital tools and anonymous feedback channels.
9. Offer directed support and guidance to employees who have difficulty with self-regulation or are consistently impacted by peer politics.
10. Connect emotional intelligence growth with leadership development and succession planning to develop emotionally intelligent leaders of the future.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that Emotional Intelligence (EI) is a vital and strategic competency in modern organizations, particularly in helping employees effectively navigate peer politics. Workplace politics, including favoritism, gossip, informal alliances, and interpersonal conflicts, can negatively affect employee morale, productivity, teamwork, and organizational climate. However, the findings reveal that employees with higher levels of emotional intelligence are better equipped to recognize, understand, and manage these challenges without allowing them to negatively influence their performance or professional relationships.

The study highlights that key dimension of emotional intelligence, especially empathy, self-awareness, and emotional regulation, play a significant role in helping employees respond constructively to politically sensitive situations. Emotionally intelligent employees are more likely to maintain composure during conflicts, communicate effectively, understand different perspectives, and build trust among colleagues. As a result, they are less vulnerable to the negative effects of peer politics and are better able to sustain positive workplace interactions.

The statistical findings further support this conclusion, indicating a strong positive relationship between emotional intelligence and the ability to manage peer politics. Employees with higher EI demonstrated greater resilience, stronger interpersonal skills, and a higher capacity to remain focused on organizational goals despite political pressures. Among all EI dimensions, empathy emerged as the most influential factor in fostering cooperation, reducing misunderstandings, and promoting healthy workplace relationships.

From a Human Resource Management perspective, the findings emphasize the importance of integrating emotional intelligence into recruitment, training, leadership development, and employee engagement initiatives. Organizations that actively promote emotional intelligence can create a more inclusive, collaborative, and supportive work environment where political behavior has a reduced impact on employee well-being and performance. Therefore, investing in the development of emotional intelligence is not only beneficial for individual employees but also contributes to organizational effectiveness, employee satisfaction, and long-term success.

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