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# Emotional Intelligence, Interaction Involvement, and Job Performance of Call Center Representatives in the Philippines

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**Abstract**

The objective of this research was to examine the benefits of emotional intelligence (EQ) to call center representatives in the Philippines. Data collection was conducted with a sample of call center representatives from seven contact centers in the Philippines (N = 425). Online questionnaire survey was used for data collection. The survey data were analyzed by using partial least squares regression. The results supported that call center representatives with high EQ tended to demonstrate a high quality of interaction involvement and tended to show a higher level of job performance. Moreover, interaction involvement was found as a mediator that explained the positive linkage between EQ and job performance of call center representatives. The overall results suggested that EQ training should be considered to help call center representatives enhance their ability to communicate effectively with foreign customers and to perform better in their jobs.

**Keywords**: *Emotional intelligence, service, communication, performance, competencies*

## Introduction

The Philippines is one of the major outsourcing destinations for the call center industry in the world. Despite the impressive growth of this industry, a handful of research has found that there are drawbacks when it comes to the emotive and psychosomatic conditions of people working in call centers (Budhwar, Varma, Malhotra, & Mukherjee, 2009). The stressful work atmosphere usually comes from the pressures to meet the required quotas, the lack of control over pressing situations, and the close monitoring of management towards the agents' work performance (Holdsworth & Cartwright, 2003; Holman, 2003; Kwok, 2005). In light of these troubles, emotional competence may be needed by the call center agents so that they can successfully deal with their customers. This current research focuses on emotional competence in the area of Emotional Intelligence (EQ) (Jyoti & Kour, 2015). EQ is the capability of a person to understand, monitor, regulate and manage his or her own and others' emotions, and to know how to respond appropriately as well as use this knowledge to influence one's reasoning and actions (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). EQ has been associated with positive outcomes in various areas such as helping individuals lower stress and enhance psychological well-being (Brunetto, Teo, Shacklock, & Farr-Wharton, 2012; Karimi, Leggat, Donohue, Farrell, & Couper, 2014; Slaski & Cartwright, 2003); enhancing communication effectiveness in the workplace (Brackett & Salovey, 2006; Jorfi, Jorfi, Fauzy, Yaccob, & Nor, 2014; Poskey, 2006; Sinha & Sinha, 2007); predicting performance on work-related tasks, successful interpersonal interactions, and social interactions (Darvishmotevali, Altinay, & De Vita, 2018; Day & Carroll, 2004; Lopes et al., 2004). From these findings, EQ might possibly be the competence that is needed by call center representatives to perform their duties efficiently every day. It helps them communicate with their customers more effectively, and provide them with the best service they can give (Poskey, 2006).

The main objective of this research was to investigate the relationship between the EQ of call center representatives and their job performance. In addition to the direct contribution of EQ, this research considered the indirect effect of interaction involvement, which is proposed as a mediating variable that might explain why call center representatives with high EQ can achieve better performance. Interaction involvement reflects the degree to which individuals actively participate in a social conversation (Cegala, Savage, Brunner, & Conrad, 1982). It also represents how well call center representatives coordinate their own thoughts, experiences and feelings during the interaction (Cegala et al., 1982). In this current research, the authors explored EQ as a competency that enables call center representatives to demonstrate interaction involvement more effectively and achieve

satisfactory job performance. The logic and research that support the linkage between EQ and interaction involvement are explained in the next section. From a managerial perspective, the results from this current study are expected to provide recommendations for companies handling call center operations, not just in the Philippines, but also all over the world. This research may help management understand and consider some interventions that might help their call center teams to perform better in their jobs.

## Literature Review

### *Emotional Intelligence (EQ)*

EQ is defined as the manner in which an individual develops a capability to appropriately handle emotionally-stimulating conditions or information (Shokrian, 2016). The four branches of EQ include perceiving emotion, using emotion to facilitate thought, understanding emotion and managing emotion (Brackett & Salovey, 2006; Wong & Law, 2002). EQ is primarily concerned with how an individual reason out sentiments, and how this reasoning enriches his and one's own emotional awareness so that he or she can respond correctly and properly in various emotional situations. EQ has also been regarded as a characteristic that is associated with performance tasks that involve identification, judgment and reasoning out of emotions (Hoerger, Chapman, Epstein, & Duberstein, 2012). EQ has been explored in various settings. For instance, it was found to help individuals lower stress and improve psychological well-being (Brackett & Mayer, 2003; Brunetto et al., 2012; Lopes, Salovey, & Straus, 2003; Schutte, Malouff, Simunek, McKenley, & Hollander, 2002); improve job performance and satisfaction (Brackett & Salovey, 2006; Carmeli & Josman, 2006; Joseph & Newman, 2010; Shooshtarian, Ameli, & Aminilari, 2013); and enhance leadership (Hurley & Barron, 2018; Nightingale, Slade, Sheen, & Spiby, 2018; Rosete & Ciarrochi, 2005). Considering prior findings about the benefits of EQ, this current research suggests that EQ might also benefit the work performance of call center representatives. In particular, this research proposes that EQ might enhance the communication capability of call center representatives in the area of interaction involvement.

### *Interaction Involvement*

Interaction involvement is a measurement of communication competency, which refers to knowing when and how language is used in a social context (Campbell & Neer, 2001). It focuses on a speaker's participation during a conversation by being reactive and fully engaged in the conversation (Cegala et al., 1982). There are three dimensions of interaction involvement: attentiveness, perceptiveness, and responsiveness (Cegala et al., 1982). First, attentiveness is a person's willingness to listen and pay attention during the conversation. It includes being attentive to cues in the form of verbal and non-verbal communication from the other party (Frymier, 2005). Second, perceptiveness is the ability to give suitable meaning, understanding, and interpretation to one's own behavior and the behavior of others (Cegala, 1981). Responsive individuals tend to react emotionally to any social circumstances; they react mentally to their social circumstances and try to adjust by knowing appropriate lines to say or not to say (Cegala, 1984). Lastly, responsiveness is showing confidence in saying things and knowing how to apply appropriate manners during the interaction process (Frymier, 2005). Responsive individuals take the initiative to render correct solutions to problems raised, and are prompt in responding to others' needs (Jun, Yang, & Kim, 2004).

### *EQ and Interaction Involvement*

This research proposed that EQ can be positively associated with interaction involvement. First, EQ can facilitate the attentiveness dimension of interaction involvement by helping individuals becoming aware of their emotions. Charoensukmongkol (2014) supported this notion by explaining that people with high EQ demonstrated a high quality of attentiveness. EQ can also enhance the perceptiveness dimension of interaction involvement. The characteristic of high EQ that supports perceptiveness is the ability of persons to identify emotions in themselves and others (Brackett & Salovey, 2006). Individuals who are skillful in this area are frequently at an advantage since they can

easily distinguish between real feelings and fake feelings (De Ruyter & Wetzels, 2000). Essentially, individuals with high EQ are more able to relate to clients' feelings during the interaction process (De Ruyter & Wetzels, 2000). Lastly, EQ tends to improve the responsiveness dimension of interaction involvement. High EQ people use emotion management to facilitate thought that is focused on one's ability to generate sentiments, and use the sentiments to reason out a problem (Harris, Reiter-Palmon, & Kaufman, 2013). Because of this characteristic, it is likely that high EQ call center representatives know how to use the strategy about what to say and how to convey the message (Anderson & Martin, 1995). Considering the roles of EQ that facilitate all three aspects of interaction involvement, the following hypothesis is presented:

*Hypothesis 1: EQ has a positive relationship with interaction involvement.*

***Interaction Involvement and Job Performance***

This current research predicted that interaction involvement of call center representative can be positively associated with their satisfactory job performance. Norton and Pettegrew (1979) mentioned that an attentive communicator is more knowledgeable and alert about what the other party is trying to convey. Moreover, call center representatives who are perceptive are better at identifying clients' motives (De Ruyter & Wetzels, 2000). In addition, a call center representative who is responsive is able to demonstrate understanding and agreement during the interaction with customers (Salomonson, Åberg, & Allwood, 2012). He or she is also capable of giving concrete answers, and taking customer's calls seriously in a courteous and friendly way. For example, research showed that responsiveness can predict job commitment among service employees, which might also motivate them to achieve good service performance (Miller, Stiff, & Ellis, 1988). Following these arguments, this hypothesis is presented.

*Hypothesis 2: Interaction involvement has a positive relationship with the job performance of call center representatives.*

***EQ and Job Performance***

A number of prior research studies showed that EQ could enhance job performance of people in various occupations, including call center jobs. In particular, the contributions of EQ were shown in various studies which found that EQ tended to improve job performance in numerous occupations (Çekmecelioğlu, Günsel, & Ulutaş, 2012; Coetzee & Harry, 2014; Darvishmotevali et al., 2018; Joseph & Newman, 2010; Salovey, Stroud, Woolery, & Epel, 2002; Shahzad, Sarmad, Abbas, & Khan, 2011; Shooshtarian et al., 2013; Witt, Andrews, & Carlson, 2004). Given this evidence, EQ is considered to be a characteristic that can be linked with job performance of call center agents. Additionally, considering the linkage between EQ and interaction involvement, as well as the contribution of interaction involvement to job performance mentioned earlier, interaction involvement could serve as a mediator that explains why call center representatives with high EQ might demonstrate satisfactory job performance. Taken all these perspectives, the following hypotheses are proposed:

*Hypothesis 3: EQ of call center representatives has a positive relation with job performance.*

*Hypothesis 4: The positive relation between EQ and job performance of call center representatives is mediated by interaction involvement.*

**Methodology**

***Sample and Data Collection Method***

The sample frame for this study was the call center representatives from seven contact centers in the Philippines. The majority of the respondents answered calls from the United States of America. Questionnaires were distributed through an online survey. The link and the QR code to access the online survey were disseminated to 1191 employees. They were notified about the objectives of the survey, with the assurance of anonymity. The data collection process took about two months to complete from August to September 2018. At the end of the data collection, the

researchers gathered 425 usable surveys, which accounted for a 36 percent response rate. The demographic data are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Respondent Characteristics

| Demographic Factors | Descriptive Statistics |
|---|---|
| **Gender** | Male 127 (29.9%) Female 298 (70.1%) |
| **Age** | Mean 30.63<br>Standard Deviation 6.56 |
| **Marital Status** | Single 263 (61.9%) Married 162 (38.1%) |
| **Education Level** | High School Level 9 (2.1%) College Level 122 (28.7%) Bachelor's Degree 279 (65.6%) Master's Degree 15 (3.5%) |
| **Salary (Pesos)** | < 10,000 28 (6.6%) 10,001-20,000 143 (33.6%) 20,001-30,000 133 (31.3%) 30,001-40,000 86 (20.2%) 40,001 above 35 (8.2%) |
| **Supervisory Position** | No 333 (78.4%) Yes 92 (21.6%) |
| **Job Tenure** | Less than 6 months 38 (8.9%) 7-12 Months 33 (7.8 %) 1-2 years 136 (32.0%) 3-4 years 106 (24.9%) 5 years and above 112 (26.4%) |

***Measurement***

*EQ* was measured by a 10-item short version self-reported EQ scale adapted from Davies, Lane, Devonport, and Scott (2010). These items were measured using a five-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). *Interaction involvement* was measured using an 18-item survey that was modified from an instrument developed by Cegala (1981). The items were measured using a five-point Likert response scale, with choices ranging from 1 (*not at all like me*) to 5 (*very much like me*). *Job performance* was measured using a modified instrument based on one developed by Singh, Verbeke, and Rhoads (1996). The subjective measure of performance was used due to the information confidentiality regulation imposed by the companies. The respondents were asked to evaluate themselves using a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (poor performance) to 5 (excellent performance).

***Control Variables***

The control variables in this research covered some demographic factors and work characteristics of call center representatives, including age, gender, marital status, education, job tenure, salary, and supervisory position.

***Estimation Method***

Partial least squares (PLS) regression was employed in this study. PLS is a powerful method of analysis because of the minimal demands on measurement scales, sample size, and residual distributions (Chin, 1997). PLS allows researchers to analyze numerous levels of hypotheses, which include single or multiple items measurement. Furthermore, PLS does not require data to be normally distributed (Hair, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2011). Specifically, PLS was used because for this current research because the Jarque-Bera test of normality revealed that some variables did not have a normal distribution pattern. WrapPLS Version 6.0 was employed to perform the PLS estimation.

**Results**

The validity and reliability of the multi-item measures had to reach an acceptable requirement before performing PLS estimation. Convergent validity is analysis that evaluates how well the indicators measure their constructs, which is assessed by factor loadings. Convergence validity was measured by the use of factor loadings, which need to be more than 0.50 to show sufficient convergence validity (Hair et al., 2011). The results showed that there were 5 items out of 18 items for interaction involvement with lower factor loadings than the minimum requirement of 0.50, and therefore they were removed from the analysis. Discriminant validity was measured by comparing the average variance extracted (AVE) to the squared correlation coefficient. The square root of the AVE should be higher than the other correlations so that discriminant validity can be distinguished (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Table 2 showed that all AVEs met the said requirement. Then, the researchers checked the reliability of the construct by assessing Cronbach's alpha of EQ = 0.842, II = 0.935 & JP = 0.923), and their composite reliability coefficients (EQ = 0.876, II = 0.944 & JP = 0.940). Both coefficients should be higher than 0.70 to meet the satisfactory level as suggested by Nunnally (1978). The results shown in Table 2 indicate that all constructs had coefficients that met this requirement.

**Table 2.** Correlations among Variables and Convergent Validity

| Variables | EQ | II | JP | AGE | GEN | MAR | EDU | SAL | SP | TENURE |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| EQ | (0.645) | 0.240** | 0.269** | 0.102* | -0.045 | 0.049 | -0.068 | 0.084 | 0.055 | 0.035 |
| II | | (0.751) | 0.308** | 0.241** | -0.007 | 0.121** | 0.089 | 0.189** | 0.019** | -0.015 |
| JP | | | (0.850) | 0.178** | 0.028 | 0.113* | 0.096* | 0.100* | 0.099* | 0.023 |
| AGE | | | | (1) | -0.060 | 0.286** | 0.021 | 0.317** | 0.124** | 0.244** |
| GEN | | | | | (1) | -0.124 | -0.060 | 0.096* | 0.026* | 0.106* |
| MAR | | | | | | (1) | 0.086 | 0.312** | 0.023** | 0.136* |
| EDU | | | | | | | (1) | 0.143* | 0.083* | -0.089 |
| SAL | | | | | | | | (1) | 0.341** | 0.333** |
| SP | | | | | | | | | (1) | 0.207** |
| TENURE | | | | | | | | | | (1) |

Notes: $^{*}p \leq 0.05$; $^{**}p \leq 0.01$

Average variance extracted of latent variables are shown in the parentheses.

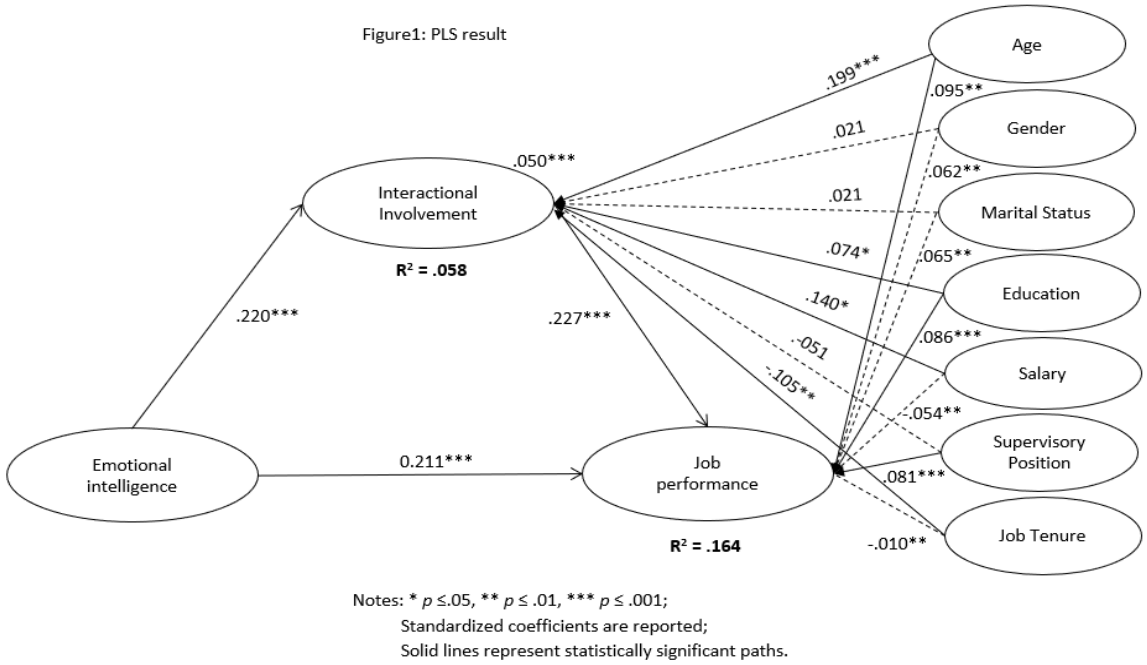
EQ=Emotional Intelligence, II=Interaction Involvement, JP=Job Performance, AGE=Age, GEN=Gender, MAR=Marital Status, EDU=Education, SAL=Salary, SP=Supervisory Position and TENURE=Job Tenure.

A full collinearity variance inflation factor (VIF) test was conducted to check for any potential problem with multicollinearity variance. The results revealed that the VIFs of all variables ranged from

1.063 to 1.484, which was lower than the maximum threshold of 3.3 as suggested by Petter, Straub, and Rai (2007).

Results from the PLS regression analysis are presented in Figure 1. Standardized path coefficients and p-values were calculated using a bootstrap resampling technique with 100 subsamples. The findings are presented as follows. Hypothesis 1 predicted a positive relationship between EQ and interaction involvement of call center representatives. The result showed that they are positively related and statistically significant (β = 0.220; p < 0.001). Thus, hypothesis 1 was supported. Hypothesis 2 predicted that interaction involvement has a positive relationship with job performance. The result supported a positive relation, which was also statistically significant (β = 0.227; p < 0.001). Therefore, hypothesis 2 was supported. Hypothesis 3 predicted a positive relation between EQ and job performance. The result supported a positive relation, which was statistically significant (β = 0.211; p < 0.001). Thus, hypothesis 3 was supported. Hypothesis 4 predicted that a positive relation between EQ and job performance was mediated by interaction involvement. The test of mediating effect was conducted by the method recommended by Preacher and Hayes (2004), which was calculated by the WrapPLS software. The result supported the positive mediation of interaction involvement, which was also statistically significant (β = 0.050; p = 0.003). Therefore, hypothesis 4 was supported.

With regards to control variables, the results were as follows. Job performance is positively related with age (β = 0.095; p = 0.018), gender (β = 0.062; p = 0.070), marital status (β = 0.065; p = 0.095), education (β = 0.086; p = 0.019), and supervisory position (β = 0.081; p < 0.029); but negatively related with salary (β = -0.054; p = 0.144) and job tenure (β = -0.010; p = 0.421). Interaction involvement is positively related with age (β = 0.199; p < 0.001), gender (β = 0.021; p = 0.335), marital status (β = 0.021; p = 0.331), education (β = 0.074; p = 0.058), and salary (β = 0.140; p = 0.003); but negatively related with supervisory position (β = -0.051; p = 0.181 and job tenure (β = -0.105; p = 0.013).




**Discussion and Conclusion**

This current study was conducted with the main purpose of exploring the contribution of EQ to call center representatives in the Philippines. The overall findings of this study from the PLS

regression analysis revealed that all of the hypotheses were supported. The result suggesting that call center representatives with higher EQ tended to have higher interaction involvement with the clients was consistent with those of previous research studies, which showed that higher EQ individuals are more able to relate to clients' feelings during conversations (De Ruyter & Wetzels, 2000). The result showing that interaction involvement and job performance are positively related was also consistent with previous studies, which mentioned that communication competency is important for call center representatives to have good performance (Ramsey & Sohi, 1997). The result suggesting that EQ tended to have a positive relationship with job performance was also consistent with previous studies which claimed that EQ tended to improve job performance in various occupations (Çekmecelioğlu et al., 2012; Coetzee & Harry, 2014; Darvishmotevali et al., 2018; Joseph & Newman, 2010; Salovey et al., 2002; Shahzad et al., 2011; Shooshtarian et al., 2013; Witt et al., 2004).

This current study offered further evidence to supplement the findings of previous EQ research studies. First, this research provided additional evidence about the benefits of EQ in the call center industry, as understanding of this field of study so far has limited empirical support. It also contributed additional understanding to the mediating role of interaction involvement by showing that call center representatives with high EQ tended to have more satisfactory job performance if they are highly attentive, perceptive and responsive towards their clients' needs and inquiries. However, it is recommended that future research projects need to consider other mediators that might affect the relationship between workers' EQ and their performance outcomes. The results suggest some managerial implications to call center companies to help them improve their effectiveness in training their employees to handle calls from foreign customers. This current research suggests that having an EQ training program for existing employees is vital in order to mold them to effectively handle customers in various circumstances.

Even though this current study offered contributions that expanded the researcher's understanding about the contribution of EQ towards job performance, there are numerous research limitations that need to be addressed. First, this current study collected data from a small group of call center representatives in the Philippines. Second, the job performance of call center representatives was measured in terms of performance satisfaction, which may not completely reflect the actual performance of employees. Third, the results were obtained from cross-sectional data and correlation analysis, and so the causality of relationships between key variables cannot be implied.

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