The Level of Emotional Intelligence among Administrators: A Case of Malaysian Public Universities

Abdul Shukor Shamsudin, Abd. Rahim Romle, Azizi Haji Halipah

(Universiti Utara Malaysia, 06010 UUM Sintok, Kedah Darul Aman, Malaysia)

Abstract: The purpose of this paper is to identify the level of emotional intelligence among middle level administrators in Malaysian public universities. Using a quantitative cross-sectional survey approach, a total of 500 self-administered questionnaires were distributed by surface mail to selected middle level administrators, regardless of their service schemes, in public universities throughout Malaysia, including Sabah and Sarawak. Stratified proportionate random sampling technique was applied in determining the sampling frame. The SSEIT was used to measure emotional intelligence. The final response rate was 47.4% (237 responses) and data obtained was analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 19 for Windows. Judging from the mean scores, the study suggests that the overall score of emotional intelligence among middle level administrators is of high importance. Finally, implications and some suggestions for future research are also discussed.

Key words: emotional intelligence; middle level administrators; Malaysian public universities

JEL code: M10

1. Introduction

According to UNESCO (1998), in the 21st century, higher education all over the world has undergone a huge paradigm shift. Today, the higher education sector faces several challenges, such as attracting and retaining excellent students and staff, training the workforce to be more skilled, using new pedagogical approaches, meeting the growing demands of the stakeholders (i.e., students, staff, the government and the public), and finally, coping with the surging higher education expenditure which requires the management to look for new sources of income and financial models.

Parallel with this global development in the higher education segment, the Ministry of Education (MoE) Malaysia has announced the government's aspiration to make the country a center for higher education excellence (Malaysia, 2006). Since then, among several plans and initiatives, the MoE has targeted to increase the number of international students in Malaysia. By the year 2020, the MoE aims to attract 200,000 international students to pursue their studies in Malaysia (Ministry of Higher Education, 2011).

Abdul Shukor Shamsudin, DBA, Senior Lecturer, School of Business Management, Universiti Utara Malaysia; research area/interests: leadership, emotional intelligence and ethics. E-mail: shukor@uum.edu.my.

Abd. Rahim Romle, Ph.D., Senior Lecturer, School of Government, Universiti Utara Malaysia; research area/interests: quality management. E-mail: abd.rahim@uum.edu.my.

Azizi Haji Halipah, Ph.D., Senior Lecturer, School of Business Management, Universiti Utara Malaysia; research area/interests: entrepreneurship, business plan. E-mail: h.azizi@uum.edu.my.

In this regard, besides academic staff, administrators also have significant roles to play towards the achievement of the national higher education goals. Szekeres (2004) stated that although it is evident the group has an important role to play for the development of higher education institutions, administrators appear to be completely ignorant of the roles they have to play, and worse still, in most cases, their contributions are not well recognized.

Meanwhile, several authors have observed that there are only a few articles dedicated to the public universities' administrative staff development nationally and internationally thus far (Szekeres J., 2004; Abd. Rahim R. & Abdul Shukor S., 2006; Whitchurch C., 2004). No doubt, these factors may lead to administrators' occupational stress and this is the reason why emotional intelligence is crucial at the workplace.

The purpose of this research is to investigate the level of emotional intelligence among middle level administrators in Malaysian public universities. Obviously, such knowledge is very useful for both academic and managerial purposes.

2. Literature Review

Stress is a common phenomenon nowadays and identified as a cause of many illnesses. Stress can be the result of a hectic personal life and rapid organizational changes. Work-related stress occur due to several ted factors, such as conflicting performance expectations, role ambiguity, disharmonious relationship with other colleagues and office politics (Amat Taap M., Rodrigue F. & Choy S. C., 2003). As such, among other factors, emotional intelligence is seen as important for organizational effectiveness. Basically, it is the work of Mayer and Salovey and Goleman that started to highlight the potential benefits of emotional intelligence, which later ignited the interest of managers and practitioners (Bratton V. K., Dodd N. G. & Brown F. W., 2011; Latour S. M. & Hosmer B. C., 2002; Taylor G. J. & Bagby R. M., 2000).

Emotional intelligence is a relatively new and expanding subject of behavioral research, which has attracted the attention of the scientific community, the academicians, business corporations and the general public as well (Anand R. & Udaya Suriyan G., 2010). Even though scholars have suggested many models to describe the concept of emotional intelligence, an ability model and a mixed model are the two most common emotional intelligence models thus far (Fernàndaz-Berrocal P. & Extremera N., 2006). Most scholars believe that emotional intelligence is a possible factor which contributes to positive behaviors, attitudes and organizational outcomes (Carmeli A., 2003).

Considering its popularity, this paper focuses only on the emotional intelligence ability-based model. The model is widely used due to some factors, such as strong theoretical foundation, uniqueness of the measurement and its systematic appraisal; it is also supported by empirical data obtained from numerous researches (Fernàndaz-Berrocal P. & Extremera N., 2006).

According to Salovey and Mayer (1990), emotional intelligence refers to an individual's ability to observe feelings and emotions of themselves and others, to differentiate among them and use this information for their thinking and actions.

In other words, emotional intelligence is a combination of emotions and intelligence of a person (Bratton V. K. et al., 2011). Supporting this argument, Weinberger (2009) suggested that the fundamental belief behind this definition is the connection between emotion and intelligence. Meanwhile, Graves (1999) proposed that emotional intelligence is something to do with the ability to think intelligently. He added that taking right decisions is what the ability-based perspective is most concerned with.

Originally, Mayer and Salovey (1997) combined both mental abilities and personality characteristics in their definition, thus leading to a mixed model. Subsequently, the authors redefined the concept and focused only on the mental ability aspect (Jaeger A. J. & Eagan M. K., 2007). According to Salovey, Brackett and Mayer (2004), the concept also implies the differences between intellect and emotional intelligence; and both concepts in reality occupy different parts of the brain.

Mayer and Salovey (1997) believed emotional intelligence can be taught and improved over time. However, the model has ignored several personality attributes which are mentioned in other models (Fernàndaz-Berrocal P. & Extremera N., 2006; Weinberger L. A., 2009). In other words, emotional intelligence is seen as an ability to drive and promote positive behaviors towards better workplace outcomes (Carmeli A., 2003).

Subsequently, the mental-ability model contains four hierarchical organized factors, namely the perception of emotions; utilizing emotions to facilitate thinking and reasoning; understanding emotions in self and others; and the regulation of emotions in self and others (Mayer J. D. & Salovey P., 1997).

In other words, emotional intelligence is related to the ability to recognize, apply emotion to assist a person to think, know what causes emotions and manage these emotions in order to capture the wisdom of that person's feelings.

Subsequently, Mayer and Salovey (1997) proposed that the four components of emotional intelligence are organized from more fundamental psychological processes to higher and more psychologically integrated processes. The fundamental level concerns the basic abilities of perceiving and expressing emotion, while the higher stage concerns the awareness of regulating the emotion.

Table 1 illustrates a comprehensive description of an ability-based model of emotional intelligence.

Table 1 Mayer and Salovey's Ability-based Model of Emotional Intelligence

Component	Feature
Perceiving emotions	This is the primary element of emotional intelligence as it makes all other processing of emotional information possible. It is related to the ability to see and read emotions in appearance, pictures, voices and artifacts, including the ability to recognize one's own emotions.
Using emotions	The emotionally intelligent person can utilize upon person changing feeling in order to best fit the task given. It is related to the ability to handle emotions to facilitate several cognitive activities, such as to think and solvethe problem.
Understanding emotions	This feature grows over time. It is related to the ability to perceive emotion language and to appreciate the complicated interaction among emotions. For instance, understanding emotions comprises the ability to be sensitive to slight variations between emotions.
Managing emotions	Ability to regulate oneself and others' emotions. Thus, the emotionally intelligent person can manage emotions and control them to achieve anticipated objectives.

Source: Mayer and Salovey (1997)

The concept of emotional intelligence corresponds closely to the ability to perceive, manage and appraise emotions (Schutte N. S. et al., 1998). Although, emotional intelligence involves thinking and feeling, amazingly, the two different mental processes can come together. This corresponds to what Mayer and Salovey (1997) posited that the social intelligence and emotional intelligence constructs are strongly interrelated.

In addition, George (2000) explained that the theory of emotional intelligence emphasizes the extent to which one's cognitive capabilities is alerted by emotions and the extent to which emotions are cognitively coordinated. Since then, the area of emotional intelligence has been flooded with various kinds of tests and all are alleged to be an effective assessment of an individual's emotional intelligence (Kerr R., Garvin J., Heaton N. & Boyle E., 2006).

As a conclusion, several scholars have strongly stated that emotional intelligence skill can be developed and trained (Goleman D., 1998) since it is not an inborn characteristic (Weinberger L. A., 2009). By improving emotional intelligence skill among middle level administrators, perhaps they would perform better at the workplace.

3. Methodology

This research is designed to study the level of emotional intelligence among middle level administrators in Malaysian public universities. Data were collected using a cross-sectional self-administered questionnaire, developed specifically for the individual level unit of analysis.

The instrument used for this study is adapted from the Schutte Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Test (SSEIT), a 33-item scale developed by Schutte et al. (1998) to measure emotional intelligence ability. A 5-point multi-item Likert scale format was employed, ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree), 2 (Somewhat disagree), 3 (Neither agree nor disagree), 4 (Somewhat agree) and 5 (Strongly agree).

The internal consistency score (Cronbach's alpha coefficient) for this scale is 0.87. Proportionate stratified random sampling procedure was used in selecting the sample. This procedure ensured each subpopulation that existed in the total population is well represented.

A total of 500 questionnaires were distributed to the middle level administrators in public universities. Subsequently, 241 replies were obtained. Of the 241 questionnaires received, four were incomplete, leaving 237 usable questionnaires. Subsequently, the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 19 for Windows was used to generate descriptive statistics.

4. Findings and Discussion

This research obtained 47.4% response rate. The frequency of respondents were 6.3% (IIUM), 11.4% (UiTM), 11.4% (UKM), 4.6% (UM), 0.8% (UMK), 3.0% (UMP), 5.5% (UMS), 4.2% (UMT), 5.9% (UniMAP), 4.2% (UNIMAS), 3.0% (UniSZA), 5.1% (UPM), 1.7% (UPNM), 3.8% (UPSI), 2.5% (USIM), 6.8% (USM), 3.8% (UTEM), 3.4% (UTHM), 8.0% (UTM), and 4.6% (UUM). It was recorded that most of the respondents (72.2%) had been serving for less than 11 years, 8.9% between 11-15 years, 10.1% between 16-20 years, 3.0% between 21-25 years and 5.9% for more than 26 years. About 60% of the respondents are females and 41% males. In terms of ethnicity, 92.4% of the respondents are Malays, 1.7% Chinese and 5.9% of other races. Interestingly, most of the respondents are well educated, with 97.5% having at least a bachelor's degree.

No less than 92.4% are permanent staff and 7.6% have been appointed on a temporary/part-time basis. Meanwhile, 22.8% respondents are less than 30 years old, 36.3% between the ages of 30-35 years, 12.2% between 36-40 years, 12.7% between 41-45 years, 7.6% between 46-50 years, and 8.4% above 51 years. This shows an emerging number of generation Y workforce and they are likely to become a dominant force in years to come. A profile of the respondents is presented in Table 2.

Table 2   Profile of the Respondents

Respondents' profiles		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Institution	IIUM	15	6.3
	UiTM	27	11.4
	UKM	27	11.4
	UM	11	4.6
	UMK	2	0.8
	UMP	7	3.0
	UMS	13	5.5
	UMT	10	4.2
	UNIMAP	14	5.9
	UNIMAS	10	4.2
	UNISZA	7	3.0
	UPM	12	5.1
	UPNM	4	1.7
	UPSI	9	3.8
	USIM	6	2.5
	USM	16	6.8
	UTEM	9	3.8
	UTHM	8	3.4
	UTM	19	8.0
	UUM	11	4.6
Tenure of service	≤ 10 years	171	72.2
	11 – 15 years	21	8.9
	16 – 20 years	24	10.1
	21 – 25 years	7	3.0
	≥ 26 years	14	5.9
Job classification	Permanent	219	92.4
	Contract	17	7.2
	Temporary	1	0.4
Education level	Bachelor's degree	188	79.3
	Master's degree	43	18.1
	Other qualifications	6	2.5
Age	< 30 years	54	22.8
	30 – 35 years	86	36.3
	36 – 40 years	29	12.2
	41 – 45 years	30	12.7
	46 – 50 years	18	7.6
	Above 50 years	20	8.4
Gender	Male	97	40.9
	Female	140	59.1
Race	Malay	219	92.4
	Chinese	4	1.7
	Indian	0	0
	Others	14	5.9

Table 3 indicates both the mean and standard deviations of the emotional intelligence scale. The ranking of importance as suggested by Rosli (2005) and Rosli and Ghazali (2007) was used as a reference to determine the level of emotional intelligence. The authors have suggested the following four categories based on rank of importance: mean value of 2.59 and below indicates *less importance*, mean value between 2.60 to 3.40 indicates *moderate importance*, mean value ranging from 3.41 to 4.20 indicates *high importance* and mean value of 4.21 and above indicates *great importance*.

Hence, based on the findings, three items which scored mean value between 2.60-3.40 (I find it hard to understand the non-verbal messages of other people; I know what other people are feeling just by looking at them; and It is difficult for me to understand why people feel the way they do) imply moderate importance.

Eighteen items scored the mean value ranging from 3.41 to 4.20, and were ranked as high importance. The items are: When my mood changes, I see new possibilities; Emotions are one of the things that makes my life worth living; I like to share my emotions with others; When I experience a positive emotion, I know how to make it last; I arrange events others enjoy; I am aware of the non-verbal messages I send to others; I present myself in a way that makes a good impression on others; By looking at their facial expressions, I recognize the emotions people are experiencing; I know why my emotions change; I have control over my emotions; I easily recognize my emotions as I experience them; I am aware of the non-verbal messages other people send; When another person tells me about an important event in his/her life, I almost feel as though I experienced this event myself; When I feel a change in emotions, I tend to come up with new ideas; When I am faced with a challenge, I give up because I believe I will fail; I help other people feel better when they are down; I use good moods to help myself keep trying in the face of obstacles; and I can tell how people are feeling by listening to the tone of their voice.

Meanwhile, 12 items which obtained a mean value greater than 4.21 and indicated as great importance are: I know when to speak about my personal problems to others; When I am faced with obstacles, I remember the times I faced similar obstacles and overcame them; I expect that I will do well on most things I try; Other people find it easy to confide in me; Some of the major events of my life have led me to re-evaluate what is important and not important; I am aware of my emotions as I experience them; I expect good things to happen; I seek out activities that make me happy; When I am in a positive mood, solving problems is easy for me; When I am in a positive mood, I am able to come up with new ideas; I motivate myself by imagining a good outcome to tasks I take on; and I compliment others when they have done something well.

Table 3   Descriptive Statistics of Emotional Intelligence

	Mean	SD
I know when to speak about my personal problems to others	4.445	0.771
When I am faced with obstacles, I remember the times I faced similar obstacles and overcame them	4.277	0.674
I expect that I will do well on most things I try	4.269	0.720
Other people find it easy to confide in me	4.582	0.630
I find it hard to understand the non-verbal messages of other people	2.962	1.033
Some of the major events of my life have led me to re-evaluate what is important and not important	4.340	0.654
When my mood changes, I see new possibilities	3.777	0.860
Emotions are one of the things that makes my life worth living	4.092	0.785
I am aware of my emotions as I experience them	4.214	0.650
I expect good things to happen	4.345	0.711
I like to share my emotions with others	3.487	0.894
When I experience a positive emotion, I know how to make it last	3.975	0.711
I arrange events others enjoy	3.929	0.762
I seek out activities that make me happy	4.374	0.723
I am aware of the non-verbal messages I send to others	3.966	0.717
I present myself in a way that makes a good impression on others	4.198	0.723
When I am in a positive mood, solving problems is easy for me	4.445	0.696
By looking at their facial expressions, I recognize the emotions people are experiencing	4.034	0.751
I know why my emotions change	4.067	0.798
When I am in a positive mood, I am able to come up with new ideas	4.408	0.680
I have control over my emotions	3.992	0.723
I easily recognize my emotions as I experience them	4.160	0.643

(To be continued)

(Table 3 continued)

I motivate myself by imagining a good outcome to tasks I take on	4.219	0.664
I compliment others when they have done something well	4.324	0.741
I am aware of the non-verbal messages other people send	3.882	0.702
When another person tells me about an important event in his/her life, I almost feel as though I experienced this event myself	3.887	0.723
When I feel a change in emotions, I tend to come up with new ideas	3.764	0.760
When I am faced with a challenge, I give up because I believe I will fail	3.987	1.065
I know what other people are feeling just by looking at them	3.370	0.830
I help other people feel better when they are down	3.987	0.738
I use good mood to help myself keep trying in the face of obstacles	4.160	0.693
I can tell how people are feeling by listening to the tone of their voice	3.830	0.710
It is difficult for me to understand why people feel the way they do	2.903	0.956

From the observation of the mean score, the level of emotional intelligence among middle administrators is between *moderate* to *great importance*. The mean score ranges from 2.903 to 4.582 on a 5-point Likert scale. Besides that, the variability of the rating is relatively high with standard deviation ranging from 0.630 to 1.065, suggesting some inconsistencies in importance pertaining to the agreement about emotional intelligence items among the respondents. From these, three items are reported as *moderate importance*; 18 items as *high importance*; and 12 items as *great importance*.

The findings reveal a high mean value among middle level administrators in Malaysian public universities. Subsequently, judging from the score, which shows a strong mean concentration, it may be assumed that middle level administrators in Malaysian public universities exhibit their emotional intelligence ability at the workplace. All these practices have been employed well by both male and female respondents (including their length of service, age groups and their different service schemes) across the public universities.

Perhaps, with continuous on-the-job training and development programs conducted by their respective universities, middle level administrators can become more conscious of their obligations and know how to act appropriately and independently. Another possible reason could be that middle level administrators possess a high educational level and therefore they are not only aware of the challenges encountered by the Malaysian higher education sector, but also understand how to execute their responsibilities at the workplace.

5. Conclusion

The results obtained show that the middle level administrators in public universities have shown quite a high level of emotional intelligence at the workplace. Several factors, such as assimilation, consistent and comprehensive on-the-job training and their education level could be the reasons why middle level administrators are more conscious of their obligations, which in turn, encourage them to behave appropriately at the work place. The findings add to the literature on emotional intelligence, especially in the context of Malaysian public universities. Since the present study only emphasizes on the public universities, future research could also include employees from private universities in Malaysia to enhance the findings.

References:

Abd. Rahim R. and Abdul Shukor S. (2006). "The relationship between management practices and job satisfaction: The case of assistant registrars at public institutions of higher learning in northern region Malaysia", *The Journal of Human Resource and Adult Learning*, Vol. 2, No. 2, pp. 72-80.

Amat Taap M., Rodrigue F. and Choy S. C. (2003). "Occupational stress among managers: A Malaysian survey", *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, Vol. 10, No. 6, pp. 622-628.

Anand R. and Udaya Suriyan G. (2010). "Emotional intelligence and its relationship with leadership practices", *International Journal of Business and Management*, Vol. 5, No. 2, pp. 65-76.

Bratton V. K., Dodd N. G. and Brown F. W. (2011). "The impact of emotional intelligence on accuracy of self-awareness and leadership performance", *Leadership and Organization Development Journal*, Vol. 3, No. 2, pp. 127-149.

Carmeli A. (2003). "The relationship between emotional intelligence and work attitudes, behavior and outcomes: An examination among senior managers", *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, Vol. 18, No. 8, pp. 788-813.

Fernàndaz-Berrocal P. and Extremera N. (2006). "Emotional intelligence: A theoretical and empirical review of its first 15 years of history", *Psicothema*, Vol. 18, No. 1, pp. 7-12.

Goleman D. (1998). "What makes a leader?", *Harvard Business Review*, Vol. 76, pp. 93-104.

George J. M. (2000). "Emotions and leadership: The role of emotional intelligence", *Human Relations*, Vol. 53, No. 8, pp. 1027-1055.

Graves J. G. (1999). "Emotional intelligence and cognitive ability: Predicting performance in job-simulated activities", *ProQuest Information & Learning*, available online at: http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=psyh&AN=1999-95022-280&site=ehost-live.

Jaeger A. J. and Eagan M. K. (2007). "Exploring the value of emotional intelligence performance", *Journal of Student Affairs, Research and Practice*, Vol. 44, No. 3, pp. 512-537.

Kerr R., Garvin J., Heaton N. and Boyle E. (2006). "Emotional intelligence and leadership effectiveness", *Leadership and Organization Development Journal*, Vol. 27, No. 4, pp. 265-279.

Latour S. M. and Hosmer B. C. (2002). "Emotional intelligence: Implications for all United States Air Force leaders", *Air and Space Power Journal*, Vol.16, No. 4, pp. 27-36.

Malaysia (2006). "Ninth Malaysia Plan 2006-2010", Kuala Lumpur, Percetakan Nasional Malaysia Berhad.

Mayer J. D. and Salovey P. (1997). "What is emotional intelligence?", in: P. Salovey & D. Sluyter (Eds.), *Emotional Development and Emotional Intelligence: Implications for Educators*, New York: Basic Book, pp. 3-31.

Ministry of Higher Education (2011). "Malaysia higher education statistics", Putra Jaya, Ministry of Higher Education.

Rosli Mahmood (2005). "Ethical perceptions of small business owners in Malaysia", *International Journal of Management and Entrepreneurship*, Vol.1, No. 2, pp. 138-145.

Rosli M. and Ghazali A. R. (2007). "How bank managers assess small business borrowers?", *Malaysian Management Review*, Vol. 42, No. 1, pp. 43-53.

Salovey P., Brackett M. A. and Mayer D. (2004). *Emotional Intelligence: Key Readings on the Mayer and Salovey Model*, New York: Dude Publishing, 2004.

Salovey P. and Mayer J. D. (1990). "Emotional intelligence", *Imagination, Cognition, and Personality*, Vol. 9, No. 3, pp. 185-211.

Schutte N. S., Malouff J. M., Hall L. E., Haggerty D. J., Cooper J. T. and Golden C. J. et al. (1998). "Development and validation of a measure of emotional intelligence", *Personality and Individual Differences*, Vol. 25, No. 2, pp.167-177.

Szekeres J. (2004). "The invisible workers", *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, Vol. 26, No. 1, pp. 7-22.

Taylor G. J. and Bagby R. M. (2000). "An overview of the alexithymia construct", in: R. Bar-On and J. D. A. Parker (Eds.), *Handbook of Emotional Intelligence*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, pp. 40-67.

UNESCO (1998). "Higher education in the twenty-first century", in: *World Conference on Higher Education. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization: Vision and Action*, Paris, 5-9 October.

Whitchurch C. (2004). "Administrative managers: A critical link", *Higher Education Quarterly*, Vol. 58, No. 4, pp. 280-298.

Weinberger L. A. (2009). "Emotional intelligence, leadership styles, and perceived leadership effectiveness", *Advances in Developing Human Resources*, Vol. 11, No. 6, pp. 747-772.