A PROACTIVE APPROACH TO CUSTOMER SERVICE IN THE AIRLINE INDUSTRY: 
THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE, 
CUSTOMER ORIENTATION, AND SELF-RATING PERFORMANCE
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Abstract: Despite the popular claim in the business world that emotional intelligence is “pop psychology,” there is little academic evidence to support emotional intelligence as having a real value to an organization. This paper aims to investigate the relationship between emotional intelligence and customer orientation, and the relationship between emotional intelligence and the performance of frontline service workers, in this case, airline cabin crew members. Specifically, it assesses the scope of emotional intelligence within the trait emotional intelligence (Trait EI) theory developed by Petrides and Furnham in 2001. A survey was conducted among 357 participants, cabin crew members of a Middle East airline with no leadership position, and Pearson’s correlation coefficient used for data analysis. The data analysis yielded a medium positive relationship between emotional intelligence and customer orientation, and a medium positive relationship between emotional intelligence and cabin crew performance. The study also found a significant relationship between the following: (1) emotional intelligence and information exchange; (2) emotionality and information exchange; and (3) well-being and performance. The results suggest that higher emotional intelligence among airline cabin crew members could lead to superior customer orientation as well as improved performance.

Keywords: Emotional intelligence, trait emotional intelligence, customer orientation, performance, cabin crew

1. Introduction

As Halon (2007, cited in Gildner et al., 2010), stated, the airline industry has grown into the world’s largest industry for travel and tourism ever since its expansion began after World War II (1939-1945). According to the Air Transport Association (ATA), the most significant part of an airline’s cost is its labor force; pilots, cabin crew members (also referred to as either flight attendants or cabin crews in this study), baggage handlers, and dispatchers to name a few (Investopedia, 2010). It is therefore in the best interest of an airline to optimize the performance of its service-providing staff so as to make the company attractive and competitive and provide value to its customers.

Admittedly, for a commercial airline, some of the most prominent frontline service employees are the cabin crew. However, it is the author’s observation that even though all the personnel on board an airplane undergoes an intensive recruitment process, which involves the same standard training, cabin crew members still exhibit different skill levels in dealing with passengers. This observation and a 2008 study by Prentice on the relationship between trait EI and the self-perceived performance rating of frontline service employees, casino key account representatives, are at the origin of this research. Focusing on the relationship between emotional intelligence, customer orientation, and the self-rating performance of an airline cabin crew, it aims to address the issue of why there are discrepancies in flight attendants’ customer service skills.

The primary focus of this research is to study (i) the relationship between emotional intelligence and customer orientation and (ii) the relationship between emotional intelligence and self-rating performance. It includes a survey of a cabin crew from one prominent airline in the Middle East. However, for privacy and confidentiality purposes, it will not refer to this airline by name but simply as a “Middle East Airline.” This Middle East Airline, one of the fastest growing and most profitable airlines in the world, was awarded ‘World Best Airline’ by Skytrax in 2013 (Gulf news, 2013). It provides extensive customer service training to crew members.

While “Emotional intelligence” has been accepted and adopted both in the academic and business worlds, it has also been criticized for being premature in the field of human resource...
and organization development, having a ‘consultancy mindset’, and ignoring the most common benefits of using invalid measurement on a particular environment in order to quantify validity (Bardach, 2008). Four prominent studies on the relationship between emotional intelligence and customer orientation have come out between 2004 and 2010. They include: Rozell, Pettijohn and Parker (2004); Prentice (2008); Chih and Huang (2009); and Pettijohn, Rozell and Newman (2010). This leaves the field wide open for further explorations. Deeper understanding of the relationship between emotional intelligence, customer orientation and staff performance would benefit both the service industry and the academic community as a whole.

This research is specifically designed to measure customer orientation scores among frontline service workers (cabin crew members in this case). To this end, it uses the so-called Modified COS as a measurement tool. The Modified COS, adopted by Daniel and Darby in 1997 as a customer orientation scale (COS) for obtaining customer orientation scores on frontline service workers was used in Prentice’s study on casino account representatives. As reported by Daniel and Darby (1997) and Prentice (2008), though the importance of customer orientation has been widely discussed in the academics, only few studies have exclusively measured this construct.

This research also uses the trait EI questionnaire (TEIQue) on samples of an international cabin crew. It is available as part of the worldwide trait EI research program directed by Dr. K. V. Petrides at London Psychometric Laboratory at University College London (UCL). In 2009, Petrides wrote the following: “The global trait EI score is a broad index of emotional functioning. Global trait EI correlates positively with extraversion, conscientiousness, mental health, job satisfaction, organization commitment, seniority, pro-social behavior, popularity, sensitivity and susceptibility to affect, over-prediction of affective reactions in decision-making, overconfidence, social desirability and hubris…”

This study may be applicable to the management of frontline service workers of service industries, first and foremost the airline industry. The implications in terms of business practice are threefold: customer relationship marketing, staff performance, and personnel selection and training. Firms may use emotional intelligence to enhance customer service and use customer relationship marketing as a competitive advantage. They may also use the findings of this study to elevate staff performance by introducing emotional intelligence in training and selection within their organizations. Lastly, management may use the findings to improve their personnel selection criteria and create more efficient emotional intelligence training.

The relevant literature will be examined first. The research framework and methodology are considered next. The results are then presented. The study ends with a discussion of the findings and some concluding remarks and recommendations.

2. Literature Review

This section examines several concepts especially relevant to this study and the research questions to which they give rise.

- Cabin Crew

The cabin crew job is generally described as service-oriented and traditionally performed for the most part by females who are expected to tend to passengers’ individual needs, often in stressful situations. Passengers may demand full attention although cabin crew members need to tend to multiple requests by passengers (Sveins et al., 2007). Othman et al. (2008) mentioned a 1983 leading publication on emotional labor by Hochschil entitled “The Managed Heart,” which includes cabin crew members and debt collectors as part of the study. Hochschil proposed a classification of occupations based on their emotional labor demand. Cabin crew is classified as service workers.

- Emotional Intelligence (EI)

In 2003, Bar-On defined emotional intelligence (EI) as: “an array of emotional and social abilities, competencies, and skills that enable individuals to cope with daily demands and be more effective in their personal and social life” (as cited in Bardach, 2008, p 10). Throughout research, emotional intelligence has been described and measured under three different models: Ability EI; Trait EI; and Mixed EI.

In this study, emotional intelligence
definition and measurements pertain solely to the Trait EI framework. Trait EI is categorized as a surface trait since trait EI incorporates emotional intelligence abilities within a more general framework of individual self-perceived emotionality and emotion efficacy (Petrides & Furnham, 2001 as cited in Zampetakis et al., 2009). With surface trait identified as trait emotionally-related self-perception, which can be measured through a self-report questionnaire and its relationship to work-related outcome, trait EI was chosen to define the framework of emotional intelligence in this study.

- Trait Emotional Intelligence (Trait EI)

Petrides and Furnham first published trait emotional intelligence (trait EI) in 2001 (Davey, 2005). Referred to as trait EI or emotional self-efficacy, it is defined as “a constellation of emotional related self-perceptions located at the lower levels of the personality hierarchies” (Petrides, Peta, & Kokkinaki, 2007 as cited in Petrides, 2009, p 12).

Trait EI is related to cross-situational consistencies in behavior, which is evident in specific traits or behaviors such as empathy, assertiveness and optimism (Petrides & Furnham, 2000b). Until recently, hypotheses suggested that trait EI was positioned outside the area of human cognitive ability. These hypotheses, however, have been tested since in some studies and observed correlations between trait EI questionnaires and IQ tests have been reported to be near zero, or even negative (Petrides, 2009). Trait EI is set in the personality framework and can be accessed through self-report inventories measuring typical behavior (Petrides & Furnham 2000b, 2001). The construct of trait EI measurement consists of self-perception and behavioral dispositions, which are well matched to the subjective nature of emotions (Davey, 2005).

Research conducted between 1999 and 2006 determined that trait EI could predict work-related outcomes such as work satisfaction and work performance (Carmeli, 2003; Dulewicz & Higgs, 1999; Rahim & Minors, 2003; Sy et al., 2006; and Wong & Law, 2002 as cited in Zampetakis et al., 2009). According to Carmeli (2003 as cited in Zampetakis et al., 2009), trait EI is positively associated with career commitment and work satisfaction.

- Emotional Intelligence and Customer Orientation

Some of the literature has highlighted the relationship between emotional intelligence and efficiency of frontline service workers in delivering service to customers. For example, Brown et al. (2002, p 111 as cited in Perryer, 2009, p 239) defined customer orientation as “an employee’s tendency or predisposition to meet customer needs in an on-the-job context.” At an individual level, customer orientation embodies staff attitude towards service delivery by keeping customer satisfaction as a central goal (Saxe and Weitz 1982 as cited in Lings et al., 2008). Successful organizations in today’s corporate world are the ones taking the initiative to deliver “high quality service” to customers (Goodman, 2000 as cited in Dimitriades, 2007).

As Bardzil and Slaski (2003 as cited in Dimitriades, 2007) emphasized, great service, which is delivered with positive emotional content, most likely comes from employees aware of their own emotions and able to understand other’s emotions.

Othman et al. (2008) argued that for a person who performs service work involving interacting with others, such as: customers, colleagues, and managers, it is important to be able to deal with emotions. People with higher emotional intelligence are supposed to have a higher success in understanding and focusing on customers’ needs. These findings are in keeping with Prentice’s (2008) determination that the concept of customer orientation requires service employees to verify customers’ needs, which in the context of this present study, means that they will be able to perform in a way which will meet those needs better than the cabin crew members of competitive airlines would, giving them a competitive advantage. Customer-oriented frontline employees would be able to use their empathy skill to identify and satisfy passengers’ needs. This is because passengers may have different needs in different encounters and different passengers may have different needs in the same encounters. Thus research question one can be formulated as follows:

**Research Question 1:** Is emotional intelligence related to the customer orientation of the cabin crew members of a Middle East Airline?
- Emotional Intelligence and Self-rating performance

The study of the relationship between emotional intelligence and performance has been the subject of heightened interest among researchers ever since the early stage of emotional intelligence. As Boyatzis mentioned in 1982, despite its position as a new branch of psychology, EI has gained a role in performance counseling and career development (as cited in Koman & Wolff, 2008).

Bangkoedphol (2007) referred to work performance, as people accomplishments in work using their effort, knowledge, experience etc., under suitable circumstances. The success of an organization is a direct result of work performance, which consists of both effectiveness, and work productivity. Work performance has been observed to be significantly related to EI competencies (Koman & Wolff, 2008).

In his study Goleman (1998 as cited in Hunter et al., 1990) collected evidence from 121 companies around the world which confirmed that EI abilities were twice as much more instrumental in performance excellence than technical and cognitive abilities. Work productivity within EI ability was found to be higher among top performers than average ones. This was especially true of complex occupations such as insurance sales and account management. Diggins (2004) has argued that EI training help employees be more motivated and cooperative, which leads to an increase of a company’s profits and employee’s productivity. Diggins’ study was conducted among multinational consulting firms. As reported by Diggins, one firm, which scored above average on emotional intelligence factors, made $1.2 million more in profit than the others. Based on the above, research question two can thus be formulated as follows:

**Research Questions 2:** Is emotional intelligence related to the self-rating performance of the cabin crew members of a Middle East Airline?

3. Conceptual Framework and Research Methodology

The conceptual framework articulating the relationship between Trait EI and customer orientation and the relationship between Trait EI and performance is based on research by Kukreja (2004), Nguyen (2008), Zampetakis (2009), and Chih et al. (2009). The combination of these various frameworks is shown in Figure 1.

**Figure 1: Model of Research Framework**

![Figure 1: Model of Research Framework](source: Created by the author for this study)

As shown in Figure 1, the independent variable, trait EI, includes four components: well-being, self-control, emotionality, sociability. There are two dependent variables, (i) customer orientation, which includes perceived professional relationship and information exchange, and (ii) self-rating performance. Based on these variables and the conceptual framework articulating the relationships among them, the following 4 groups of five hypotheses each were developed, with a total of 20 hypotheses (see Annex One):

Group 1 hypotheses consist of trait EI related to the customer orientation of cabin crew members; Group 2 hypotheses include trait EI related to the perceived professional relationship of cabin crew members; Group 3 hypotheses, trait EI related to the information exchange of cabin crew members; Group 4 hypotheses, trait EI related to the self-rating performance of cabin crew members.

A self-administered questionnaire was used in this study. The questionnaire consisted of four parts: a (i) a demographic profile; (ii) trait EI questionnaire-short (TEIQue-SF); (iii) modified customer orientation questionnaire (Modified COS); and (iv) self-rating performance questionnaire. The TEIQue-SF used on the samples was tested to have a correlation with customer orientation: perceived professional relationship and information exchange and performance. The reliability of the modified COS used to determine their customer the cabin crew’s
orientation scores was found to be 0.727. The population included 5,035 cabin crew members in a non-leadership position, responsible for providing service in the economy cabin. As to the sample, it consisted of 357 cabin crew members. With regard to data collection and analysis, 380 questionnaires were distributed. A total of 359 were returned (a 94.47% response rate). However, only 357 questionnaires were considered eligible for data analysis. The SPSS program (17.0.1) was used for data analysis and processing. The data obtained in part one of the questionnaires was analyzed descriptively for demographic profile purposes. Twenty hypotheses using Pearson’s correlation coefficient were relied on to identify the relationships between emotional intelligence and customer orientation (Research question no. 1) and the relationship between emotional intelligence and performance evaluation (Research question no. 2).

4. Results
Most of the respondents were females (75.91%). The majority of the respondents held a bachelor’s degree (55.68%) as their highest degree. Most of them were single (86.48%). As to customer service experience, 32.39% of the respondents had more than 5 years and 30.14% between 3 and 5 years.

The Pearson’s correlation coefficient was used to investigate the relationship between trait EI and customer orientation and between trait EI and self-rating performance. The results are shown in Tables 1 and 2 below.

**Table 1:** Summary of the Strength and Direction of the Relationship between Emotional Intelligence and the Main Variables.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationship between the Variables</th>
<th>Level of Significance</th>
<th>Strength and Direction of the Relationship</th>
<th>Result</th>
<th>Rank based on the Strength of the Relationship</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trait EI and Performance</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.452</td>
<td>Medium Positive Relationship</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trait EI and Information Exchange</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.444</td>
<td>Medium Positive Relationship</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trait EI and Customer Orientation</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.401</td>
<td>Medium Positive Relationship</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trait EI and Perceived professional relationship</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.302</td>
<td>Low Positive Relationship</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 2:** Summary of the Strength and Direction of Relationship between the Dimensions of Emotional Intelligence and the Main Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationship between Variables</th>
<th>Level of Significance</th>
<th>Strength and Direction of the Relationship</th>
<th>Results</th>
<th>Rank based on the Strength of the Relationship</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emotionality and Information Exchange</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.354</td>
<td>Low Positive Relationship</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well-being and Performance</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.345</td>
<td>Low Positive Relationship</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotionality and Customer Orientation</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.317</td>
<td>Low Positive Relationship</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotionality and Perceived professional relationship</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.236</td>
<td>Low Positive Relationship</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1 shows the rank of the relationships based on the strength and direction of the relationships between emotional intelligence and the following variables: performance, information exchange, customer orientation, and perceived professional relationship. Trait EI is found to have the strongest significant relationship with performance followed by information exchange, customer orientation and perceived professional relationship respectively.

Table 2 indicates the rank of the relationships based on an analysis of the dimensions of trait EI and their strength and the direction of the relationships with other variables. Emotionality is found to have the moist significant and strongest relationship with information exchange, followed by customer orientation, and perceived professional relationship respectively. In addition, well-being is found to have the significant second strongest relationship with performance.

5. Discussion, Conclusions and Recommendations

The purpose of this research is to consider the two research questions articulated for this study: (1) Is emotional intelligence related to the customer orientation of the cabin crew members of a Middle East Airline? and (2) Is emotional intelligence related to the self-rating performance of the cabin crew members of a Middle East Airline?

- Research Question 1:

The results of Groups 1, 2, and 3 hypothesis testing address this question. They confirm that the two variables have medium positive correlations. The latter finding has two implications. The first implication is that the higher the emotional intelligence of the cabin crew members, the higher the level of customer orientation is likely to be. The second implication suggests that the higher the customer orientation of the cabin crew members, the more the level of emotional intelligence is likely to be.

These findings support the claims of previous studies, which have established the correlation of these two variables. For example, Pettijohn, Rozell and Newman (2010) found that salespeople’s emotional intelligence levels positively correlate with their customer orientation scores. This may explain the first implication that emotional intelligence is likely to influence the customer orientation behavior of cabin crew members. As the frontline service employees of an airline, they are in direct contact with customers/passengers and have to deal with high emotional demands. Therefore, their emotion skills are bound affect their ability to deal with the emotions of customers/passengers, colleagues, and their own. Cabin crew members who know how to manage their own emotions and are able to anticipate this while dealing with passengers are more likely to better communicate with passengers and focus on their needs. Prentice (2008) suggested that the benefits of emotional skills are not only to manage customers who are emotional, but also regulate the employee’s emotions so that they can reasonably deal with the unreasonable demands.

Another possible reason that may account for the second implication that a flight attendant’s customer orientation may indicate his/her level of emotional intelligence, is that a cabin crew member who scores high on customer orientation may also possess a high level of emotional intelligence. This is because cabin crew members with a successful customer orientation possess kills, which make passengers feel important. Such flight attendants have the ability to anticipate needs as well as maintain excellent communication skills, typically found in cabin crew members with high emotional intelligence. On-duty cabin crew members not only face a whole array of passenger demands, especially with hundreds of passengers sitting in the confined space of the economy cabin, but also have to deal with a challenging, space-restricted working environment. The job also requires cabin crews to work in different time zones, in a confined space with low air quality, limited resources, time stress, and possible emergency situations such as first aids, safety and security problems. So, if not equipped with emotional intelligence skills, cabin crews could go through much emotional stress when having to deal with all these challenges and limitations.

Bozionelos (2006) pointed out that emotional work could lead to emotional exhaustion - one form of job burnout - as a consequence of stressful interpersonal interaction at the work place. His study has shown that the more employees disguise their
emotions, the more it positively associates with their levels of emotional exhaustion. Clearly, maintaining one’s willingness to serve or to go out of one’s way to offer excellent passenger service at 30,000 feet high requires a cabin crew member to have good emotional management skills.

Interestingly enough, Lamberg (2008) determined that at an individual level, employees responsible for making contact with customers can be customer-oriented and act in a rational manner toward customers even though they may be part of an organization that is not customer-oriented. Lamberg’s research demonstrates that regardless of the company’s policy, at an individual level, employees can also resort to their own initiatives and decide whether to be customer-oriented or ignore it, regardless of the company’s policy. This particular point is especially important as it emphasizes - and accounts for - the fact that while working at high altitude, any one flight attendant could decide to become customer oriented or alternatively to ignore some of the passengers’ requests, depending on his/her individual initiative (and professionalism).

In addition, the results also indicate that trait EI is found to have a “medium positive correlation” with ‘information exchange,’ while trait EI is found to have a “low positive correlation” with ‘perceived professional relationship.’ While comparing the correlation score between trait EI and the three variables (customer orientation, information exchange and perceived professional relationship), information exchange is found to have the highest relationship with trait EI of the three variables. Daniel and Darby (1997) described information exchange as one of the factor structures of customer orientation. They defined information exchange as the moment “when both parties seeking and receiving information in the interests of determining how customers would like to receive service.”

Thus, in this study, in light of all the above findings, it is possible to state that frontline service workers with higher skills in terms of emotional intelligence are more likely to have better information exchanging skills, one of the key elements of customer orientation. Conversely, the information exchange skills of frontline service workers may be an indicator of their level of emotional intelligence. One possible reason that may explain this outstanding association between trait EI and information exchange is that for a cabin crew member to be able to communicate well with a passenger requires him/her to be equipped with skills in anticipating customer’s needs and be able to ask the right question. Hartmann (2010) described professional service providers as having the ability not only to be aware of his/her emotions but also to understand their clients’ own values and experience. Cabin crew members should be able to identify the emotional bias of passengers by encouraging them to discuss it openly. Therefore, for cabin crew members to be able to develop better skills successfully communicating with passengers, it is imperative that they possess emotional intelligence skills that will enable them to better grasp passengers’ emotions.

Furthermore, the four dimensions of trait EI were found to have a low positive correlation with customer orientation and also with perceived professional relationship and information exchange. However, emotionality was found to be the most important item in terms of emotional intelligence dimensions; one that has the highest relationship with information exchange, followed by customer orientation.

One reason that may account for this remarkable bond is that cabin crew members who score high in emotionality are, as described by Petrides (2009), people who perceived themselves as able to recognize or aware of their own emotions when they arise. They view themselves as having an ability to perceive and express their emotions and being able to use this quality to create a closer relationship with others. Therefore, this explains that with great emotionality skills, cabin crews may be able to have successful communication with passengers. This is known as a great information exchange skill. The results in this study indicate that information exchange is not likely to be possessed by cabin crews with a diminished emotionality dimension. The information exchange of cabin crews may be an indicator of how well they are equipped with emotionality skills.

Swan, Bowers, and Grover (2002) proposed a relationship of service transaction and information exchange and described frontline service, such as cabin service, as a ‘user dominated transaction.’ A user dominated
transaction refers to the customer orientation of a service provider, termed 'helpful partner', whose informative role consists in responding to customers’ inquiries, warning them of any inappropriate choice, and mentioning alternatives. Therefore, cabin crew members who score higher in information exchange may also possess greater emotionality skills. As a result, to be ‘helpful partners’ with passengers, cabin crew members are required to be able to understand their own and anticipated passengers’ emotions and use this quality to create a closer relationship with them.

The answer to research question no. 1 can thus be summarized as follows: There is a relationship between trait EI and customer orientation. There is also a medium positive relationship between these two variables. Besides, trait EI is found to have the highest relationship with information exchange. This is followed by emotionality, which is one of the four dimensions of trait EI. It is also found to have the highest relationship with information exchange.

To summarize, in response to the research question no. 1, the author would like to propose that helping staff members improve their emotional intelligence skills, especially the emotionality dimension, may be key to improving their customer orientation skills, especially in terms of exchanging information and communicating with customers. Firms may also be able to identify level of emotional intelligence or emotionality skills of their employees by observing their customer orientation and information exchange skills.

- Research Question 2:

The results of Groups 4 hypothesis testing answer this second question. They show that there is a relationship between trait EI and the self-rating performance of cabin crew members and that it has a medium positive correlation. The results also indicate that the higher the emotional intelligence, the more the level of performance is likely to increase and likewise, the higher staff performance, the more the level of emotional intelligence is likely to increase.

The findings in this research are consistent with Cote and Miners’ (2006) findings who, in their research, reported that both emotional intelligence and cognitive intelligence are positively correlated with job performance. They determined that emotional intelligence is the predictor of task performance and the organizational citizenship behavior directed at the organization (OCBO) whenever the cognitive intelligence of staff decreases. Their findings suggest that staffs who have low cognitive intelligence but high emotional intelligent are able to accomplish tasks correctly and are involved regularly in OCBO. In their study, entitled ‘Developing effective salespeople: exploring the link between emotional intelligence and sales performance,’ Deeter-Schmelz and Sojka (2003) also found a link between sales people’s performance and emotional intelligence. Likewise, a similar relationship between cabin crew performance and emotional intelligence is also found in this study.

The first implication of these findings is that the trait EI of cabin crew members influences their job performance. A second implication is that an employee’s performance may be an indicator of his/her level of trait EI. This means that employees who perform well may inhibit a high level of emotional intelligence while, employees who perform poorly may lack emotional management skills.

One reason that may explain the first implication as to why trait EI may influence the performance of a cabin crew is that any flight attendant with great emotional intelligence skills will not waste time carrying his/her negative emotions whether in a personal context or on the job and will not let it affect his/her performance in respect of passengers and his/her colleagues. Instead, he/she will be able to deal with any emotion that may arise and rely on these skills to understand him/herself, his/her customers and colleagues. Abraham (1999 as cited in Carmeli, 2003) described people with emotional intelligence as ‘optimistic’; a trait that helps them look for a resolution rather than reasoning (blaming on who’s fault). For this very reason, employees with emotional intelligence would not blame or hold their company’s responsible for every difficulty encountered in their jobs (Abraham, 1999 as cited in Carmeli, 2003). Kravitz and Schuber (2004 as cited in Nguyen, 2008) argued that people who are trained to acquire ‘emotional smarts’ are generally people who can develop a relationship at school and in social settings. They are able to manage emotions, be better communicators, more flexible and
enthusiastic, and focus on team work. Staff members with greater emotional intelligence may thus also be those with improved performances.

One of the reasons that may explain the second implication as to why the level of staff performance can be an indicator of their emotional intelligence skills is that a solid performance is often a display of successful customer and team interactions, in and of themselves a manifestation of a great level of emotional intelligence. In this study, the area of performance evaluation of cabin crew members involves knowledge in safety and security, professional image, and interaction with colleagues and passengers. According to Singh (2010), emotional intelligence influences the ability to understand and relate well with one another within an organizational context. Petitjohn et al. (2010) argued that the five competencies including in Goleman’s (1998) concept of emotional intelligence (self-awareness, self-regulation, self–motivation, empathy, and social skills) have an impact on the way individuals perceive and react to organization practice. As a result, if customer and colleague interacting skills are part of frontline staff’s performance criteria, it can then be assumed that staff members with strong performances most likely hold great emotional intelligence skills.

Moreover, the results also suggest that there is a relationship between all the four dimensions of trait EI and self-rating performance, which is in-keeping with the testing results of Group 4 hypotheses. Out of the four dimensions of emotional intelligence, well-being has the highest relationship with self-rating performance.

One possible way to explain why well-being is highly associated with job performance is that well-being may be an indicator of the perceived level of satisfaction of how cabin crews view their lives. Petrides (2009) determined that people with high scores in terms of well-being perceive themselves as positive, happy and fulfilled with their lives in contrast with people with low scores in terms of well-being who display low self-esteem and are disappointed about their present lives. Cabin crew members who feel happy and satisfied with their lives may feel more motivated to be attentive towards customers and focus on team performance more than cabin crew members who perceived themselves as being frustrated. Petrides (2009) further suggested that well-being has a positive association with extraversion, positive mood, job satisfaction, and faith in intuition.

One of the implications of this finding may be that encouraging employees to improve their well-being, maintain a positive state of mind, and be satisfied with their lives and the job they do, may be the key factor in increasing their performance. Employees’ performance may be a key indicator of their emotional intelligence level, especially in respect of the dimension of well-being. Therefore, companies, airlines in particular, may be able to address employees’ level emotional intelligence by measuring how well employees perform their jobs. This is especially true of the well-being dimension.

This study also compares the correlation coefficient scores between the relationships of trait EI and the four variables, which include: customer orientation, perceived professional relationship, information exchange and self-rating performance. They indicate that the relationship between trait EI and performance has the highest correlation among these four variables. Therefore, in light of these results, it is possible to state that the relationship between emotional intelligence and performance is the most significant relationship in this study.

In conclusion, the answer to research question no. 2 confirms that there is a medium positive relationship between emotional intelligence and the performance evaluation of cabin crew members. Moreover, well-being is found to be the most significant dimension of emotional intelligence that relates to performance. Thus, including emotional intelligence as part of the training and selection and helping staff members raise their level of well-being is likely to cause employees to better perform.

Moreover, the results of this study support the existing customer orientation, information exchange, and perceived professional relationship and their relationships with emotional intelligence as tested by Daniel and Darby in 1997. This research has not only confirmed the relationship between trait EI and customer orientation but also revealed an outstanding role of information exchange with regard to emotional intelligence. Performance evaluation is also found to have the highest
relationship with emotional intelligence among all the variables considered in this study. The results once again support the claim of previous research that emotional intelligence has a positive relationship with performance.

This study has established that emotionality, one of the four EI dimensions, has the most significant relationship to customer orientation. Employees equipped with cognitive skills and able to anticipate their own and others’ emotions are likely to establish a warm relationship with customers. Therefore, by leveraging customer relationship marketing as a competitive advantage, firms may be able to benefit from an enrichment of customer loyalty, retention, and long-term engagement. This study therefore proposes that there is a positive relationship between emotional intelligence and staff performance.

Moreover, the findings in this study point to a relationship between well-being and staff performance. Managers may use this information to help create a happy work environment and support and assist employees in dealing with demands and challenges both on the job and in their personal life. This could be done through organizational policies (reward programs) that would influence employees’ well-being in various ways (fringe benefits, wellness programs, counseling and career advancement, etc.). By doing so, firms may be able to maintain or improve staff performance.

Recommendation for Further Studies

Since the sample population in this study is only limited to the cabin crew members of a Middle East airline, future research should include flight attendants from various airlines around the world as samples and compare the findings among them.

It is also recommended to measure and compare the level of emotional intelligence, customer orientation, and performance of frontline service workers indifferent industries. This would help to investigate and confirm relationships of these variables in various samples and environments.

Moreover, since this study does not aim for a comprehensive analysis of psychometric factors and facets of trait EI, the emotional intelligence questionnaire used in this study is a short-form TEIQue-SF, with 30 items providing less in-depth data when compared to a long-form TEIQue-LF, with 153 items providing 4 factors and 15 facets of trait EI. Therefore, for any study looking for a more comprehensive psychometric analysis of trait EI, TEIQue-LF may be a more suitable questionnaire option to be used.

Finally, performance evaluation in this study uses a self-rating questionnaire, which only yields an evaluation of how employees rate themselves. Therefore, a 360-degree type of evaluation with input from managers, colleagues, and customers should be used for future performance study.

References


Customer-Orientation Selling: Exploring the roles of Emotional Intelligence and Organization Commitment ”[Electronic version]. Psychology and Marketing , 21 (6), 405-424.


### Annex One

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>H1:</strong> Trait EI is related to <strong>the</strong> customer orientation of cabin crew.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<tr>
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<th><strong>H4:</strong> Trait EI is related to <strong>the</strong> self-rating performance of cabin crew.</th>
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