

Soft skills: impact of coachability and emotional intelligence on organizational citizenship behaviors

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ABSTRACT

Employers rank soft skills as the most important factors in employee success at entry-level positions. Two specific soft skills are the emotional intelligence and coachability of the employee. In order to fully understand the impact that coachability and emotional intelligence have on employee success, this study evaluated how they were linked to organizational citizenship behavior, a work outcome that research has shown leads to worker success. The results of the study indicate a statistically significant positive relationship between employee coachability and organizational citizenship behavior and emotional intelligence and organizational citizenship behavior.

Keywords: Organizational citizenship behavior, coachability, emotional intelligence



INTRODUCTION

The effective management of organizations is becoming increasingly challenging as companies face tremendous change brought about by technological advances, the availability of information, as well as corporate restructuring to compete in the global market (Cooper, Faragher, and Sparks, 2001; Mitchell, Skinner and White, 2010). Mukkelli (2015) suggests that in order for organizations to grow and survive in this ever-changing environment, workers must possess the capability of adapting their practices to keep up with the changes. The skills necessary to adapt and succeed in business are very different than they once were, and companies are realizing the importance of the soft skills for successful employees (Murphy, 2006). Soft skills are defined as character traits and interpersonal skills that characterize a person's relationships with other people (Doyle, 2018). In the workplace, soft skills are considered a complement to hard skills, which refer to a person's knowledge and technical skills. Sutton (2002) discovered that in all types of industries, soft skills are the most important qualities that differentiate one job applicant from another with the same technical skills.

Employers rank soft skills as the most important factor in success at entry-level positions (Wilhelm, 2004). In a three-year study involving over 5,000 hiring managers from 312 organizations, Murphy (2006) found that 46% of new hires fail within 18 months. Technical skills, however, were not the primary reason for failure. Rather, poor soft skills were indicated as a primary cause of failure. More specifically, 26% of those who failed lacked the soft skill called coachability (the ability to accept and implement feedback), and 23% failed because they had low emotional intelligence, a soft skill involving the ability to understand and manage emotions in oneself and in others. Therefore, nearly 50% of new hires that fail within 18 months do not possess the soft skills necessary to thrive. Murphy (2006) called for managers to assess

coachability and emotional intelligence in job applicants because these attributes have the capability to greatly reduce hiring failures.

In order to fully understand the impact that coachability and emotional intelligence have on individual success, studies must evaluate how they are linked to variables which lead to job success. One positive work outcome that research has shown leads to worker success is organizational citizenship behavior (Carmeli, 2003; Mathieu & Zajac, 1990; Organ & Konovsky, 1989; Podsakoff & MacKenzie, 1994; Shore & Martin, 1989; Thompson, Andreassi, & Prottas, 2005; Walz & Niehoff, 1996). Consequently, a need exists to more closely determine whether the specific soft skills of coachability and emotional intelligence promote this positive work outcome. If so, the results would provide evidence of the need to emphasize specific soft skills training as a foundation to a more prepared workforce. Thus, the purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between emotional intelligence, coachability, and organizational citizenship behavior. Specifically, can emotional intelligence and coachability increase organizational citizenship behaviors?

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES

Organizational Citizenship Behaviors

Katz (1964) identified three behaviors that were essential to the overall success of an organization. These three behaviors were (a) people must be motivated to stay with the organization; (b) employees must understand and fulfill the requirements of their positions based on the job description; and (c) employees must be willing to do more than is required of them. Organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) research began with the third behavior described by Katz. Specifically, OCB is defined as a behavior that benefits the organization as a whole, but is not formally recognized by a reward system. According to Borman (2004), OCB includes an employee volunteering their time, cooperating with colleagues, and sharing ideas. These behaviors are not required of the job, but are performed by the employee in order to enhance the environment in the organization and contribute indirectly to the effectiveness of the organization (Organ, 1997).

Significant research has demonstrated the positive relationship that OCB has with positive outcomes such as job performance (Ozer, 2011; Nielsen, 2012), and may represent one useful indicator of the effectiveness of an organization (Podsakoff & MacKenzie, 1994, 1997; MacKenzie, Podsakoff, & Ahearne, 1998; Walz & Niehoff, 1996). According to Organ, Podsakoff and Mackenzie (2006), OCB facilitates organizational effectiveness, efficiency, and success because it frees up scarce resources, allows managers to devote more time to productive activities, and improves employee productivity.

Emotional Intelligence and OCB

There are multiple definitions of emotional intelligence (Bar-On, 1997; Goleman, 1995; Mayer & Salovey, 1990). The emotional intelligence (EI) model developed by Daniel Goleman (1998) has become prominent. Goleman defined EI as the capacity to recognize one's own feelings and those of others, to motivate one's self, and to manage emotions in one's self and in relationships. Goleman's EI model has five dimensions: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills.

Past research indicates a positive relationship between emotional intelligence and OCB (Abraham, 1999; Cote & Miners, 2006; Jain, 2012; Singh, 2006; Yaghoubi, Mashinchi, & Hadi, 2011). An explanation for the positive relationship may be that the dimensions encompassed by EI may enable people with higher levels of EI to better understand their own feelings and emotions as well as those of others (Cadman & Brewer, 2001). If someone knows their internal states of emotion, it allows for self-control. This self-control or self-managing of emotions can help those with higher EI create a positive working environment and to have better relationships with their colleagues. It may also help keep people from feeling anger and anxiety, and, in turn, allow them to become active in work and life (Abraham, 1999; Alfonso, Zenasni, Hodzic, & Ripoll, 2016; Goleman, 1995). Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: There will be a positive relationship between emotional intelligence and organizational citizenship behavior.

Coachability and OCB

Coachability is defined as the ability of a person to receive and use constructive criticism and feedback to improve their workplace performance (Shannahan, Bush, & Shannahan, 2013). Coachable employees are characterized as being eager to learn, they listen to new ideas, thoughts, feedback or perspectives, and they look reflectively at their work, behaviors, and attitudes and question if they are affecting those around them.

Although there are similarities between athletics and business, coachability has not been thoroughly explored in either arena (Giacobbi, 2000). In business research, Shannahan et al (2013) examined the relationship between a salesperson's coachability and sales performance. The results suggested that when salespeople are highly coachable, highly competitive, and under transformational leadership, their sales performance is the highest. Ciuchta et al. (2017) found that entrepreneurial coachability functions as a viable signal in pitches and suggest that coachability offers great potential for future research and practical significance. Given the coachability link to higher performance, positive outcomes such as higher OCB are likely. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: There will be a positive relationship between Coachability and OCB.

METHODS

Sample

The present study sampled individuals enrolled in a Texas Public University M.B.A. Program over one semester. Of the 124 subjects that received questionnaires, 106 completed and returned usable surveys to the researcher, resulting in a response rate of over 85%. The surveys were voluntarily completed, and participants were assured of confidentiality. The demographic data for the sample of 106 M.B.A. students revealed that there were 49.5% male and 50.5% female participants with the majority (74.6%) being under the age of 34 years old. Sixty percent were white and about 21% were Asian/Pacific Islander. About 77% were currently employed, and almost 80% had been working for 4 years or less at their current organization.

Measures

Quantitative data was gathered by using a four section questionnaire: Section I consisted of demographic information; Section II consisted of the Athletic Coachability Scale; Section III consisted of the Assessing Emotions Scale; Section IV consisted of the Organizational Citizenship Behavior Scale.

Coachability

The Athletic Coachability Scale (Giacobbi, 2000) was used to measure coachability. This scale includes the components of intensity of effort, reactions to coach feedback, openness to learning, trust/respect for the coach, working with teammates, and coping with criticism. The 24-item scale is a self-report instrument which utilizes a seven-point scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The total coachability score is calculated by adding all 24-items on the scale. For this study, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the ACS was .883, which exceeded the minimum levels acceptable by social science research standards (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Emotional Intelligence

The Assessing Emotions Scale is a 33-item self-report instrument in which respondents rate themselves using a five-point scale (Schutte, Malouff, & Bhullar, 2009). The scale has 3 items that are reverse coded, and the total score is then calculated by summing all items on the scale. Respondent scores will range from 33 to 165 with higher scores indicating more characteristics of emotional intelligence. For this study, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the Assessing Emotions Scale was .868, which exceeded the minimum levels acceptable by social science research standards (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB)

Podsakoff, Mackenzie, Moorman, & Fetter, 1990 developed the Organizational Citizenship Behaviour Scale to measure OCB. This instrument is the most widely utilized organizational citizenship behavior scale in organizational related studies (Gonzalez & Garazo, 2006; LePine, Erez, & Johnson, 2002). The 24 item scale has 5 items that are negatively coded to reduce bias, and scores are summed to give a total organizational citizenship behavior score. High scores signify high levels of organizational citizenship behavior and low scores signify low levels of organizational citizenship behavior. For this study, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the Organizational Citizenship Behaviour Scale was .83, which exceeded the minimum levels acceptable by social science research standards (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Procedures

The researchers traveled to the M.B.A. classrooms and conducted paper-based questionnaires. Face-to-face data collection was chosen to ensure a larger response rate. The students were given time at the beginning of class to complete the survey and return it to the researcher. The researcher was careful that the respondents were aware of the confidentiality of the survey and assured them that there were no right or wrong responses. Podsakoff, Mackenzie,

Lee, and Podsakoff (2003) believe that this exercise will reduce participant's evaluation anxiety and make them less likely to edit their responses to be more socially desirable.

Data Analysis

Pearson's r correlation coefficient was used to show possible linear relationships between the independent variables, coachability and emotional intelligence, with the dependent variable, organizational citizenship behavior. Simple linear regression was used to show if the independent variables predicted the dependent variable by examining R^2 (Creswell, 2012).

Results

Descriptive statistics and correlations among study variables are shown in Table 1 (Appendix) with the reliability coefficients listed on the diagonal of the matrix. A review of the reliabilities of the measures used indicates that all were well within the acceptable range according to a criterion of .70 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Nunnally, 1978).

Hypothesis 1 predicted that there would be a positive relationship between emotional intelligence and organizational citizenship behavior. The data in Table 1 (Appendix) indicates that there was a positive, statistically significant correlation between emotional intelligence and organizational citizenship behavior, $r=0.575$, $p<0.001$. Additionally, as shown in Table 2 (Appendix), the linear regression established that emotional intelligence could statistically predict organizational citizenship behavior, $F(1, 93) = 46.05$, $p < .001$, with an R^2 of .331. Emotional intelligence accounted for 33% (.575) of the explained variability in organizational citizenship behavior. These results provide support for Hypothesis 1.

Hypothesis 2 predicted that there would be a positive relationship between coachability and organizational citizenship behavior. The data in Table 1 (Appendix), indicates a positive, statistically significant correlation between coachability and organizational citizenship behavior, $r=0.577$, $p<0.001$. Further, as shown in Table 3 (Appendix), the linear regression established that coachability could statistically predict organizational citizenship behavior, $F(1, 94) = 46.80$, $p < .001$, with an R^2 of .332. Coachability accounted for 33% (.577) of the explained variability in organizational citizenship behavior. These results provide support for Hypothesis 2.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between emotional intelligence and OCB and coachability and OCB. The expected positive linkage between the soft skills of coachability and OCB and EI and OCB was supported. The results of this study suggest several implications for practice. The implications include soft skill assessment, providing soft skills development in higher education, and providing soft skill training to current employees.

Murphy (2006) called for the assessment of soft skills to reduce new hire failures. This research suggests that identifying potential employees who are stronger in the areas of coachability and emotional intelligence prior to hiring could increase positive work outcomes that may lead to organizational success. The current coachability assessment was focused on athletic coachability. There needs to be a valid and reliable coachability tool developed for business.

It appears desirable for new hires to develop good soft skills in order to have an increased

chance of success in the work place. Institutions of higher education may want to increase their focus of soft skill development in their coursework. Evenson (1999) suggested that students may be ill equipped to enter the workforce if educators do not begin teaching basic soft skills and human interaction skills. Offering courses in soft skill training before students enter the workforce can equip them with the skills they need to be successful new hires. According to Krishnaveni and Deepa (2011), companies are beginning to realize the importance of the soft skills necessary to grow their employees. The professional success of an employee results from an integration of his or her cognitive and emotional intelligences. Technical skills and more importantly, soft skills, are of the utmost importance when developing a successful employee.

De Meuse, Dai, and Lee (2009) found that coachability is a factor that can greatly influence the effectiveness of executive coaching. Executive coaching is used in organizations to retain and develop employees (Sketch, Johnson, & Casella, 2001). Before an individual can successfully be coached, one must assess their readiness to be coached. If an employee is not ready to be coached, there must be programs in place to develop the soft skills needed to benefit from executive coaching. Also, because of the importance of emotional competencies on employee performance success, organizations are beginning to initiate emotional intelligence development programs. Emotional intelligence and coachability training may be a more appropriate development program for current employees.

LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The research clearly states that both emotional intelligence and coachability are potential factors of employee success (Goleman, 1995 & 1998; Murphy, 2006; Shannahan et al., 2013;). By examining the relationship between coachability and OCB and emotional intelligence and OCB, this study has opened up for future researchers more clarity on what may contribute to positive work outcomes.

This study utilized one M.B.A. program ($N=106$) at a Texas Public University. If this study were replicated, it is recommended that future studies use students from other programs across the University and at a variety of higher education institutions. It is also recommended that future studies evaluate a sample of current employees of varying age brackets, tenure, and educational backgrounds.

The study utilized the Athletic Coachability Scale that was originally developed for the purpose of assessing athlete coachability. Although there are many similarities between the sports and business environments (Gallwey, 2000; Jones, 2002), future research is needed in the development of the coachability construct and scale in the business environment.

This study only evaluated one positive work outcomes, organizational citizenship behaviors, that research has shown leads to organizational success (MacKenzie, Podsakoff, & Ahearne, 1998; Mathieu & Zajac, 1990; Podsakoff & MacKenzie, 1994; Podsakoff & Mackenzie, 1997; Rathi & Rastogi, 2009; Walz & Niehoff, 1996). If this study were replicated with coachability and emotional intelligence as the independent variables, consideration should be given to other positive work outcomes that lead to organizational success. By evaluating other dependent variables, future research may result in lower employee turnover and ultimately affect long-term expenditures and savings associated with hiring and retaining lasting employees.

CONCLUSION

Multiple studies show the importance of soft skill development in new hires. Limited research, however, exists to pinpoint the specific soft skills which lead to positive work outcomes and organizational success. With organizations having to do more with less, human resources departments are motivated to determine what contributes to a successful new hire.

This study sought to identify the relationship of two soft skills, coachability and EI, with OCB. The results indicate positive relationships which suggests it may be desirable for higher education institutions to help students develop these soft skills, and organizations should consider incorporating soft skills assessment as part of their hiring strategy. This study added to the very limited body of existing research for employee coachability and advanced the research on emotional intelligence and its effects on positive work outcomes.

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APPENDIX

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Variables	Mean	s.d.	1	2	3	4
1. Coachability	5.33	.763	1.000	(.88)		
2. Emotional Intelligence	5.63	.553	.515**	1.000	(.87)	
3. OCB	5.71	.582	.577**	.575**	1.000	(.83)

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

Table 2
Results of ANOVA: Emotional Intelligence and Organizational Citizenship Behaviors

ANOVA							
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig	R	R ²
Regression	10.697	1	10.697	46.045	.000	.575	.331
Residual	21.605	93	.232				
Total	32.302	94					

Dependent Variable: Organizational Citizenship Behaviors

Predictor: (Constant), Emotional Intelligence

Table 3
Results of ANOVA: Coachability and Organizational Citizenship Behaviors

ANOVA							
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig	R	R ²
Regression	10.580	1	10.58	46.797	.000	.577	.332
Residual	21.252	94	2.26				
Total	31.832	95					

Dependent Variable: Organizational Citizenship Behaviors

Predictor: (Constant), Coachability

J B
S B