Emotional Intelligence and Demographic Characteristics of Service Sector Employees

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Abstract
Emotional intelligence is considered as an important element as it has an impact on one's behaviour and interaction with people around them. It is the ability to identify, use, understand, and manage emotions in a positive way to reduce stress, communicate effectively, have empathy for others, overcome challenges, and reduce conflict. People with high emotional intelligence not only recognise their own emotional state, but also the emotional states of others, hence they are able to engage efficiently and effectively. Emotional intelligence is measured by personal and social competence. Personal competence includes self-awareness, self-motivation, and self-regulation. On the other hand, social competence includes social awareness and social skills. This research was undertaken to identify whether demographic characteristics of employees from the service industry portray differences in their emotional intelligence levels. Data was collected online via social media platforms. A total of 536 respondents were obtained from the private and public service industries. It was found that there were no differences between gender but low to moderate differences were identified in terms of age, education levels, and job sectors.

Introduction
Emotional intelligence is the ability to identify, use, understand, and manage emotions in a positive way to relieve stress, communicate effectively, provide empathy to others, overcome challenges, and defuse conflict. It impacts many different aspects of daily life, such as the way people behave and the way they interact with others. A person with high emotional intelligence can recognise one's own emotional state and the emotional states of others and engage in an efficient and effective manner. Early focus on emotional intelligence showed how it can help relate better with others, form healthier relationships, achieve greater success at work, leading to a more fulfilling life (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). To manage one's own and others' feelings will help manage behaviours and relationships, in addition to predicting success in many sectors (Brackett et al., 2011). Emotional intelligence is developed from understanding one's own emotions and abilities (personal competence) and understanding the emotions and abilities of people around them, for example at the workplace (social

competence). Hence, the 2 main dimensions of emotional intelligence are personal competence and social competence.

This study was undertaken to test for differences in the levels of the various dimensions of emotional intelligence based on gender, age, education levels, and job sector. The objective is to determine whether differences in levels of emotional intelligence exist, and if yes, how can they be explained. The study also hopes to recommend how levels of emotional intelligence can be improved. Recommendations to increase emotional intelligence can only be done after determining where the differences lie. Higher levels of emotional intelligence would help individuals cope better with stress and changes at the workplace due to the global pandemic and the future of workplaces. On another note, understanding demographic differences in emotional intelligence levels also helps employers and workplace management teams to focus emotional intelligence training for groups that need it. A research like this would also help Human Resource Departments to make needful decisions to enhance emotional intelligence levels at the workplace.

Literature Review
Many reasons explain the fast and wide diffusion of the term emotional intelligence in professional fields. One main reason is because professionals believe in the importance and relevance of emotions and feelings for work outcomes. Goleman (1998) asserts that emotional intelligence is twice as important as technical skills and more important than Intelligence Quotient in predicting positive outcomes at the workplace.

Emotional intelligence helps to increase productivity and efficiency, to improve workers' wellbeing, job motivation, and job satisfaction. This study is timely as workers have experienced and are experiencing various changes at work, involving an increase or a reduction of working hours, alterations in job tasks and shifts, and a transition toward smart working and adaptability. Changes were also forced onto workplaces to a certain extent due to the global pandemic. In other words, many working sectors had reorganized their environments and structures to accommodate the emerging demands. These factors undoubtedly influence how people feel in their workplaces and affect their level of emotions and in the long run, their mental wellness.

Goleman's model of Emotional intelligence is a model of competencies focused on the workplace (Boyatzis et al., 2000; Goleman, 2001) and was created and adapted to predict the effectiveness and personal outcomes in the workplace and in organizational fields (Goleman, 1998). In this paper, emotional intelligence is measured by various dimensions of the personal and social competence, giving due importance to one's ability to manage one's emotions and to deal with emotions in the wider social and work circles. In fact, Goleman had suggested that Emotional intelligence is indispensable for the success of one's life.

Personal competence refers to an individual's ability to believe in themselves, their capabilities, values, standards, and helps to determine what is best for themselves and their co-workers. Personal competence is made up of three individual facets, namely, self-awareness, self-regulation, and self-motivation. Self-Awareness can be likened to an introspective and personal analysis of one's strength, weakness, opportunity, and threat (SWOT). It is based on a person's ability to assess the self accurately, genuinely, and honestly.

Self-Regulation is the ability to practise self-control, to think before reacting in words or actions and Self-Motivation is the passion and the internal drive that propels individuals. The dimensions for each competence are further elaborated under the Methods and Measurement Section.

Social competence on the other hand mainly focuses on social awareness and social skills (Osland et al., 2006). Social awareness includes the ability to build relationships with people based on emotional attributes while social skills evaluate the individual's ability to socialize with others and place higher emphasis on the group before self. The importance of social competence in the work environment is crucial because in many organizations, teamwork is an integral part of the infrastructure. In the service sector, social competence is especially important due to the nature of the jobs emphasizing customers and personal attention.

The need for a degree of emotional intelligence on the part of the employees in the services sector cannot be overemphasised. This sector needs employees with high emotional intelligence as this sector is often fraught with interpersonal friction and conflict. In service sector jobs, having higher emotional intelligence affect task performance when dealing with customers. The situation gets accentuated during the times of crisis as there is higher tension and stress (Sinha, 2016). Currently all industries are facing tremendous challenges and changes due to the Covid-19 pandemic and technology adaptations.

Of late, emotional intelligence has gained prominence as its enhancement can lead to better mental health. Mental health and wellness have been brought to the forefront of important research especially since late 2019 because of the effects of the global pandemic. Psychologists and mental health professionals predict the pandemic would impact the mental health of the global population with increasing cases of depression, suicide, and self-harm (Li et al., 2020; Moukaddam & Shah, 2020; Yao et al., 2020).

Emotional intelligence is important for individuals' wellbeing and for the success of organizations too. However, people have different levels of emotional intelligence. This study hopes to determine the differences in levels of emotional intelligence based on demographic characteristics. Organizations would be able to then tailor programs to enhance emotional intelligence to the right groups of employees. Organizations would also be able to ascertain the existing levels of emotional intelligence based on the employee profile.

Not much research in the past had focussed on demographic characteristics and emotional intelligence. The findings from existing research show inconsistent results. Research conducted on emotional intelligence with different groups of people focusses mainly on behaviour. For example, a study on adolescents show that non-aggressive respondents show higher levels of stress management (emotional intelligence), positive adolescent development, and family functioning (Perez-Fuentes et al., 2019). Additionally, a study on emotional intelligence and work values based on personal characteristics was conducted among teachers (Dios, 2020). It was found that there were no significant findings for both emotional intelligence and work values in terms of sex, civil status, educational attainment, and length of service. Only age was significantly related to emotional intelligence. Cabello et al (2016) on the other hand, found that not only age but also gender had an impact on emotional intelligence scores. Females scored higher whereas younger and older adults

scored lower than middle aged adults in most dimensions of emotional intelligence. In terms of age, normally older people report higher levels of emotional intelligence which can be related to higher levels of life experiences (Fariselli et al., 2006). Higher emotional intelligence has been reported among women due to biological and social factors. The biological factors include the larger size of the brain area which processes emotions in women. Social factors include women being taught and encouraged to be more empathetic compared to men, in addition to the influences and nurturing roles of a woman (Gur et al., 2002; Lopes et al., 2003). Higher education levels have significant correlation with higher levels of emotional intelligence (Nikolaou et al., 2002). Shukla & Srivastava (2016) found gender, age, working experience, income levels and even marital status as having an impact on emotional intelligence. Similar findings were reported in a study on health professionals in Australia where age, levels of current employment, gender, and levels of education predicted differences in emotional intelligence levels (Stami et al., 2018). However, Osman (2020) found only gender as showing differences in emotional intelligence unlike those discovered in previous research. As there were inconsistent findings regarding demographic characteristics and emotional intelligence, this study was proposed to add to the existing body of knowledge in this area.

Method and Measurement
The process of data collection for this study was carried out online. The survey link was shared on various social media platforms, such as Facebook and LinkedIn. The introduction to the questionnaire mentions the researchers' institutional identity, a short explanation about the aim of the study, and an invitation to participate in it. Individuals were informed that participation is voluntary, and that all information obtained would remain confidential. Informed consent was obtained from all the participants prior to answering the survey. The time frame for the collection of relevant data span 3 months ending in December 2020. The questionnaire was only made available online after obtaining the written approval from the UiTM Ethics Committee.

The questionnaire opens with the profile of the respondents, namely gender, age group, education level, place of residence, marital status, and sector of work. In this section, the items were measured on a nominal/ordinal scale. The remaining items of the questionnaire was based on the Self-Assessment Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire.

The *Self-Assessment Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire* was adapted by the Consortium for Research on emotional intelligence based on Goleman's Emotional Intelligence Framework (Goleman, 1998). It consists of 43 items in total on personal competence. They include self-awareness (11 items measuring emotional awareness, accurate self-assessment, self-confidence), self-regulation (17 items measures self-control, trustworthiness, conscientiousness, adaptability, innovativeness) and self-motivation (15 items measures achievement drive, commitment, initiative, optimism). Self-awareness, self-regulation, and self-motivation are the dimensions of personal competence. Fifty (50) items measure social awareness (18 items measure empathy, service orientation, developing others, leveraging diversity, political awareness) and social skills (32 items measure influence, communication, leadership, change catalyst, conflict management, building bonds, collaboration and cooperation, team capabilities). Social awareness and social skills are dimensions of social competence.

A few examples of the items included for the various dimensions are listed here: self-awareness (e.g., I am aware of my strengths and weaknesses), self-regulation (e.g., I think clearly and stay focused under pressure), self-motivation (e.g., I continuously learn in order to improve my performance), social awareness (e.g., I acknowledge and reward people's strengths, accomplishments, and development) and social skills (e.g., I acknowledge the need for change and challenge the status quo). Items were scored by using a response scale ranging from 1 (underdeveloped) to 5 (excellent). As mentioned earlier, this is a self-assessment questionnaire.

Table 1 displays the number and type of questions for each dimension.

Table 1
Questionnaire Design

Sections	Variables	Dimensions	No of Questions	Scale Used
A	Respondents' Background Information	Gender	6	Nominal/Ordinal
		Age		
		Education		
		Work Sector		
		Marital Status		
		Place of Residence		
B	Emotional intelligence		93	Interval Scale (1= Underdeveloped; 5= Excellent)
	(i) Personal Competence	a)Self Awareness	11	
		b)Self-Regulation	17	
		c)Self- Motivation	15	
	ii) Social Competence	a)Social Awareness	18	
		b) Social Skills	32	

Results and Findings

The profile of the respondents was first computed, followed by the emotional intelligence scores for the various dimensions. T-test was then carried out to investigate whether differences were significant in terms of gender, age groups, work sector, and education levels. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) 24 was employed to compute the statistical analysis of the collected data.

The age of the respondents was recategorized into 2 main age groups: below 40 (youths) and above 40. In terms of gender, the two groups were male and female. Work sector was categorized into private and public, whereas education levels were also recategorized into 2 groups: secondary/diploma in one category and degree/postgraduate in the second category. A total of 536 responses were obtained. Table 2 presents the profile of the respondents. Seventy percent (70%) of the respondents were made up of females. Respondents from the private sector service industries formed 68.5%, while the remaining were from the public service sector. In terms of age, more than 60% were aged 40 and below. More than 70% of the respondents stay in urban areas. In terms of marital status, both categories of single and married (currently or previously) were about equal percentages (51.3% and 48.7% respectively).

Table 2
Demographic characteristics of respondents (n=536)

	Labels	**Frequency**	**Percentage (%)**
Gender	Male	161	30
	Female	375	70
Work Sector	Public	169	31.5
	Private	367	68.5
Age	20-40 years	323	60.3
	41 and above	213	39.7
Place of Residence	Urban	401	74.8
	Rural	135	25.2
Marital Status	Single	275	51.3
	Married current/ before	261	48.7
Education Level	Secondary/ Diploma	305	56.9
	Degree/ Postgrad	231	43.1

Table 3 describes the mean and standard deviation of the components of emotional intelligence, namely self-awareness, self-regulation, self-motivation, social awareness, and social skills.

Table 3
Descriptive Statistics

Variables	**Mean**	**SD**
Self-awareness	3.76	.688
Self-regulation	3.77	.637
Self-motivation	3.78	.603
Social awareness	3.80	.612
Social skills	3.77	.572

The mean was above 3.5 for all the variables, the lowest being 3.76 (self-awareness) and highest 3.80 (social awareness). Similarly for the standard deviation, the lowest was .572 (social skills) and highest .688 (self-awareness).

T-test for independent samples was then conducted to test the differences in the emotional intelligence components with regards to all the demographic characteristics, namely gender, work sector, age, place of residence, marital status, and education levels.

However, it was found that in terms of gender, place of residence and marriage status, there were no differences in self-awareness, self-regulation, self-motivation, social awareness, and social skills between the categories. In terms of work sector, there were differences for all the variables, except social awareness between the public (N=169) and the private sector (N=367) employees. This is displayed in Table 4. In general, the public-sector employees showed higher levels of the emotional intelligence components.

Table 4
Differences between the public and the private sector employees

Variables	Sector	Freq	Mean	SD	t-value
Self-awareness	Public	169	3.86	.62	.021*
	Private	367	3.72	.71	
Self-regulation	Public	169	3.87	.64	.013*
	Private	367	3.72	.63	
Self-motivation	Public	169	3.87	.59	.011*
	Private	367	3.73	.61	
Social awareness	Public	169	3.86	.61	.099
	Private	367	3.77	.61	
Social skills	Public	169	3.87	.59	.006**
	Private	367	3.72	.56	

**p<.01; *p<.05

There was a significant difference in the scores for the public (M=3.86, SD=.62) and the private sector employees (M=3.72, SD=.71); t (534) = 2.31, p<.021 for self-awareness. Similarly, all the other components showed a significant difference, except social awareness. However, it is equally important to test and determine if the statistical differences found is truly sufficient and not by chance. Hence, the effect size was calculated using eta squared. It was found that all the differences produced a small effect size.

Based on the age groups, significant difference was found in the scores for those aged between 20-40 years old (N=323) and those 41 and above (N=213) for all the variables. Overall, the respondents from the older age group showed higher levels for all the emotional intelligence components.

Table 5
Differences between the ages 20-40 and 41 and above

Variables	Age Groups	Freq	Mean	SD	t-value
Self-awareness	20-40	323	3.65	.67	.000**
	41 and above	213	3.94	.67	
Self-regulation	20-40	323	3.67	.63	.000**
	41 and above	213	3.91	.63	
Self-motivation	20-40	323	3.71	.57	.000**
	41 and above	213	3.88	.63	
Social awareness	20-40	323	3.74	.57	.010*
	41 and above	213	3.89	.66	
Social skills	20-40	323	3.70	.55	.000**
	41 and above	213	3.87	.59	

**p<.01; *p<.05
The effect size was calculated, and it showed a moderate effect.
Further, the differences between the various education levels were tested. The respondents were divided into two groups: the first group comprise respondents with secondary and diploma level education and the second, made up of graduates and post-graduates.

Table 6
Differences between education levels

Variables	Education	Freq	Mean	SD	t-value
Self-awareness	Secondary/ Diploma	305	3.61	.70	.000**
	Degree/ Postgrad	231	3.97	.62	
Self-regulation	Secondary/ Diploma	305	3.64	.64	.000**
	Degree/ Postgrad	231	3.94	.60	
Self-motivation	Secondary/ Diploma	305	3.69	.61	.000**
	Degree/ Postgrad	231	3.89	.57	
Social awareness	Secondary/ Diploma	305	3.72	.62	.001**
	Degree/ Postgrad	231	3.90	.59	
Social skills	Secondary/ Diploma	305	3.68	.56	.000**
	Degree/ Postgrad	231	3.89	.56	

**p<.01; *p<.05
The results indicate significant differences between the two groups, with the graduates and postgraduates displaying higher levels in all emotional intelligence components in general. The effect size showed a moderate effect.

Major Findings
The findings from the study show that in terms of emotional intelligence, there are no differences between gender, marital status, and place of residence for the service sector employees. However, differences with the small effect are seen between the public and the private service sector employees. In terms of age and education, moderate effect differences are found. Older and degree/postgraduate holders in the public sector employees display higher levels of emotional intelligence.

These findings have similarities and differences with the study conducted by (Gautam and Khurana, 2018). Their study was conducted among the middle level managers and differences were found in the emotional intelligence levels based on gender, age and working experience. No differences were found in terms of education. However, as their study was conducted only among the middle managers, all respondents were either graduates or postgraduates.

In another study on the Indian service sector employees (Pooja & Kumar, 2016), significant differences were found in the emotional intelligence of the males and the females, where the females showed much higher levels. In terms of age, the older employees portrayed higher levels of the emotional intelligence. The non-technical graduates and the postgraduates showed higher levels of the emotional intelligence and interestingly those with 16-20 years of service showed the highest levels of emotional intelligence, but the levels dropped subsequently after 20 years of service. Perhaps the interaction and the connectivity with team members and other employees declined after many years of service or there is a lesser need to work with others as one goes up the organizational hierarchy with more experience.

This current study shows that public sector employees portray a higher level of the emotional intelligence. The public sector employees (civil servants) are expected to possess higher levels of the emotional intelligence as they must maintain the healthy relationship with the public (Lee, 2018). The private sector service industries could also strive to enhance the emotional intelligence of their employees to compete with the privatized public sector companies. Stiffer competition is to be expected between the public and the private sector service industries, once more public sector companies privatize. Hence, the private sector service organizations need to start planning activities to strengthen the emotional intelligence levels of their employees.

Emotional intelligence can then be developed, cultivated, and practised by anyone if they are given the opportunity to work with others and not in isolation. The older adults, thus, may gradually improve their understandings of emotions of themselves, and of the others based on their lifelong learning (Baltes et al., 1999) and use better emotional regulation strategies than the younger adults (Gross & John, 2003). Hence, the older adults would show higher levels of the emotional intelligence. Since the Baby Boomers generation would mostly be exiting the workplaces due to retirement, the younger employees must be given more training to enhance the emotional intelligence. Otherwise, the workplaces would lose out on the competitive advantages as there would be a higher number of the dissatisfied and unhappy employees.

Respondents with degrees or postgraduate qualifications displayed higher levels of the emotional intelligence. This could be related to their lifelong learning and greater exposure. Workplaces can aim to hire graduates or postgraduates to enhance the emotional intelligence quotient at the workplace. Those with lower qualifications can be sent for training and development to help instil or develop higher levels of emotional intelligence.

In conclusion, harnessing the emotional intelligence can significantly contribute to successful workplaces. Improving emotional intelligence in the workplace can inspire the employees and promote a positive work environment for everyone.

The emotional intelligence can be considered a competency which guarantees outstanding performance as it embodies the ability in perceiving, understanding, and using the emotional information (Boyatzis, 2009). Goleman (2004) further described the emotional intelligence as the ability-based competency which can be learnt and leads to high workplace performance. In fact, the researchers have found that the emotional intelligence is equal to or sometimes more important than the IQ, as being aware of one's own and others' feelings can help people to manage the behaviour and the relationships that lead to success (Coetzer, 2016; Mestre et al., 2016; Rezvani et al., 2016).

On the other hand, Kren and Sellei (2021) found that the emotional intelligence as a whole concept is not able to predict organizational performance, but components of the emotional intelligence namely self-awareness, self-management and awareness of others seemed to be related to performance. Among these components, self-awareness is found to predict performance. Hence, developing the emotional intelligence can definitely help to achieve the organizational goals and increase workplace performance.

Novelty of Research
This research has addressed the gaps in the research by looking at six socio-demographic characteristics, namely gender, age, work sector, education, place of residence and marital status in relation to the emotional intelligence levels. Although no differences in the emotional intelligence levels were found between the categories of gender, place of residence and marital status, this study is much more comprehensive one compared to the other research on the demography characteristics and the emotional intelligence.

In addition, this study had further looked at the statistical differences to determine the effect of the differences that were significant. This too enhances the findings of this study. In addition, this study focused on the employees of the service industry in both the private and the public sectors.

The Institute for Health and Human Potential (IHHP) in their 2019 report states that emotional intelligence is an essential skill in the economy. In fact, the World Economic Forum has included emotional intelligence as one of the top 10 skills needed for success in the 2020s. Emotional intelligence is listed alongside skills like complex problem-solving, critical thinking, and creativity. While the basic cognitive, physical, and manual skills are lesser needed across industries, the need for emotional, social and technical skills are on the rise.

Recommendations
The Malaysian Productivity Report issued by the Malaysian Productivity Corporation in 2019 highlighted a growth of 2.2% in labour productivity, much lower than the productivity levels in Indonesia (3.8%) and Thailand (4.5%). This shows a lag in the overall performance among Malaysians where the emotional intelligence could have had a positive and significant effect on organizational performance. As the public sector stimulates the growth and the performance of the private sector, it is pertinent that emphasis be given to developing the emotional intelligence at the workplace.

In addition, teams involved in the succession planning in organizations need to put in place emotional intelligence as an important trait for leaders in the organization. If the Baby Boomers who have shown higher emotional intelligence level traits (as in the current study) are leaving the organization, the younger generation must be trained and exposed to these traits of the emotional intelligence. The training and the development must emphasize the emotional intelligence as an aspect to be prioritized. Emotional intelligence can be learnt, enhanced, and developed. To create a culture of high emotional intelligence, managers and supervisors must model emotionally intelligent behaviour. The organization can set norms on how the people communicate and how they disagree, as part of the norms of the organization. As emotional intelligence can be learnt and mastered, the employees must be given access to the assessments, training, coaching and tools to master the skills through the building of a daily practise.

In the future research perhaps an investigation into the need for specific skills in the industry to determine the type of skills needed by the future workforce especially with the rise of Artificial Intelligence and robotic technology can be carried out. The future age of work will require emotionally intelligent workers to deal with technostress and other related stress.

The future research on emotional intelligence in Malaysia can be expanded to include the employees of the different sectors such as manufacturing. The self-administered questionnaires might yield different results as the current study was conducted online. There could also be varied results during this endemic period as many organizations underwent massive structural and process changes. During the Covid-19 pandemic, employees in general have had to face changes at the workplace, at the home and changes in relationships which would have some impact on studies in the area of emotional intelligence in the future. What is clear however is that emotional intelligence is a given for the future workforce and for the organizations to remain relevant and competitive.

Acknowledgement

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