A Comparative Review of Team Emotional Intelligence Measures for IT Teams

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ABSTRACT

In today’s complex information technology (IT) systems, team task work is highly interdependent, dynamic, and multifaceted. Firms seek ways to make their IT teams work better. Team emotional intelligence (TEI) is an emergent collective skill that has been shown to benefit performance in teams; however, measures for TEI are relatively new, and research is scant for applying TEI measures to examine IT team behaviors. This research presents a comparative review of the TEI construct for use in research.

KEYWORDS

Collaborative Team Norms, Emotional Intelligence, Information Technology, IT Teams

INTRODUCTION

In today’s technology organizations, a team is an organizational unit most often utilized for IT (Information Technology) work. IT offers a wide range of knowledge-intensive platforms that enable organizations to integrate and coordinate their business processes. IT supports information systems that are central to an organization where information can be shared across all functional domains and the management hierarchy. The revolutionary growth of disruptive technologies, sharing of large amounts of data across diverse geographies, and increasing complexity in technology boost the need for greater collaboration and team interactions.

Companies consider IT as an enabler of business processes that helps to transform the landscape of task work within organizations (Bradley, Pratt, Byrd, & Simmons, 2011; Peppard, Ward, & Daniel, 2007). IT teams face numerous obstacles that adversely affect their performance. These obstacles often relate to knowledge or emotions. IT teams’ interactions can involve intense social interactions (Hoegl & Parboteeah, 2007; Nicholson & Sahay, 2004), which elicit many emotions (Reus & Liu, 2004), such as stress and anxiety (Wastell, 1999). It has been suggested more than over 60 percent of IT professionals suffer from anxiety or other emotional problems (Shinozaki et al., 2015).

Although industry-wide, general perceptions are that technology initiatives improve productivity and operational efficiencies. However, well over half of the technology initiatives in organizations fail to achieve their stated goals (e.g., Black, 2018; Galorath, 2012; Pratt, 2017). According to (Black, 2018, pg. 1), “human factors are becoming a major cause of IT Project failure”. Black suggests that the project team’s behavior influences IT Project failure more than perhaps project risks or external project constraints.

Development in organizational theory advances that events and emotions play important roles in influencing employees’ attitudes and behavior (Weiss, 2002; Brockner & Higgins, 2001, Curseu et al., 2015). The collective and individual productivity in organizations seem to depend on the effective and appropriate use of technology, however, absent from these formulations is the consideration of

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emotional responses to the process changes, attitudes, and behaviors. Moreover, organizations seek out ways to improve collaboration over and beyond the IT team’s specialized training and talent, and the company’s technology investments. The collective contributions (team work) of the individuals who perform the work are considered paramount for companies to reach their goals.

Typical tasks of IT teams include developing application software, managing network security, implementing new software applications, and undertaking a variety of other complex technology-supported initiatives. Early in the formation of the teams, cooperation may be dictated by the characteristics of the task work, but more often it is dictated by teams’ objectives and the means of accomplishing those objectives (Hackman, 1992). As teams begin to interact, their cooperative behaviors emerge as norms, which helps to govern the acceptable and unacceptable behavior interaction among team members. These norms are mutually agreed upon by the team members (Cialdini & Trost, 1998) and help guide the collaborative task work to exert a powerful form of social and emotional control that can influence the teams’ performance (e.g., Taggar & Ellis, 2007). In environments of task work interdependence, the absence of strong collaborative norms supporting task accomplishment can detract from the teams’ efficiency and productivity.

Team Emotional Intelligence (TEI) is a promising skill that enables the processing of emotions to guide an individual’s thinking and actions (Turner & Lloyd-Walker 2008; Ghuman 2011; Kaur, Shr, & Mital, 2016; Soltani, Matook, & Maruping, 2018). When individual team member’s emotions elevate and transform through interactions the TEI emerges (Kozlowski & Bell, 2003). Kozlowski & Bell (2003) make no distinction between ‘group’ and ‘team’ emotional intelligence as is interchangeably done within this research. The TEI elevates from a distinct social entity governed by shared attitudes, beliefs and norms (Adams & Anantatmula, 2010) gained from the teams’ interactions (Kim et al., 2011). Though the TEI construct has advanced in the literature, research in the IT literature is scant. Furthermore, “not much focus has been given to TEI as a group-level property and its impact on team productivity” (Kaur, Shr, & Mital 2016, p. 186).

Most Emotional Intelligence (EI) psychometric scales that are designed to measure TEI behavior ignore the role of context (e.g. Cherniss, 2010). This is problematic since, social psychologists have suggested that behavior can vary enormously depending on the situation and setting (Gergen, 1973; Allport, 1985; Cialdini, & Trost, 1998). Therefore, while it is rational to assume that TEI is influenced by context, few instruments have measured team-level EI within the context of IT teams.

In a review of TEI literature from the last five years, 117 peer-reviewed journal papers were found. Of the 117 papers, six focused specifically on the role of TEI in technology teams.

Table 1 below summarizes each paper and the contribution.

The purpose of this research is to inform IT researchers and practitioners about TEI assessments that can help explain IT team behaviors. Additionally, this research paper will fill a gap in the Information Technology team literature to serve as a resource for future research. The paper proceeds as follows: a literature review on IT and Teams, the importance of EI in the IT workplace, and an overview of EI and TEI. The next section compares the various psychometric measures that have been used to examine TEI and performance, and finally, conclusions, key observations, and implications for future research are offered.

LITERATURE REVIEW

IT and Teams

Kozlowski & Bell (2003) characterize teams as collectives who exist to perform tasks, share common goals, interact socially, exhibit task interdependencies, and manage boundaries within the organization. The effectiveness and efficiency of teamwork have not kept pace with the rapid changes in technology. The team interactions and tasks are more complex requiring greater collaboration, emotional communication, and labor in their dynamic environment. Although many team-related
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