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# Emotional Intelligence and Transactional Leadership performance Case study – KPMG Vietnam

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#### **ABSTRACT**

This study investigates the relationship between Emotional Intelligence (EI) and Transactional Leadership performance using KPMG Vietnam as a case study to evaluate the most suitable model for their organisational leadership and the extent EI could influence the success of transactional leadership within the company. Primary research in the forms of interviews for qualitative (main) and questionnaires for quantitative (ancillary) analysis coupled with secondary research (prior research) is used in this study. Thematic themes are extracted from the qualitative finding and supported by the quantitative survey results analysed with SPSS. Results reveal KPMG Vietnam uses a combined model between The Goleman model (1998) and The Bar – On model (1997).

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#### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

This study will investigate the relationship between Emotional Intelligence (EI) and Transactional Leadership performance using KPMG Vietnam as a case study. The reason is twofold; the first to add to limited empirical evidence in this emerging field and secondly to provide substantive recommendations to KPMG Vietnam on improvements. As KPMG Vietnam is using EI, no studies have been undertaken to investigate ways that are more effective. The study is hoping to find through management and staff evaluation which and where areas for improvement would be effective.

Triangulation is used in this study for reliability consisting of (1) prior research by literature review, (2) qualitative interviews with management and (3) qualitative survey with staff members as an ancillary to determine areas for improvement and alignment with prior research and quantitative results. Thematic themes were extracted from the qualitative finding and used for the survey framework

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Results affirm that EI and Transactional Leadership has a positive effect on employee's performance. The findings are in line with previous studies such as Vito, Higgins and Denney (2014); Rahim (2010); Akinboye, Akinboye and Adeyemo (2002); Nikolaou and Tsaousis (2002) and adds to the empirical EI field.

Recommendations from findings include considering having trained professionals directly evaluate KPMG Vietnam staff EI performances; it will be more possible to address any weaknesses that the self-report could not reveal which is the current limitation. Secondly, EI evaluation as part of the recruitment programmes that would facilitate integration into the KPMG mind-set for EI self-development.

This study will firstly discuss the prior research the first triangulation method followed by the methodology employed in this research leading to the results and discussion.

#### 2.0 PRIOR RESEARCH

Sechelariu (2012) indicates that Emotional Intelligence (EI) and leadership have a certain characteristic in common. While EI is seen as either a set of skills or ability to perceive and express emotion to stimulate thought and regulate emotion in one and others, leadership is an effort to influence, encourage and lead others to the success of organisations that they belong to (Golnaz, 2012). In determining leadership success, many proponents of EI claim that leadership development programmes could be enhanced remarkably though a deeper understanding of the concept of EI practises.

However, according to McCleskey (2014), during the last few decades, many studies have been conducted surrounding the topic of EI and as a result, numerous frameworks, models, constructs and measurements have been established to capture the definition of the intangible concept and test emotional competency. Various models and approaches created confusion for organisations to select an EI framework to apply on their leadership practise. The background of the topic below will narrow down the organisational concept of the case study and discuss relevant theories regarding the most well acknowledged definitions of EI and transactional leadership as well as how EI positively impacts on the course of leadership.

In humans, feelings play an essential role in our decisions. To many, emotions are a vague dimension that controls people more than they have the control over them (Mayer et al. 2008). The concerning question is how to professionally manage our emotions in a work place when one spends at least 7-8 hours a day in the workplace. Emotions lie in a full range of perceiving feelings from demotivation, devaluation, underestimation etc. (negative feelings) to a sense of job satisfaction, happiness at workplace and feeling graceful to employers etc. (positive feelings). Humans have emotions and they act as a guide for actions later result in job performances. Webster and Ma (2013) asserted in their study that a person's inner well-being and external performance usually mutually influence one another. The inner well-being mentioned here refers to a well-managed emotions and the stage of happiness that an individual gained. EI was concluded by Cartwright and Constantinos (2007) as an essential tool for increasing service performance and team effectiveness. Therefore, many leaders choose the EI approach as disciplines in management especially in tough working environments. Specifically, in order to achieve success in service industry, EI is a necessary set of skills to be trained for employees whose delivery and performance of services can be enhanced through well-managed emotions at work.

Dana and Newman (2010) contend there is no such thing as the perfect and well-accepted EI models. Bano Fakhra (2013) identified that scholars have commonly recognised three (3) major conceptual models, namely:

- 1. The Mayer- Salovey model (Mayer and Salovey, 1997)
  - The model considers EI as the ability to perceive, analyse manage emotions to support thinking and to be measured an ability-based measure.
- 2. The Goleman model (1998)

The model views EI as a set of skills and competencies driving drive managerial performance, measured by multi-ratter assessment.

## 3. The Bar – On model (1997)

The model views EI is a combination between interrelated emotional and social competencies, skills and facilitators influencing intelligent behaviour, measured by self-report.

Emotional stress in particular is so severe in multiple industries, particularly service lines. The term "emotion worker" is even coined in some spinner position which requires staff to work simultaneously with both customers and supervisors, resulting in intensive stress (Lovelock, et al 2014). In this study, KPMG stands as a prime example since the firm requires the staff to satisfy both major stakeholders being the service users and the managers. The staff are also reported to be overworked and underpaid under a very unforgiving environment. As a consequence, the firm is reported to suffer a high level of staff turnover rate which cost them more than the expenses for applying a smart emotional training and management.

#### 2.01 KPMG'S PRACTICAL APPROACH TO EI MANAGEMENT

With the history of over 100 years, KPMG has developed its own global standards that have been used identically in many countries. KPMG leaders believe the firm needs to set up a common leadership approach and strategic managements in all of its offices with more than 162,000 people worldwide. In the early days, KPMG leaders realised the unique characteristics of the financial services providers that highlight the importance of keeping well trained and experiences employees (KPMG Global 2015). The company suffers heavy cost of losing skilful staff when they fail to meet the expectations of current employees. Although KPMG is well recognised for its global status that makes it a desirable workplace for many people, they still have to deal with complicated human resource related issues. KPMG is also well-known for their high rate of employee turnover due to unavoidable negative factors such as long working hours, pressures from tight deadlines, keen competition and underpaid salary (Nguyen, 2007).

Recently, KPMG leaders have practiced the theory and application of EI in the effort to managing their staff and support them, overcome occupational stress and other emotions related difficulties. KPMG management learned that only by improving the EI awareness and development of the people does the firm as a whole overcome an obstacle of the imbalance between work and life. It was reported that most KPMG staff at senior level and below do not feel happy at work but unhappily stay, waiting for a good chance to find a better paid job (Nguyen, 2007). With times, the higher level they are, the less negative feelings reported (KPMG- Leadership in Action, 2011). This finding agrees with the previous discussion arguing that managers with higher level of EI tend to be more skilful at managing emotions and less suffer the consequences of negative feelings. In the Bachelor's project, Nguyen (2013) conducted primary research under the form of questionnaires for KPMG managers to research about the management methods applied at KPMG Vietnam. The outcome received from the top managers' responses reveals that KPMG leaders specially focus on the applications of some EI models such as the Goleman model (1998) and Bar – On model (1997) for training programmes and self-measurements. The following section will specifically discuss these findings.

# 3.0 METHODOLOGY

This exploratory research uses a combined approach to study and analyse secondary data and collect primary data for further practical understanding. The study follows an interpretivism paradigm, an inductive approach using a case study strategy.

Primary qualitative research by interviews is the main method supported and augmented by both questionnaire quantitative and secondary data from prior research to triangulate the qualitative results. SPSS used to perform the quantitative analysis. Respondents were advised about the objective and

participation was voluntary and their identity would remain confidential. Therefore, the main objectives of the paper are as follows:

- To identify what model appears as the most relevant to the case study's leadership approach.
- To identify a proper instrument to measure KPMG Vietnam's employees' EI and addresses any weak dimensions to provide suitable supports for improvement.
- To determine to what extent EI could influence the success of transactional leadership in the case of KPMG Vietnam.

# 3.01 SAMPLE SIZE

# 3.1.1 QUALITATIVE

Five (5) people were selected for the interview including HR leaders and Managing leaders who have HR and business perspective respectively.

After collecting qualitative responses from the interviews and reviewing all the ideas as well as research objectives, the researcher divided the research into thematic themes as follows:

	Main Themes			Tas	sk Analysis
1	Models	of	Emotions	>	To learn more about the context and leadership style of
	Management				KPMG.
	_			>	To identify their choice for EI models
2	Measurement Methods			>	To identify the most relevant method for EI
					measurement methods
3	Strengths and weakness		>	To identify pros and cons of the EI management	
				application – A review of the whole process	
4	The success of Transactional		>	To discuss the effect of EI application on the success of	
	Leadership				the course of leadership

## 3.1.2 QUANTITATIVE

Fifty five (55) respondents were approached; forty eight (48) participated and provided useful data. All were KPMG Vietnam staff as the subject for KPMG's EI management. They were selected from 3 groups, namely:

- Audit Associate (with one year experience): 15 people 7 females, 8 males.
- Senior Audit Associate (with two year experience): 20 people 10 females, 10 males.
- Senior Audit (with more than 3 year experience): 15 people 5 females, 5 males.
- Audit Assistant to Manager (with more than 10 year experience): 5 people 2 females, 3 males.

#### 4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

# 4.01 MODELS OF EMOTIONS MANAGEMENT (THEMATIC THEME)

When asked about the strategy that leaders at KPMG are now following, Respondent 1 revealed:

"At first, I would like to emphasise on the nature of the audit/ financial services jobs. KPMG earns incomes from performing various financial services for customers and the existence and success of the firm directly and heavily depend on the employees' performance in catering services. We cannot stay away from working daily with deadlines. Therefore at the very beginning, KPMG leaders choose to follow the transactional leadership styles which mainly use the principle of rewards and punishments to manage all staff"

"We want our employees to know when customers get angry to calm them down, avoiding unexpected conflicts. The employees should know that to everyone, including both customers and the managers, arguing aggressively never brings out a good outcome. KPMG's staff were also trained to avoid any negative feelings at work, to reduce the stress level and to maximise all the good emotions."

"KPMG leaders have high opinion on the impact of emotions management because they assert that; if the firm wants to increase rewards for employees, it is really difficult and must depend on the revenue earned each year whereas the contribution of EI could make the firm outstanding in comparison to other big competitors"

During the interview, it is not difficult to realise that respondents were confident with good levels of EI. They were fast in understanding the questions and answers coherently. This might agree with the earlier research that suggests managers tend to have a high level of EI (Rahim, 2010).

KPMG is following both The Goleman model (1998) and The Bar – On model (1997).

Understanding emotions of employees allows the firm to address their needs and increase the motivation by offering the desirable rewards. Additionally, therefore, besides applying EI principles such as understand people's emotions, and control leader's self-emotions, the firm intensifies the EI trainings provided for employees.

With time, more employees, especially higher level, reported that they see the importance of the EI application at work in term of improving their job performances. The use of a mixed model which see EI as both as set of skills and a combination between interrelated emotional and social competencies suggest KPMG to step up training, heavily invest in employee's EI understanding and application.

The other Respondents from the interview consider that, the status of KPMG Vietnam as an attractive employer was enhanced by an appropriate EI approach and a suitable choice for EI mixed model.

In the questionnaires, questions 9, 10 and 11 are designed to test how staff think about the model applied at the firm. In summary, the majority of the responses indicate EI is a set of skills and competencies – in line with the qualitative findings. Overall, employees agree that the training provided for them is effective and the firm's EI model is the most suitable approach.

- Q.9 To you, El is (Skills and competencies)

  No significant differences by the three demographics (Sex, Position and Education).
- **Q.10 Is the EI training provided for employees effective** (Agree, although approximately equal numbers neutral)

No significant difference by Education although some differences by Sex and Position.

Q.11 Do you think the EI model KPMG is applying the best choice (Agree)

No significant differences by Sex or Education and only some differences for Position.

# 4.02 MEASUREMENT METHODS (THEMATIC THEME)

All Respondents agree the EI model used in KPMG indicates self-reporting is the most common and reliable measurement for EI performance. When being asked why the firm never tries any other measurement method such as assessment by trainers or mentors, Respondent 4 revealed:

"What we are doing shows a good result, KPMG leaders are satisfy with their investments in the training and employees EI performance reflected in questionnaires' results. It is also reflected by customers' feedback regarding KPMG's employees' attitude, communication and behaviours. We are never requested to try any new method in measurement"

The current measurement method being used at KPMG might be effective, according to the firm's evaluation. However, Wakeman (2006) suggests, there are numerous measurable factors that an organisation wants to test and analyse El. It is also claimed that using just one unchanged method over years in an organisation to measure El could be insufficient in term of addressing any weak dimension for a better improvement (Maul, 2008). Question here is, can KPMG achieve a more efficient level of El application if their measurement can identify weaknesses, which hinder their employees to perform better.

In the questionnaire, questions 12 is designed to test how staff think about EI measurement methods applied at the firm. The results show that most staff prefer Self-Assessment Questionnaire, but there are 22.9% staff suggest assessment by trainers as a new method in line with prior research.

Q.12 What method is the best to measure your El (Self-Assessment Questionnaire)

No significant differences by Sex or Education and only some differences for Position at the lower levels.

# 4.03 STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESS (THEMATIC THEME)

All Respondents suggest that the use of EI seems to be very rare and complicated in a developing country such as Vietnam. They also tend to avoid what they do not really either understand or have a feeling of familiarity, Respondent 5 revealed:

"There is a fact that could become obvious now but 10 years ago, not so many employers in Vietnam, especially the local ones could be aware and understand deeply, that: talented employees looking for caring and thoughtful employers with excellent reimbursements. Most of employers think only high salary can help them win high quality employees, but actually people expect more than just a well-paid job. KPMG today's success was greatly contributed by our talent work force and I am confident to say, it thanks to our strategic leadership with the use of EI".

Yet, it should be noted that, the interviewer only asked the staff who stay with the firm, but do not have a chance to talk to the ones who quit. KPMG still suffers a relatively high rate of employee turnover rate. Regarding this issue, Respondent 1 said, we hardly totally get rid of that problem due the nature of the challenging service jobs. In Chapter 2 – Literature Review, it has been mentioned that the use of EI might help organisations obtain interpersonal success with sensitivity and mindfulness, particularly in workplaces that require work-life rebalance. Emotions play a great role in human decision making process and a proper impact on emotions could lead to a surprise success for any individual or organisation (Gould, 2003).

This finding demonstrates the aim of KPMG in applying EI principles to win people's heart as they already determined that the work force will essentially decide their long-term development. However, it appears that the company's emotion managements can only help reduce the tensions in a busy workplace but cannot fully address the issue. Respondent 3 gave a high opinion on the company's time and investment in raising the awareness of EI among employees, but he also emphasised"

"It is more about each individual's efforts to contribute to their own job performance and self-development. The firm can only support employees in term of providing training materials but each person should discipline themselves to learn the EI skills. I can see that there are still a few of my colleagues who still not categorise EI in an academic way."

With respect to weaknesses in the management, Respondent 1 acknowledged that is more about their limitation than weakness. He explained some factors that hinder the firm to obtain the most effective EI approach.

"Personally, I do not think that we have achieved the most effective results for the EI application. The firm and managers have not attached much important to the measurement method. The self-report questionnaire seems is not sufficient."

Respondent 1 reveals that KPMG aims at reducing their turnover rate and keep experienced staff with them in the long run but their EI management only helps partly, he wants to improve the application and the area needed improvement could be the measurement. He is of the view that the firm should outsource the assessment to have professionals evaluated their employees to increase the effectiveness. He said: "we need to learn what we are weak at; we need professionals to tell us if we could not fully find it in the self-report." Additionally, Respondent 1 and Respondent 2 mentioned, in the future, they are planning to have EI assessment in the recruitment process to select future employees that already developed a certain level of EI by themselves – it demonstrate a well preparation of the potential candidates before joining the workforce. This idea seems to satisfy the concern of Respondent 3 who expects a higher level of staff EI self-awareness. These leaders think it is time for KPMG to have some improvement to gain a more significant success.

In the questionnaires, questions 4,5,6,7 and 8 are designed to test the general EI performance of KPMG employees. The responses show a good level of EI among staff, demonstrating a quite effective result of the firm's emotion management over years. However, in dealing with difficulties at work and maintaining enthusiasm, the responses show an unconfident attitude (neutral) which defines the issue that Respondent 1 mentioned that KPMG has not fully addressed the high employee turnover rate. These obstacles could be the elements that frustrate staff and consequence in their under expected performances.

- Q.4 I can describe accurately what I am feeling (Agree)
- Q.5 I can stay calm, even in difficult circumstances (Neutral)
- Q.6 I find it hard to maintain my enthusiasm when I encounter setbacks (Neutral)
- Q.7 I find it easy to "read" other people's emotions (Agree)
- Q.8 I can achieve win-win situation when I have conflicts with customers (Agree)

# 4.04 THE SUCCESS OF TRANSACTIONAL LEADERSHIP (THEMATIC THEME)

First, all the five interviewees share one common opinions that KPMG has obtained a successful transactional leadership. They are of the view that the success has been contributed by many factors including the EI applications. Respondent 1 asserts that the EI applications play an essential role in making the firm become an attractive employer and this factor alone contributes greatly to the entire success of the firm today. Respondent 2 acknowledges that the firm's success today is thanks to a strategic combination of the emotions managements and transactional leadership. She adds, once organisations well define their leadership approaches and goals, the consistence application will eventually lead them to success. This analysis, it aims at emphasizing the responses collected from the questionnaires to see how KPMG's staff evaluate the situation and to see if staff's opinions confirm leaders' assessments. It will be more objective to gather different opinions from staff than interview a few leaders who tend to have some natural bias in evaluating their own leadership.

In the questionnaires, questions 14, 15 and 16 are designed to see KPMG staff's evaluation toward the impact of EI application on their success of Transactional Leadership.

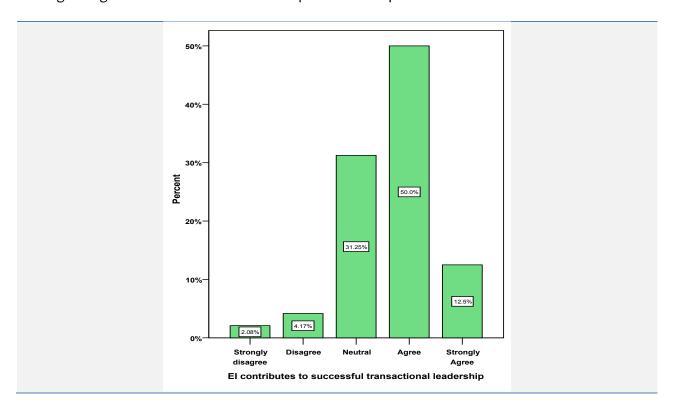
- Q.14 In general, KPMG managers have a good level and EI (Agree)
- Q.15 They set a good example for managing emotions, positively influence staffs (Agree)
- Q.16 El applications partly contribute to KPMG's successful transactional leadership (Agree)

  No significant difference by Education and Sex for Q.13, 14 & 16.

  Significant difference found by Sex for Q15 and for Position

Q.16 is the dependant question of this research as it connects EI with transactional leadership at KPMG Vietnam. Quantitative results found respondents agreeable and skewed heavily towards the top end; this is tempered by the neutral responses.

62.5% are on the Agreeable side and only 6.25% on the Disagreeable side, the remaining 2nd largest group being noncommittal. Extracting this phenomena is worthy of additional research beyond this study although the general trend is in line with the qualitative and prior studies.



# 5.0 SUMMARISED FINDINGS

The qualitative findings from the interviews appear to be in line with quantitative findings from the questionnaires. This summary was made based on the answers of the interviewees and responses received in the questionnaires. There are some main points extracted from the analysing section above as follows:

#### THE ELMODEL

Both KPMG leaders and their staff see EI as a set of learnable skills and social abilities. The firm based on these theories to build up and provide intensive trainings for staff and these trainings were assessed as effective by them. In the leadership context of the KPMG, the mixture of The Goleman model (1998) and The Bar – On model (1997) is seen as the most relevant choice for the EI application which bring EI into daily activities at work as the trained skills.

#### THE MEASUREMENT

KPMG is now using self-report questionnaires to measure EI performance of employees and this common and simple method received many supports from their staff. However, due to the current good result of the emotions managements, the firm leaders have not though about updating any new method for the purpose of improving the measurement and addressing any weakness which can hinder the firm from performing even better.

#### STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESS

The EI application at KPMG was implemented early compared to other competitors in the Vietnam market; therefore, they have gained the strength in attracting talent employees for a powerful work force, which partly drive them to success. All five staff who were interviewed answered that EI has a significant positive influence on their job performance in term of reducing the stress level at a challenging working environment.

However, the emotions management only helps reduce the tension and remain positive emotions among staff but not yet help address fully the issue of high employee turnover rate at the firm. Which means the effectiveness of the EI application needs to be improved. Not only the firm but each individual should put effort in their EI improvement. Furthermore, it is asserted that one single simple measurement method such as self-report questionnaires would not be enough to address weaknesses (McCleskey, 2014).

# THE SUCCESS OF TRANSACTIONAL LEADERSHIP

Generally, both KPMG's leaders and staff evaluate that the EI application does contribute to KPMG's successful transactional leadership.

#### 6.0 CONCLUSIONS

The study of relationship and effects of EI on employee's performances at KPMG from both qualitative and quantitative data collected affirm the existent relationship and a positive effect of EI on employee's performance. The interviews with KPMG staff reveal that these employees after receiving intensive EI related trainings from the firms and realise the important role of the skills in term of reducing their stress level, resulting in the improvement in productivity at work. KPMG's audit partner also asserts that EI applications improve their employee's performance by the ability of self-emotional control and maintaining good relationships with clients with positive emotions. These findings agree with suggestions of Akinboye, Akinboye and Adeyemo, (2002), who assert that employees who frequently suffer high tension and overwhelming difficulties at work need both effective self-emotional management and other external supports from employers to maintain good performance and improve interpersonal relations.

In this case, on one hand KPMG employees are aware of the need of improving their EI index; they also receive external support from the firm (by trainings) on the other hand. These two factors together have a positive impact on the general performances of those employees. The findings also indicate a greater sphere of influence of EI; it does not only help reducing the stress level among employees, but also contributes in an improving adaptability their course of actions to cope with sudden changes without collapsing. These authors found the same cause-effect relationship between EI and job performance improvement in their studies.

Importantly, there is one point in common between the findings and theory mentioned by Nikolaou and Tsaousis (2002) which argues that there is a strong link between EI, occupational stress, and organisational commitment. In the interview with the Audit Partner, Respondent 1 is of the view that KPMG EI applications at this moment can help reduce the tensions at work and improve employees' performances, but the firm has not reached to the most effective result of EI management which can increase the employees' organisational commitment due to some limitations in the measurement methods. As a consequence, KPMG still suffers quite high employee turnover rate. This issue will be discussed more in the recommendations.

The study of relationship and effects of EI on the success of transactional leadership at KPMG, the findings prove that EI applications have a big say over the success of transactional leadership at the firm.

First, the early use of EI managements contributes to KPMG success of being one of the most attractive employers in the world, resulting in their powerful work force. EI also plays an important role in the changing mind process which is one of the main tasks of transactional leadership. Sharing the same view, Vito, Higgins and Denney (2014) support transactional leaders to use EI applications because they see rewards and punishments are another form of managing people through emotions. Respondents received from the questionnaires reveal that KPMG staff high evaluate the EI level of their managers. This seems in line with the findings of by Rahim (2010) who conducted a survey in 23 Pakistan banks to learn that people at higher level tend to achieve a higher EI performance.

In comparison with the two research papers by Nguyen T.N, 2007 and Nguyen T.T, 2013 who conducted the similar study on the same employer - KPMG, there are some of their findings agree with this research findings. First, the two papers also indicate that KPMG is using Goleman model (1998) and Bar – On model (1997) for training programmes and self- measurements. Secondly, the two authors also found that KPMG only use the self-report questionnaires for measurements and this would not be sufficient. This issue will be mentioned more details in the recommendations. Lastly, both these research findings and the findings of the two research papers above, find that at KPMG, the higher position one person is holding, and the higher EI level he or she might achieve. Besides the similar points, this research reveals more findings which address the weakness in using measurement method suggested by this combination model.

#### 7.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall, the EI application at KPMG which has been used for years is assessed as well structured and effective. The choice of EI model, the practice of providing training, the approach of leading by examples at KPMG are very well designed and organisationally carried out. However, if the firm looks for maximising the benefits that EI application can bring to them, which can address a high employee turnover rate, they should find it as a new motivation to revise the current measurement method. The self-report questionnaires is still relevant and suitable but if the firm consider having professionals such as EI trainers tested and directly evaluate their people's EI performances, it will be more possible to address any weaknesses that the self-report could not reveal. To reinforce this point, in one study that also revised other previous research, Nikolaou and Tsaousis (2002) assert a strong relationship between EI and organisational commitment. If KPMG leaders see this point, it might help them in defining new strategy that more effectively address their concern of the leaving of experienced staff.

The second point is the concern of Respondent 3, he expresses that the company has play their role well in term of practicing EI management, they also support employees by heavily investing in the intensive trainings programmes. However, the staff should also put effort in the process in order to maximise the outcome. And, because the firm demands for a greater development, it is suggested that they should involve some EI test section in the recruitment programmes for the purpose of selecting potential employees that already have the sense of EI self-development. In the situation that KPMG provides further training for employees who already gained a certain level of EI, the outcome could be far more effective than they are executing at the moment.

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