

TEAM CREATIVITY AS A MEDIATOR OF TEAM LEADER EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND TEAM PERFORMANCE

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ABSTRACT

Businesses are faced with increasing pressure to innovate in order to remain competitive in today's information intensive marketplace. Creativity plays a key role in the firm's innovation processes, yet, creativity does not occur spontaneously in organizations (Zhou and George 2003, Castro, Gomes and de Sousa 2012). Organizational leaders play a key role in identifying, developing and sustaining creativity in workers. In fact, it has been suggested that the emotional intelligence of the team leader can play a significant role in the team's level of creativity (Castro, Gomes and de Sousa 2012, Rego *et al.* 2007, Zhou and George 2003).

This study examines this premise by exploring the team leader's emotional intelligence impact on his/her team's creativity and their team job performance. Emotional intelligence is defined as "the ability to perceive accurately, appraise, and express emotions; the ability to access and/or generate feelings when they facilitate thought; the ability to understand emotion and emotional knowledge; and the ability to regulate emotions so as to promote emotional and intellectual growth" (Mayer and Salovey 1997, p. 35). Team creativity denotes "teams producing novel ideas and solutions to maintain the firm's competitive edge (Barczak, Lassk and Mulki 2010, p. 333)." Job performance, one of the most widely researched sales topics, consists of both behavioral and outcome performance of the salesforce.

The study's hypotheses were tested with 142 sales teams from a national U.S. field sales force of a business to consumer company. Multiple regression analyses were conducted for each component of the proposed mediation model. First, it was found that team leader's emotional intelligence was positively associated with the sales team's job performance. It was also shown that the team leader's emotional intelligence was positively related to the team creativity. Lastly, results indicated that the mediator, team creativity, was positively related to the sales team's job performance. Results for the mediation analyses confirmed the mediating role of team creativity in the relationship between the team leader's emotional intelligence and the sales team's job performance. Since the direct effect of the team leader's emotional intelligence on team job performance remained significant when controlling for team creativity interactions, a partial mediation model is represented by this data.

The findings suggest that emotionally intelligent sales leaders behave in ways that inspire creativity and higher levels of job performance in their teams. Zhou and George (2003) suggested, creative endeavors are affect-laden. Emotionally intelligent leaders are able to understand the emotions of their employees and channel them to creative outlets that promote organizational innovation and competitiveness. Those sales teams that produce more creative methods positively impact the team's behavioral and objective job performance as well.

What do these results suggest for the practitioner? Previous research has suggested that the sales manager has a very significant impact in the success or failure of the individual salesperson (Dubinsky *et al.* 1995). The current study provides evidence suggesting that some of that influence may stem from the managers' level of emotional intelligence. As a result, firms may consider instituting training programs designed to enhance the emotional intelligence of their current sales leaders. However, given the fact that many sales managers are selected from the organization's existing sales force, it may be beneficial to extend the emotional intelligence training programs to the current sales force as well. Of course, this is doubly true given the fact that other research has suggested that emotional intelligence has a positive impact on the individual salesperson's performance. The same logic would suggest that firms consider evaluating the emotional intelligence of potential hires, at both the management and entry sales levels.

References are available by request.