

THE ROLE OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE IN MANAGING RURAL SALES FORCE PERFORMANCE

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In past few decades, the term emotional intelligence has become quite popular. Researches and studies have shown that technical skills, capabilities and expertise alone cannot guarantee success at workplace. The field of psychology, behavioural science and neuroscience have highlighted the importance of emotional intelligence. It has been realized workplaces cannot be termed "emotion free zones" and hence understanding the concept is even more important. The understanding and awareness of emotional intelligence is particularly more important when interpersonal relations at work are talked about. The study based on secondary data tries to explore the effect of emotional intelligence on sales performance particularly with reference to Indian rural market as the opportunities offered by the same are immense and any factor that can help in positively affecting the sales must be given due concern by the organizations.

Keywords : *Emotional Intelligence, Indian Rural Market, Sales, Rural Sales*

Introduction

The origin of the construct of Emotional intelligence dates back to Thorndike's work on social intelligence, where it was mentioned as the ability to understand and manage people and acting wisely in human relations (Thorndike, 1920). The term "emotional intelligence" first appeared in a doctoral thesis (Payne, 1985) and the concept came in existence when a work on multiple intelligences comprising of "interpersonal intelligence" and "intrapersonal intelligence" was highlighted (Gardener, 1983). The term emotional intelligence (EI) is relatively new and traces back its origin to 1990 when Salovey and Mayer (1990) defined the construct as "The ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings, to discriminate among them, and to use this information to guide one's thinking and action". The most pioneering work in the area of emotional intelligence has been done by Goleman who defined emotional intelligence as a person's self-awareness, self-confidence, self-control, commitment and integrity, and the ability to communicate, influence, initiate and accept change (Goleman, 1998).

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It was also further postulated by him that emotional intelligence must be considered at least equal to Intelligence Quotient (IQ) if not more important than it and is instrumental in determining success in one's professional and personal life. It was also mentioned in his study that Intelligence Quotient and technical expertise plays only 10percent(at the most 20percent)role in deciding success in a person's life and rest all can be attributed to emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1995).

Reuven Bar-On, who coined the term "emotion quotient" (which implies how one measures emotional intelligence), defined emotional intelligence as the understanding of self and others, relating with people, and adapting as well as coping with the environment to be more effective while dealing with the environmental demands (Bar-On, 1997). Emotional intelligence is referred to as the combination of cognitive skills, capabilities and competencies which have the ability to influence environmental demands and pressure that a person encounters (Martinez, 1997). A person's level of their emotional intelligence capabilities is also found to have a key role in dictating their interpersonal relationships (Klausener, 1997). Studies have shown it as the ability to judge emotions by thinking and understanding of regulation of emotions and feelings, so that a person can affect the feelings of others (George, 2000). Hence, it can be referred to as a set of skills which are helpful in estimating the feelings and emotions of oneself as well as others, and serves as an important tool for motivation and achievement in one's life (Abraham, 2000).

There are a wide range of definitions and models of emotional intelligence and numerous researchers have attempted to define it. The concept of emotional intelligence and the model thus proposed by Mayor & Salovey was criticized on the grounds that even though an individual might know how to behave in a particular situation, it doesn't necessarily always mean that the individual would actually carry out the reported behaviour (Brody, 2004). On the other hand Goleman's concept and the model of emotional intelligence was criticised by calling it a mere "*pop psychology*" (Mayer, Roberts, & Barsade, 2008) which implied that just because the concept of emotional intelligence was in fashion, hence more and more researchers tried to define it.

Emotional Intelligence is perceived both as ability and as a trait. The trait EI comprises of behavioural dispositions and self perceived abilities. The trait EI model comparatively enjoys superiority as compared to other models and approaches of EI, primarily because it acknowledges the subjective nature of emotional experience and is capable of being extended into areas such as social intelligence etc rather than being restricted to a single characteristic model (Robinson & Clore, 2002).

Trait EI theory enjoys widespread empirical support and can be applied to a multitude of settings such as organizational, clinical, educational, social, health etc. (Petrides, 2011). EI is found to have an impact on an employee's job performance and hence on organizational outcomes and it has been proved by various researchers from time to time in their studies. It almost has a positive impact on all organizational processes such as communication, team and group dynamics, leadership etc. Emotional intelligence is also said to be highly correlated with organizational commitment and job performance. The area of sales is also highly affected by emotional intelligence and it has been found time and again that salespeople who are emotionally intelligent generate more revenue. As the sales persons are the ones who directly interact with the customers of any organization, hence they must score high on emotional intelligence capabilities as they deal with a wide range and varieties of customers on a daily basis and they need to build a lasting relationship with their customers so that they return again and again. Effectiveness at sales is all about emotionally intelligent capabilities such as relationship-building and ability to have an influence over the customer's mind (Goleman, 1998). The concept of Emotional intelligence becomes even more important when rural sales and sales force management is talked about because the traits that are required are quite different from urban and suburban areas. The present study tries to explore the relationship between emotional intelligence and sales force effectiveness in the Indian Rural market.

Literature review

Emotional Intelligence is often regarded as the integrating thread which weaves consistency into organizational effectiveness (Watkin, 2000). Training the salesperson in emotional intelligence capabilities provides a means to develop the much required communication and interpersonal skills needed by salespeople so that they can develop and improve their relationships with the customers (Deeter & Sojka, 2003).

A study undertaken to find whether emotional intelligence and awareness training should be introduced into sales training programs and whether the effect of emotional intelligence training is necessary for ensuring success in the field of sales or not revealed that emotional intelligence is highly important to the sales professionals (Manna & Smith, 2004). Sales persons often face situations such as role conflict and role ambiguity. They are under constant pressure and expected to sell their organization's products and services to generate immediate profits and they also need to focus on ensuring customer satisfaction so as to ensure long-term economic viability of their organization. It is found that a salespersons customer orientation level is significantly related to their emotional intelligence (Rozell, Pettijohn, & Parker, 2004).

An Increase in the awareness levels of the relationship managers with

respect to their own emotions, its perception and hence acting upon the emotions of others, which are actually the important constituents of emotional intelligence are also said to impact the financial performance positively (Heffernan, Travaglione & Droulers, 2008). A study on sales professionals and the use of emotions by the sales professionals in order to facilitate positive outcomes for their firms, themselves, and their customers concluded that emotional intelligence can help in improving interactions between buyers and sellers (Kidwell, Murtha & Sheng, 2011).

Although there are plenty of research and articles which have highlighted the linkage between emotional intelligence and sales performance, there is still a dearth of research with respect to the linkage between emotional intelligence and effectiveness of rural salesman performance. The present study tries to examine the relationship between the same with special reference to Indian rural market conditions and how emotional intelligence can act as an ingredient for ensuring effectiveness of rural salesman performance.

Objectives

The objectives of the present study are:

1. To understand the potential, problems and challenges of the Indian Rural Market.
2. To understand the problems and challenges of the salesman employed in rural markets.
3. To study the effect of emotional intelligence in ensuring effective sales performance in rural markets.

Research Methodology

The paper is based on secondary data. The sources of data are articles, newspapers, internet, governmental and organizational reports.

Findings and Discussions

One of the initial objectives of the research was to find the potential that the Indian rural market offers. The rural market in India has been growing steadily over the past few years. It's a well known fact that about 70 per cent of India's population lives in villages and because of the fact that most of the urban and semi urban markets are already saturated, many of the Indian marketers as well as multinationals have started focusing on rural markets. According to the third annual edition of Accenture Research Report (2014), rural consumers are increasingly becoming aware and hence are aspiring to purchase branded, high quality products. Hence the organizations in India are highly optimistic about the growth of the country's rural consumer markets, which is expected to be faster than urban consumer

markets. India's per capita GDP in rural regions has grown at a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 6.2 per cent since 2000. The rural segment is growing at a healthy pace of 8-10 percent per annum and expected to add US \$ 100 billion in consumption demand by 2017. Market research firm Nielsen expects India's rural FMCG market to reach a size of US\$ 100 billion by 2025¹. According to Ablett et al (2007) the annual real income per household in rural India is supposed to rise to 3.6 per cent in 2025, from 2.8 per cent in the last 20 years. The various governmental initiatives will help in providing and improving the infrastructure in rural areas which will ultimately have a multiplier effect and contribute towards movements of goods and services which will help in improving the earnings of the population belonging to rural areas and hence will result in a further increase and improvement in consumption.

In spite of the advancements in the mentality of the rural consumers and the prospects that the rural markets offer still there are numerous challenges that are associated with the same. Till date still a larger percentage of rural people are not financially stable and are still traditional in their approach. The age-old customs, traditions and practices are still reflected in their buying behaviour too (Kumar, 2013). Cultural factors, Literacy levels and lower per capita income are few of the other challenges before the rural population (Kavitha, 2012). The other objective of the study was to analyze the challenges faced by rural salesman. Since Personalized Selling is supposed to be an essential element in sales, its importance increases manifold when we talk about rural marketing owing to the nature of the customers. The sales in rural areas involve more intensive personal selling efforts as compared to selling in the urban areas. Each rural area of the country has a different local language and hence the salesmen working in these areas must have a understanding of these languages which will help them in establishing a connect with their customers. Also the rural areas in our country are still devoid of many of the basic amenities and hence a salesman working in these areas must be comfortable and willing to work in such conditions. This aspect needs to be taken care by the organizations while selecting the salesman as a wrong choice will affect the sales figure of the company. Since earlier in the study we found out that rural customers are traditional in their approach, the rural salesman must be a person who has a great deal of patience and perseverance as it will be difficult for the salesperson at times to convince the customer to buy their product or service. Many times the product or service that is launched in the rural market might be quite new as compared to the urban market. Hence, it will be required by the rural salesman to use their creative and cognitive abilities to introduce them

¹ <https://www.ibef.org/industry/indian-rural-market.aspx>

in such a manner to their customers that they are encouraged and excited to try such products or services.

The above mentioned points make us analyze the potential and problems of the rural markets and the challenges before the rural salesman. Any factor that can positively contribute to increase the effectiveness of sales performance in rural markets will be quite beneficial for the organizations to incorporate into their practices because of the opportunities that the rural markets offer. Earlier in the study it has been observed that there exists a positive relationship between sales performance and emotional intelligence. This relationship becomes even more important when we talk about rural sales owing to the conditions in the rural markets pertaining to the customers based in such markets. The importance of inter personal relationship in case of sales can never be overemphasized and when interpersonal relations are talked about emotions play an important role. The training programs for the prospective sales persons or those sales people who are already employed in rural markets must comprise of providing them with the training that can help them to manage their emotions effectively. It will help them in managing tension and will also be instrumental in increasing their comfort levels in challenging situations. The knowledge of emotional intelligence can help them in developing and manage their emotions to enhance their effectiveness with respect to their roles. Emotional intelligence can also help them to sense and respond to some subtle non verbal signals with respect to their customers and hence they can use those signals to demonstrate appropriate behaviour so that the chances of convincing a customer to try their product or service increases (Mehnart & Mehnart, 2011.)

Conclusion

The opportunities that the rural markets offer to the marketers, makes us believe that the future is quite bright for the marketers and especially for those who can comprehend these dynamics well and use them for having an edge over the others. Since sales are all about relationships, behavioural competencies play an important role. The organizations must realize the fact and should incorporate the awareness and knowledge related to emotional intelligence in hiring and training their sales professionals employed in the rural areas to reap the benefits and have a competitive advantage. Although the present study is a sincere attempt to understand the constructs undertaken, but an empirical study with primary data might reveal some more insightful details and provide some robust analysis. The authors also feel that an industry wise comparison can also provide additional insights in understanding the constructs mentioned in the study.

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