# Identification of Factors to Enhance Emotional Intelligence of Employees and Mitigate Employee Alienation in HEIs during Covid-19 Pandemic

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## Abstract

This research aims to identify the key factors to enhance Emotional Intelligence (EI) among faculties and staff as well as mitigate Employee Alienation (EA) in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) during the Covid-19 pandemic. By virtue of this, HEIs are enabled to effectively connect with their stakeholders (Students, Parents, and Employees) during this pandemic situation. A positive emotional state of employees with enhanced performance are critical to the success of HEIs. In this scenario, Emotional Intelligence (EI) and Employee Alienation (EA) are deemed as critical components in employee performance. However, there is limited literature on EI and EA from Indian HEI perspective

The proposed cross-sectional study collected data from 288 employees of eight Indian HEIs in Bengaluru using stratified sampling technique. Validity and reliability of the questionnaire was carried out using Q-sort technique and Cronbach's alpha respectively before the questionnaire was administered to the larger population. before the questionnaire was distributed to the larger population. The results were then subjected to the KMO test to determine sampling adequacy and the Bartlett's test of Sphericity to determine suitability for Factor Analysis. To identify the critical factors, descriptive statistics, exploratory factor analysis (EFA), and linear regression were carried out.

The results showed appropriate factors of EI and EA specific to HEIs during the COVID 19 pandemic. Thus, the impact of the COVID 19 pandemic on employee and EA and EI in HEIs was investigated by identifying the underlying issues. As a result, HEIs will be able to connect with their stakeholders in a sustainable manner during pandemic situations.

**Keywords:** Emotional Intelligence, Employee Alienation, Covid-19, HEIs, Pandemic

# Introduction

Higher education institutions (HEIs) are frequently subjected to rapid changes and reforms, which creates additional challenges and work stress for their employees. The COVID 19 pandemic has exacerbated the challenges faced by HEI faculty and staff as a result of a paradigm shift in new modes of teaching in limited time, as well as other key issues. This volatile situation may result in the development of Employee Alienation (EA), resulting in organisational dysfunction. However, existing research indicates that employees with higher levels of Emotional Intelligence (EI) can effectively manage their emotions in order to overcome the impact of such difficult situations in their professional lives. Many of the organisational issues that arise as a result of employees' lack of involvement can be greatly reduced by improving employees' EI, which leads to increased employee efficacy, performance, and motivation (Goleman, 1999). This study primarily aimed at identifying different dimensions of EI and EA in Indian HEIs during the pandemic in order to improve employee EI and mitigate EA.

# Literature Review

Karl Marx's work influenced the concept of work alienation (Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts, 1844). In his work, alienation is defined as an individual's isolation and detachment from the product of his work as a result of the impact of the capitalist labour process. EA can result from close supervision, routine work with no significant differences or intricacies, ownership hierarchical position, class structure, and so on (Shantz *et.al.,* 2015).

EA, according to Blauner (1964), is the separation of employees from the product and process of their labour. Alienation varies according to industrial situations, technology used, and organisational structure (Blauner, 1964). Conceptualization of EA was done by different researchers in different ways, but the most accepted one was that of Seeman (1959). According to Seeman, EA is measured in five different dimensions- Powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, isolation and self-estrangement. Later, Mottaz (1981) developed a condensed version of the above model to measure work alienation that included Powerlessness, Meaninglessness, and Self-Estrangement. The primary focus of this measurement model was the work environment.

EI is a multi-dimensional concept that connects emotion and cognition to improve human intercommunication (Mayer, Salovey & Caruso, 2008; Jena & Goyal, 2022). Emotions can be positive or negative based on individual perceptions (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Behnke et al., 2022). Negative emotions like anger, fear and jealousy etc. are unpleasant emotions that are evoked in individuals to express a negative effect towards a situation or individual (Prayag & Del, 2021). At the same time, positive emotions such as joy, interest, contentment, pride, love appear to have a complementary effect, widening people's momentary thought-action repertoires (Fredrickson, 2013; Behnke et al., 2022).

When the EI level of employees is low, unpleasant work situations can develop negative emotions among employees (Meisler, 2021). This can lead to various deviant work place behaviours including EA. Thus, EA is a serious issue where the employee gets separated from the work and the co-workers, resulting in undesirable outcomes for organisations (Vinokurov &

Kozhina, 2020; Mohamed, 2022). There is no doubt that the situation becomes severe for Institutions like HEIs where employees include teachers from Asst. Professor cadre to Professor cadre. Teachers are entrusted with a vital task for all societies: education and generational upbringing. As a result, teacher alienation is not limited to them only. Instead, it affects the outcomes of educational work and extends to students and society (Akar, 2018; Dirican & Erdil, 2020).

EI serves as the most effective barrier between employees and workplace stresses (Kim and Qu, 2004). (2019). Mayer and Salovey were the first to propose the concept of emotional intelligence (1989). According to them, emotional intelligence (EI) is the ability to perceive, facilitate, and manage one's own and other people's emotions for productive purposes. Employee job satisfaction and organisational commitment are positively related to EI (Anari, 2012). Transformational leaders connect emotionally with their followers, which leads to better results and job satisfaction (Rajesh *et al.*, 2019). Furthermore, team members with higher Emotional Intelligence levels are better at demonstrating teamwork and can take on the role of an informal leader than those with lower EI levels (Paik *et al.*, 2019). Although EI is an inborn talent, it can be developed, modified, or acquired through appropriate education (Goleman, 2000). Changes in EI can improve emotionally guided decision-making, through improving self-related emotion recognition processes (Alkozei *et al.*, 2019). Sabina *et al.* (2017) conducted a multilevel meta-analysis to determine whether EI can be improved through training. The results of the study explored a moderate standardised mean difference between pre and post measurement as the effect of EI training in improved performance. In general, EI

and EA are deemed as critical components in employee performance. However, there is a limited literature on EI and EA identifying the critical EI and EA factors from Indian HEI perspective. By identifying the critical EI and EA factors, employee EI can be improved to prevent the onset of EA in HEIs during this pandemic situation.

## Methods and Methodology

The study was both conceptual and empirical in nature. It was formed on theoretical foundations as well as conclusions drawn from data collected and analysed using advanced statistical techniques in SPSS.

Employees from eight Higher Education Institutions in Bangalore served as the study's population. The proposed study made use of both primary and secondary data. To collect primary data, a structured questionnaire with 65 items was used. The questionnaire was divided into four sections. First section included 11 demographic Questions. The second section to assess EI comprised of a selected combination of 44 items incorporating both *"Assessing Emotions Scale (AES) developed by Schutte et al., (1998) and Emotional Competency Inventory (EC1 2.0) developed by Boyatiz (2000)* to suit the HEIs in India". The third Section included 21 items to assess Employee Alienation using the scale developed by Mottaz (1981). The variables were evaluated using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 5-strongly agree to 1-strongly disagree. Section four included open-ended questions to allow employees to express their opinions, concerns, and ideas.

A pilot study was carried out to assess the measurement scales' validity and reliability. To develop the questionnaire, the

Q-Sort technique was used in two rounds to test the construct validity of the identified items. In a pretesting stage, Q-Sort is an iterative process to determine the validity of constructs. The validity of the measurement instrument was determined using three specific Q-Sort measures proposed by Moore and Benbasat: "*inter-judge raw agreement score, Cohen's Kappa, and item placement ratio (Hit ratio)*".

A pilot survey with the validated questionnaire was conducted among a small sample of 30 respondents to assess the reliability of the measurement scales. Cronbach's Alpha is calculated using data from the pilot study. A structured questionnaire was used for the large-scale survey.

Descriptive analysis aided in understanding the characteristics of the collected data and identifying appropriate analytical tools and techniques to be used in the proposed study. To assess Sampling Adequacy and Data Adequacy for Factor Analysis, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin and Bartlett's tests of sphericity were used. To identify the factors associated with EI and EA, an EFA was performed. These variables can also be used for further investigation. The maximum common variance from all variables is extracted using principal component analysis with varimax rotation and assigned to a common factor. The identified factors were named based on the similarity of the items/variables in the underlying factors, and the variance explained by each factor was examined.

To identify the critical factors for EI and EA, a linear regression was performed with all factor scores as independent variables derived from factor analysis. This is an acceptable method for using factor scores as independent variables (source: IBM.com). EI and EA index values calculated by adding up all the values of scaled variables of each sample (what were the variables used to calculate has to be specified earlier) was considered as the dependent variable.

# Results

Demographic profile of the employees in HEIs such as gender, age, marital status, education, experience, level of employment in organization were analysed and is shown in Table 1.

**TABLE 1:** Demographic profile of the Employees

(n= 271)

| | | Frequency | Percentage % |
|---|---|---|---|
| Gender | Male | 137 | 50.60 |
| | Female | 134 | 49.40 |
| | Total | 271 | 100.00 |
| Marital Status | Single | 62 | 23.00 |
| | Married | 209 | 77.00 |
| | Total | 271 | 100.00 |
| Age | < 30 years | 75 | 27.70 |
| | 30-40 years | 114 | 42.10 |
| | 41-50 years | 68 | 25.10 |
| | 51-60 years | 11 | 4.10 |
| | > 60 years | 3 | 1.10 |
| | Total | 271 | 100.00 |
| Education | Diploma | 9 | 3.40 |
| | Under Graduate | 22 | 8.10 |
| | Post Graduate | 174 | 64.20 |
| | PhD. | 66 | 24.30 |
| | Total | 271 | 100.00 |

| Work Experience | < 5 years | 73 | 26.90 |
| | 5-10 years | 76 | 12.50 |
| | 11-15 years | 59 | 21.80 |
| | 16-20 years | 29 | 10.70 |
| | > 20 years | 34 | 28.10 |
| | Total | 271 | 100.00 |
| Year of experience in present organization | < 5 years | 150 | 55.40 |
| | 5-10 years | 74 | 7.40 |
| | 11-15 years | 27 | 10.00 |
| | > 15 years | 20 | 27.20 |
| | Total | 271 | 100.00 |
| Level of Employment | Teaching | 209 | 77.10 |
| | Non-teaching | 62 | 22.90 |
| | Total | 271 | 100.00 |

Among the 271 employees participated in the study, representation of male and female employees was almost equal. Married employees constituted 77% of the total respondents. Majority of the respondents, 42.10% were between the age of 30-40 years. When looked into educational level, post graduates constituted 64.20% and PhD. 24.30%. Also, 77.10% of the respondents were teaching faculties and 22.90% were administrative and allied staff.

Q-sort process carried out to assess the construct validity in the pretesting stage, including two experts determined the validity of the questionnaire. The higher values arrived in iteration 2 in all the three measurement models show good construct validity

**TABLE 2:** Results of Q-sort

| Q-sort | Raw Agree-ment | Cohen's Kappa | Hit Ratio |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Iteration 1** | 48% | 0.424 | 56.14% |
| **Iteration 2** | 93% | 0.919 | 82.70% |

A pilot survey was conducted to assess the reliability of the measurement scales. The Cronbach's Alphas calculated were higher than the threshold value of 0.70, ranging from 0.92 to 0.92 for the EI and EA dimensions, respectively.

Descriptive statistics are used to calculate the mean and standard deviation of the study variables. Self-management received the highest score (4.301, 0.260) among the EI dimensions, while Social-awareness received the lowest (3.907, ±0.530). The EI level of employees was found above average (3.981). Powerlessness (2.719, ±0.273) showed the highest score among EA dimensions, followed by Self-estrangement (2.502, ±0.316). Overall average of the EA dimensions was moderate (2.538)

**TABLE 3:** Mean and standard deviations of each variable

| Variables | Mean | SD |
|---|---|---|
| Self-awareness | 3.907 | 0.400 |
| Self-management | 4.031 | 0.260 |
| Relationship management | 3.956 | 0.340 |
| Social-awareness | 4.019 | 0.530 |
| Utilization of emotions | 3.990 | 0.170 |
| Powerlessness | 2.719 | 0.273 |
| Meaninglessness | 2.394 | 0.262 |
| Self-estrangement | 2.502 | 0.316 |

To determine the sampling adequacy and suitability of data for factor analysis, the Kaiser- Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test and Bartlett's test of Sphericity were conducted respectively. A higher KMO value, greater than 0.80, and a critical tail value of Bartlett's test, less than the level of significance, 0.05, determined the data's suitability for factor analysis.

**TABLE 4:** KMO and Reliability Coefficients of each construct

| Emotional Intelligence | KMO: | 0.883 | X$^2$ Bartlett: | 4432.17 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Cronbach Alpha(α)): | 0.913 | Df: | 946 |
| | | | Tail Critical value: p | 0.000 |
| Employee Alienation | KMO: | 0.914 | X2 Bartlett: | 3020.25 |
| | Cronbach Alpha(α): | 0.924 | Df: | 216 |
| | | | Tail Critical value: p | 0.000 |

An exploratory factor analysis was performed to identify the factors explaining the EI and EA phenomena in HEIs during this pandemic. Ten factors were explored which explained the EI of employees up to 64.42 percent and five factors explained the EA of employees up to 67.93 percent. The factors were extracted using the varimax rotation method. All factors with Eigen values greater than one were deemed significant. EI had ten factors with Eigen values greater than one, and EA had five factors with Eigen values greater than one. However, two EI factors with one loaded variable each and low explained variance were excluded from further analysis. Variables with a factor loading of less than 0.5 were dropped

during the factor analysis process because they were thought to be less important in explaining the EI and EA of employees in HEIs during this pandemic. The factors were named based on the closeness of the variables in the underlying factors

**TABLE 5:** Factors identified and their explained variance of EI

| Factor No. | Factors | Variance Explained % |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Self- management with positive outlook | 12.043 |
| 2 | Empathy | 9.905 |
| 3 | Self-confidence | 6.919 |
| 4 | Apprehension of emotions | 6.210 |
| 5 | Organizational awareness | 5.455 |
| 6 | Relationship management | 5.215 |
| 7 | Sharing and caring | 5.163 |
| 8 | Managing Situation | 5.051 |

**TABLE 6:** Factors identified and their explained variance of EA

| Factor No. | Factors | Variance Explained % |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Meaninglessness | 18.646 |
| 2 | Powerlessness | 18.531 |
| 3 | Self-estrangement | 15.213 |
| 4 | Dissatisfaction | 8.515 |
| 5 | Low Involvement | 7.078 |

Linear regression carried out to identify the critical factors, resulted in adjusted R Square value of 0.974 for EI and 0. .993 for EA component, which are good values and it means the factors taken explain up to 97.4% and 99.3% of variance of EI and EA respectively. The F value for regression is very high at 995.163 for EI and 7505.730 for EA and is significant. This means the

regression equation is statistically significant and both are good models. The Standardised Beta (regression Co- efficient value) are provided in the table and listed in descending order. All the beta values are significant at 0.000 levels

**TABLE 7:** The Standardised Beta Co-efficient values EI in decreasing order

| Factor No. | Beta Co – efficient (standardised) | Factor Name |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | 0.550 | Self- management with positive outlook |
| 2 | 0.462 | Empathy |
| 3 | 0.333 | Self-confidence |
| 4 | 0.294 | Apprehension of emotions |
| 5 | 0.263 | Organizational awareness |
| 7 | 0.282 | Relationship management |
| 6 | 0.244 | Sharing and caring |
| 8 | 0.201 | Managing situation |

**TABLE 8:** The Standardised Beta Co-efficient values EA in decreasing order

| Factor No. | Beta Co – efficient (standardised) | Factor Name |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | 0.576 | Meaninglessness |
| 2 | 0.530 | Powerlessness |
| 3 | 0.487 | Self-Estrangement |
| 4 | 0.328 | Dissatisfaction |
| 5 | 0.188 | Low Participation |

# Discussion and Analysis

The study aimed to identify the critical factors impacting EI and EA of employees in HEIs during Covid-19 pandemic. The pandemic has increased the stress load across and within organizations, and lots of repercussions upon the personal and professional lives of working men and women created an unprecedented emergency. The result depicted suitable factors of EI and EA specific to HEIs during COVID 19 pandemic apart from the extensively discussed parameters in the literature. Based on the results of the analysis carried out, employees of HEIs were exhibiting a good level of EI during this pandemic and only medium level of alienation was found among them. This shows that Employees were able to cope with this challenging, turbulent situation by managing their emotions well, in order to protect their family, health, job etc.

Among the identified EI factors, self-management with positive outlook was derived as the most critical factor which explained the maximum variance with highest *Beta* co- efficient. Managing emotions under any context and keeping a positive outlook helps to overcome unprecedented crises in our life, hence accorded high importance. The second critical factor, Empathy shows the significance of understanding other's feelings, pain and having empathy during such pandemic conditions than isolate yourself from them. Self-confidence, the third critical factor reiterates the importance of being strong, confident and alert to face any pandemic situation. Apprehension of emotions was the fourth factor, pointing towards the fact that understanding our emotions and the underlying feelings from which the particular emotion has been evolved, helps to overcome many unprecedented crises. The significance of knowing the rules and policies of the organisation to reduce the work stress is explored through the fifth factor- organizational awareness. The sixth factor relationship management depicted the importance of maintaining good

relationships with others to avail good social support during tough times. Lesser important factors were sharing and caring and managing situations which emphasised the significance of sharing our problems with others and helping others to overcome their problems and managing challenging situations with courage.

Among the identified EA factors, highest level of EA perception was meaninglessness which impacted employees in HEIs during this pandemic. Second factor was powerlessness, arrived due to perception of lack of autonomy and freedom in the work being carried out by the employees. The third factor, self-estrangement showed that employees lack sense of realisation or personal fulfilment from the work carried out by them. The last two factors expressed their dissatisfaction in work and their low involvement in the daily affairs of the organization leading to alienation.

The results showed the development of medium level of EA among employees during this pandemic. But it was also found out that many employees were able to emotionally manage these situations to a great extent to avoid its impact on their professional life. But the development of this medium level alienation among employees during this period should be addressed to reduce its impact on organisational functions. This can be achieved by giving training to employees on critical identified EI factors, to enhance their EI. Organisation can give better support to employees by understanding their problems, acknowledging and rewarding their work, giving more autonomy in work, providing a healthy and safe work environment and training them to handle such unprecedented challenging situations.

## Conclusion:

The Identified factors can provide a line of sight to guide employees in enhancing their EI and address EA behaviour in parallel. Organizations should understand the emotions, their employees are dealing with, so they can precisely empathize, communicate and lead through such unprecedented chaotic time. This may reduce the perception of meaningless, powerlessness and self-estrangement to contribute better in their work. Training can be given to employees to enhance their EI to face such pandemics with more confidence and courage so as to overcome the negative feelings and perception evolved due to Covid-19 pandemic.

The result of this study should be used within its limitations, which also provides opportunities for future research. Only occupational dimensions of alienation are discussed in this study. The sample in this study includes individuals only from higher education sector. Researchers can replicate this study taking sample from different sectors to have a comparative analysis of the influence of EI on Employee alienation.

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