

Chapter 9

The Relationship Between Social Justice Issues and Emotional Intelligence (EI): A Literature Review

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ABSTRACT

This chapter discussed issues of injustice as often affecting the emotional, and in some cases, the physical well-being of a person. In recent years, researchers have begun to explore the role of Emotional Intelligence (EI) in creating awareness when it comes to social justice issues related to areas such as racism, sexism, heterosexism, etc. The purpose of this chapter is twofold: First, to concentrate on the area of social justice issues to find out what the literature has explored in terms of the role Emotional Intelligence (EI) might play when it comes to dealing with social oppression, and second, to advocate emotional intelligence traits that can be successfully used to cope with social oppression. We reviewed the literature as a way to deepen our understanding of how to foster “socially conscious” practices within the workplace. The chapter has implications for Human Resource Development (HRD) practitioners to remind them of the responsibility they have to encourage and welcome studies and practices addressing critical aspects such as social justice issues as a way to help ensure a productive and safe workplace. Through this review of the literature, we found that emotional intelligence traits, if practiced responsibly, can make society a better place for everyone to live and work in.

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INTRODUCTION

Injustice often affects the emotional and in some cases the physical well-being of a person (Parzefall & Salin, 2010). In recent years, researchers have begun to explore the role of Emotional Intelligence (EI) in creating awareness when it comes to social justice issues related to areas such as racism, sexism, heterosexism, etcetera (Wilson, 2008; Zembylas, 2007). This research is increasingly becoming important within the field of Human Resource Development (HRD). Fenwick and Bierema (2008) have identified an increasing body of research addressing the trend of “socially conscious” practices in organizations. The purpose of this paper is to explore what role emotional intelligence can play when dealing with social justice issues within the context of HRD. We cited some examples of social media incidents to indicate the recent trend of presence or lack of emotional incidents in dealing with social issues. Specifically, we conducted a literature review to explore this topic. Despite the fact that one of the earliest studies done on the use of emotion and racism was conducted over twenty years ago (Essed, 1991), a dearth of research is still noticeable in this area.

In this chapter we have discussed social media trends and attitudes affecting activities of people in the social network citing the papers on social media. The idea is to identify the characteristics related to EI in social media sites that play important role in determining behavior of people influencing their productivity and performance at the workplace. “Workplace” is used in this paper comprised of quite a broad spectrum to include both for profit and non-profit organizations (Universities, healthcare, sports organizations and corporate sector). The paper also highlights some of the recent selected critical incidents involved in social media and their resulting consequences to employees involved. The authors think that these incidents can serve as important lessons in helping to grow emotional intelligence of the employees involved, and the readers in general. This is done to find out cues about what behavior and attitudes are responsible to create problems for the users. This is followed by the discussion on EI traits that may help prevent the social injustice related incidents.

Yet, increasing incidents of injustice related to social justice issues such as sexism, classism, and racism remain startling and ask for our attention. The following data on oppression expresses the suffering of people and appeals to our need for proper action. In a study (Choi et al., 2011) concerning Black, gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people attending a Black, gay pride festival, 57% reported experiences of racism and 43% reported experiences of homophobia. Choi et al. (2011) revealed the following alarming data that demands our attention:

A study of Latino gay and bisexual men in New York, Miami, and Los Angeles found widespread experiences of homophobia and racism; 91% of participants reported hearing negative perceptions about homosexuality while growing up, 70% reported having felt that their homosexuality would hurt their family, and 62% reported having experienced sexual objectification by other gay men owing to their race... A survey of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender Asian and Pacific Islander (API) men and women in New York found that 82% had personally experienced racism in the gay community and 96% believed that homophobia was a problem in API communities. (p. 145-146)

While the data presented above only includes oppression related to racism and heterosexism, the numbers compel us to do something regarding these issues that are taking place in the real world as they filter into our work world as well. A 2012 report by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI, 2012)

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