

# How Does Emotional Intelligence Influence Job Performance? A Case Study Among Sales Personnel in Central Region of Malaysia

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## Abstract

The purpose of this study is to determine the relationship between emotional intelligence and job performance among sales personnel in sports retail companies. This is a quantitative study in which questionnaires being distributed to respondents. A total of 144 responses were collected from sales personnel of sports retail companies in the Central Region of Malaysia. Emotional intelligence was measured using Wong and Law's Emotional Intelligence Scale consisted of 16 items and job performance was measured using the Individual Work Performance Questionnaire consisted of 18 items. Data were analysed using descriptive analysis by SPSS statistical software version 23 and structural equation modelling by Smart PLS version 4.0.9.5. Results indicated that there was a significant positive and moderate relationship between emotional intelligence and employee job performance. This implies that emotional intelligence is closely related to employee job performance, and emotional intelligence has an important impact on job performance. A few recommendations were suggested that are organization can maintain the high level of transformational leadership by initiating an emotional intelligence training program for the sale personnel. Suggestions were also provided for future research including collecting data from different job levels about the studied variables.

**Keywords:** Emotional Intelligence, Job Performance, Sales Personal

## Introduction

The market rivalry environment is becoming increasingly complex and changeable as society continues to develop and economic globalisation deepens. However, what remains unchanged in the changes is the unremitting pursuit of high performance. In fact, employee job performance has a direct impact on the company's growth and survival (Roy & Tiwari, 2019). Thus, there are many factors that affect employee job performance (Omar et al., 2020; Diamantidis & Chatzoglou, 2019), and emotional intelligence is one of the factors that may affect job performance

(Mahdinezhad et al., 2017; Welikala & Dayarathna, 2017; Zainal et al., 2017; Khassawneh et al., 2022).

Based on the records of the Department of Statistics Malaysia, the wholesale and retail trade sector has grown rapidly. In 2018, the establishment of wholesale and retail trade sector was 469,024, an increase of 26% from 370,725 in 2013. Therefore, it plays a significant role in the contribution of Malaysia's GDP. Sultana et al. (2020) pointed out that the performance of employees in the retail industry may lead to the company's success or failure. Meanwhile, Zainal et al. (2017) found that emotional intelligence of employees plays an important role for employee job performance in the service industry.

Nowadays, organization often focus on its performance, while ignoring the factors that influence on employee performance (Diamantidis & Chatzoglou, 2019). Omar et al. (2020) pointed out that factors such as employee achievements, recognition and work itself will affect employee performance. Wen et al. (2019) found that as organisations continue to review and criticise the way employees interact and deal with the people they serve, employee performance declines. According to Aqqad et al. (2019), human resource managers have begun not only to evaluate employee performance through the delivered output but also to evaluate the efficiency of their dealings with colleagues and staff. This imbalance work environment has placed Malaysia as the 80th happiest country in the world compared with overall ranking for of countries, and happiness is tied to emotional intelligence (Chamorro-Premuzic et al., 2007).

However, Mahdinezhad et al. (2017) argued that an organisation should consider the employee's contextual and task performance when assessing and analysing an employee's overall effectiveness and efficiency. Given the constant development of the company and the continuous improvement of market standards, achieving the greatest level of performance is becoming increasingly difficult (Petera et al., 2020). Other than that, expansion of technological advancement and development are inseparable from growing performance demands, which is crucial in the service industry (Roy & Tiwari, 2019).

The growth of the service industry seems to depend on the performance of service employees (Zainal et al., 2017). In order to achieve common tasks and good performance, it is necessary to pay more attention to the needs of others and provide emotional support to gain cooperation with the others (Khassawneh et al., 2022). It has been determined that the interruption of internal communication may lead to confusion, uncertainty, hostility and reduced productivity, which will affect the job performance (Salleh & Abdul Rahman, 2014). Mahdinezhad et al. (2017) claimed that employee job performance would not increase until they are given training to change and correct their behaviours.

A recent study by Sambu (2019) found that, when employees are unable to cope with stress, the likelihood for turnover will increase, some of which are dismissals. It is surprising to note that 29% of the Malaysian workforce (15 to 65 years old) is experiencing mental health problems resulting in employee absenteeism, poor job performance and turnover (Chua, 2020). Salleh and Abdul Rahman (2014) stated that the emotional bond between employees and customers can never be stoked by a product, price, location, promotion, or even technical solutions. Another study by Othman and Syed Muhsin (2020) found that frontline service employees are usually exposed to extremely high stress and emotional barriers, which directly or indirectly affect performance.

Mahdinezhad et al. (2017) suggested that employee job performance would not increase until they are given training to change and correct their behaviours. In short, emotional intelligence is an important factor that affects employee's job performance. However, there is a gap in research on the relationship between emotional intelligence and job performance, especially in retail

industry. Therefore, this research will examine on the relationship between emotional intelligence and job performance among sales personnel in sports retail companies.

## Literature Review

### Brief Overview of Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence refers to the quality of a person in terms of emotion, will and ability to withstand setbacks (Dhani & Sharma, 2016). Goleman (2006) described emotional intelligence consists of character, personality, soft skills and competence. Emotional intelligence is a concept corresponding to the intelligence quotient (IQ) put forward by psychologists in recent years (Manickam & Latha, 2021). In other words, improving emotional intelligence means turning the part that cannot control emotions into the part that can control emotions, thereby enhancing the ability to understand and get along with others (Hasson, 2014).

Awareness of emotional intelligence is not recent, Salovey and Mayer (1990) defined emotional intelligence as the individual's ability to monitor the feelings and emotions of oneself and others, distinguish them, and use the information to guide their own thoughts and actions. Subsequently, Goleman (1995) set out a framework of emotional intelligence as the individual's ability to know oneself, manage oneself, motivate oneself, understand others, and manage others. Later, Bar-on (2000) proposed that emotional intelligence is the sum of a series of emotional, personal, and interpersonal abilities that affect people to cope with environmental needs and pressures.

Serrat (2017) believed that people with high emotional intelligence are acutely aware of their own feelings and can detect the emotions of others. Emotional ups and downs can influence on thinking, and emotional state also affects problem-solving and many other abilities (Lyubomirsky, S., & Nolen-Hoeksema, 1995). Salovey and Mayer (1990) proposed an intriguing theoretical framework for studying emotional intelligence and its related abilities (Cherniss & Goleman, 2001), and defined emotional intelligence as a subset of social intelligence, involving "the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions."

But at this time, the definition of emotional intelligence and the division of structure are all summed up on the basis of an extensive review of relevant literature, and there is no empirical basis (Fiori & Vesely-Maillefer, 2018). Mayer & Salovey (1997) refined the dimensions into four which start from the most basic emotion perception and expression ability to the emotion management and regulation ability, and are arranged in the order of the development of each ability, as shown in Figure 1. Meanwhile, Palmer et al. (2005) pointed out that the four dimensions of emotional intelligence should be hierarchical.

Mayer and Salovey (1997) pointed out that emotional perception is the ability to recognize and express emotions from one's own physical state, emotional experience and thoughts. It also includes the ability to recognize and express emotions from others, artistic activities, and language (Odukoya et al., 2020). Therefore, Wong and Law (2017) argued that in order to perceive emotions, understanding emotion indicators and accurately interpreting their meaning is the first step. Meanwhile, the ability to use emotions to facilitate thoughts is the ability to promote cognitive behaviours and make problem-solving, reasoning, decision-making and creative behaviours more effective (Mayer et al., 2000; Mayer & Salovey, 1997).

In other words, individuals with strong emotional use ability will be able to select and prioritize the cognitive activities that are most beneficial to their present emotional state and adjust their emotions to better adapt to a particular situation (Fiori & Vesely-Maillefer, 2018). Besides, Mayer and Salovey (1997) defined the ability to understand and analyse emotions as the ability to recognize the relationship between emotional experience and language expression. More, the

abilities to understand emotions is the ability that involves recognising the possibility and causes of emotional transformation (Ackley, 2016).

Joseph and Newman (2010) viewed the ability to recognise the possibility and the causes of emotional transformation as cognitively significant. Lastly, management of emotion and regulation ability induced according to the information obtained, the ability to judge and maturely enter or leave a certain emotion (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). According to MacCann et al. (2020), managing emotions is the ability to control our own and others' emotions. It is the ability to perceive the emotions related to oneself and others and to regulate the relationship between the emotions of others, etc. MacCann et al. (2020), highlighted that emotion regulation is the pinnacle of emotional intelligence.

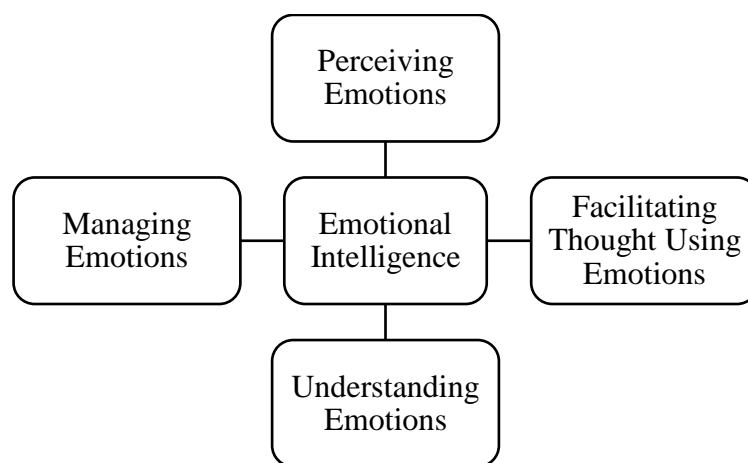


Figure 1. The Mayer and Salovey (1997) four-branch model of emotional intelligence (EI) abilities (Source: Fiori and Vesely-Maillefer, 2019: 26)

### Brief Overview of Job Performance

Job performance has been considered one of the major keys to success for organisations and individuals (Sonnentag et al., 2008). Roy and Tiwari (2019) regarded that employee job performance directly contributes to the company's growth and survival. Murphy (1989) defined performance as a set of behaviours related to the goals of the organization or organisational unit in which the individual works. Viswesvaran and Ones (2000) defined individual performance as "scalable actions, behaviour and outcomes that employees engage in or bring about that are linked with and contribute to organizational goals."

Research by Tarmidi and Arsajah (2019) demonstrated that employee job performance has a significant impact on the organization. According to Campbell et al. (1993), performance is synonymous with behaviour. It is the actions or behaviours that people actually do that are related to the organisation's goals and can be observed, and these behaviours can be completely controlled by the individual (Murphy 1989; Campbell et al., 1993). Borman et al. (1997) believed that performance is behaviours with evaluable elements, what people do at work, and these behaviours have a positive or negative effect on organizational efficiency. Therefore, they proposed a two-dimensional model of performance consisting of task performance and contextual performance (refer Figure 2).

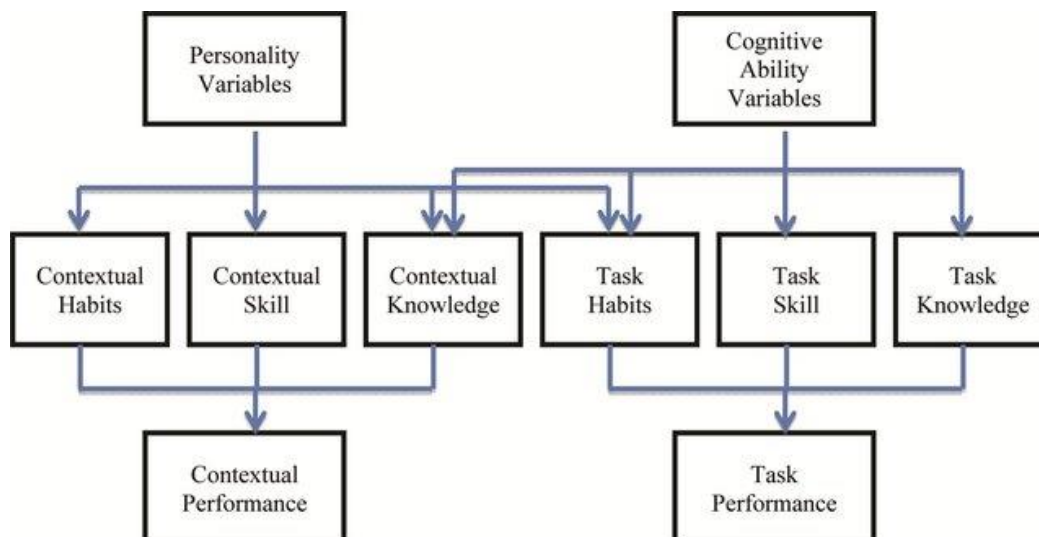


Figure 2. A Theory of Individual Differences in Task and Contextual Performance (Source: Motowidlo, Borman, and Schmit, 1997)

Borman and Motowidlo (1993) proposed a multi-dimensional model of performance based on the concept proposed by Campbell (1990). They believed that behavioural performance includes task performance and contextual performance. Task performance is only a prescribed behaviour related to specific job proficiency, and contextual performance refers to spontaneous behaviour related to specific job proficiency, and contextual performance refers to spontaneous behaviour (Motowidlo and Schmit, 1999; Motowidlo et al., 1997). Murphy (1989) suggested that task behaviour can be regarded as task performance. Mahdinezhad et al. (2017) stated that direct or indirect actions related to key job tasks are included in task performance.

Salleh and Abdul Rahman (2014) stated activities that are not formally part of the employee's job description are included in contextual performance. Borman and Motowidlo (1993) made the distinction between task and contextual performance because they were concerned that research and practise in the area of employee selection tended to focus solely on one aspect of the performance domain, ignoring or downplaying another that is equally important for organisational effectiveness. Murphy (1989) regarded task performance as achievement of work-related objectives and duties.

Borman and Motowidlo (1993) defined task performance as the behaviour prescribed by the organization, which is related to specific task activities and can directly improve the technical core of the organization. Task performance refers to the part of the performance indicators that are directly related to the work output and can directly evaluate the work results (Koopmans et al., 2011). Taken together, task performance is recognised as one of the work behaviour dimensions, which can independently contribute to the effectiveness of the organization (Podaskoff et al., 2009).

Contextual performance, also referred to as organisational citizenship behaviour (Ramos-Villagrasa et al., 2019). Borman and Motowidlo (1993) regarded contextual performance as spontaneous behaviour and has nothing to do with specific tasks, but it is also very important to organisational efficiency and can be specific activities provide a wide range of organizational, social and psychological environments. Together these studies provide important insights that only under easy conditions, contextual performance is the only predictor of perceived effectiveness (Podaskoff et al., 2000).

This study will use the individual work performance questionnaire (IWPQ) developed by Koopmans (2015) which comprised of three dimensions: task performance (TP), contextual



performance (CP), and counterproductive work behaviour (CWB). It combined all relevant dimensions of individual work performance into a single questionnaire that could be used by workers in a variety of jobs (Dåderman et al., 2020). This questionnaire has adopted the basis from Motowidlo et al. (1997) and Campbell et al. (1993). In addition, several studies have shown that the construct validity of the Individual Work Performance Questionnaire is acceptable (Dåderman, et al., 2020; Koopmans et al., 2016; Ramos-Villagrasa et al., 2019; Widyastuti & Hidayat, 2018). The relationship between emotional intelligence and job performance is discussed further next.

### **Relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Job Performance**

Individual's competency in an organisation is very essential in human resource management. Beram et al (2020) stated that the Public Service Department puts great importance on the competency practices among civil servants. Hence, competence is the ability of an individual to perform a task (Lenggan, 2019). Rusle (2018) introduced some categories of competencies for organisations, namely technical, methodological, personal, and social competencies. Suarta et al., (2017) stated that the level of diligence is determined by the employee's ability in terms of knowledge, attitudes, group cooperation, problem-solving skills, and various other management skills.

Practices performed in an organisation can produce success, that is the organisational commitment to competencies and motivation followed by job satisfaction and employee self-efficacy (Hartini, 2021; Gani et al., 2018). According to Yap et al., (2021), numerous factors namely internal and external political influence, lack of finance for training purposes, lack of project management training, time constraints, and bureaucracy are barriers to engineers in the Public Works Department from acquiring the needed competencies.

Based on a study on the career of an employee who practices competency development, individual characteristics are closely related to successful job performance (Nasrin & Morshidi, 2019; Boyatzis, 1982). Indicators namely competitiveness, ability, value, competence, expertise, and skills are among the key characteristics in determining a person's success in the career world (Abdul Rashid et al., 2020; Stewart et al., 2019).

In this Fourth Industrial Revolution (Industry 4.0) era, many experts predicted that human tasks will be replaced by the robotic energy. As a result, millions of people might lose their jobs, especially in the manufacturing sector. Hence, all parties must be prepared with the appropriate or advanced skills so that these employees remain relevant and can give their contributions to the industry.

Over the years, studies have been conducted to investigate the role of emotions and emotional intelligence in improving job performance (Bar-On, 2006; Cherniss & Goleman, 2003), as employee performance is often regarded as one of the most critical aspects of corporate growth (Roy & Tiwari, 2019). Effective employee performance reflects their desire to contribute to the performance of the company objective through their work. Therefore, the concept of emotional intelligence has become a prominent predictor of work-related behaviours in recent years (Salleh & Abdul Rahman, 2014).

Several research have been carried out to investigate the relationship between the emotional intelligence and job performance in various contexts (Alheet & Hamdan, 2021; Manickam & Latha, 2021; Chong et al, 2019; Welikala & Dayarathna, 2017). Despite the fact that the results are not always consistent, most studies have discovered the relationship between the emotional intelligence and job performance (Salleh & Abdul Rahman, 2014; Shamsuddin & Abdul Rahman,

2014). Welikala and Dayarathna (2017) found that the higher the emotional intelligence, the better the job performance.

Sambu (2019) claimed that employees who are better at managing and regulating their emotions have an impact on how they operate and complete their jobs and tasks. Meanwhile, Aqqad et al. (2019) stated that having a firm grasp of the value of emotional intelligence in the workplace can assist managers in developing and refining their emotional intelligence talents, resulting in a more positive and committed workforce. According to O'Boyle et al. (2011), emotional intelligence fosters individuals' creativity, which aids in changing individuals' job performance.

As noted by Zheng et al. (2021), companies must regard emotional intelligence as a challenging variable to maintain high performance and competitive advantage growth. Khassawneh et al., (2022) suggested that organizations should acknowledge the importance of emotional intelligence in creating human capital to cultivate high-performance workforce. Taken together, these studies supported that emotional intelligence is critical to employee job performance. Based on the literature review, the hypothesis is developed as follows:

H1: There is a significant relationship between emotional intelligence and job performance among sales personal of sport retail companies in central region of Malaysia.

### **Methodology**

This study employed a correlational research design to determine the relationship between emotional intelligence and job performance among sales personnel of sports retail companies in the central region of Malaysia. The study population includes senior sales associates and sales associates working in sports retail companies in the central region of Malaysia and 144 samples were taken as the respondents of the study. IBM SPSS statistical software version 28 and SmartPLS 4.0.9.5 were used to analyse the data in this study. Descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation were tested to measure the level of emotional intelligence and job performance among the respondents of study.

Meanwhile, SmartPLS was used to analyse the linear relationships between emotional intelligence and job performance. To measure emotional intelligence which is the independent variable for this study, the data were collected through the Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS) by Wong and Law, 2002). This scale has developed based on conceptualization of emotional intelligence from Mayer and Salovey (1997). This scale is measured from four dimensions: self-emotional appraisal (SEA), others' emotional appraisal (OEA), regulation of emotion (ROE), and use of emotion (UOE), with a total of 16 items.

Likert scale types range from 1 to 5, i.e., 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree, were used to measure the respondents' emotional intelligence. Cronbach's alpha values was 0.742, which means the scale is considered as reliable. Meanwhile for the dependent variable of this study which is job performance, the data were collected through the Individual Work Performance Questionnaire (IWPQ) by Koopmans (2015). IWPQ has used Motowidlo et al. (1997) and Campbell et al. (1993) work as the basis to develop the measurement.

The questionnaire consists of a scale of 18 items to measure job performance with three main dimensions: task performance (TP), contextual performance (CP), and counterproductive work behaviour (CWB). Likert scale type from 1 to 5, i.e., 1 = never, 2 = seldom, 3 = occasionally, 4 = often, and 5 = always, were used to measure respondents' job performance. Cronbach's alpha values was 0.765, which means the scale is considered reliable.

## Findings

### Demographic Profile

Based on the total collected response, it is identified that 54.8% were female respondents and 45.2% were male. Of the 93 respondents, generally were Chinese (%=57), followed by Malays (%=38.7). Indians and other races were the least, each accounting for 2.2% of all respondents. Meanwhile, most of the respondents were single (%=79.6), while others were married (%=20.4). Majority of the respondents were Malaysian Certificate of Education holders (%=39.8), followed by diploma holders (%=31.2) and bachelor's degree holders (%=23.7). Among them, Lower Certificate of Education (%=2.2) and other education levels (%=3.2) accounted for the smallest proportions of education levels. Among them, the majority are 26 to 35 years old (%=51.6), followed by under 25 years old (%=37.6), and finally over 36 years old (%=10.8). According to demographic information, most respondents had less than 7 years of work experience (%=65.6), followed by 8 to 15 years of work experience (%=26.9), and then 16+ years of work experience (%=7.5).

### 1 Level of Emotional Intelligence among Sales Personnel

Table 1 presented the level of emotional intelligence among sales personnel at the studied companies is at a moderate level ( $M=3.60$ ,  $SD=0.806$ ). They were good at identifying their own deep emotions (SEA), especially whether they are happy, but they are not good at observing the emotions of others (OEA).

Table 1

#### *Level of Emotional Intelligence*

Dimension	Mean	SD	Level
Self-emotional appraisal (SEA)	3.78	0.963	High
Others' emotional appraisal (OEA)	3.57	0.869	Moderate
Use of Emotion (UOE)	3.55	0.958	Moderate
Regulation of emotion (ROE)	3.51	0.974	Moderate
<b>Overall Mean for Emotional Intelligence</b>	<b>3.60</b>	<b>0.806</b>	<b>Moderate</b>

According to Table 1, the self-emotional appraisal (SEA) obtained a high level ( $M=3.78$ ,  $SD=0.963$ ), indicating that the respondents have a good understanding of how they actually felt and can also distinguish whether they are happy or not each time. This indicates that respondents have a strong ability to perceive and acknowledge their emotions better than most. In addition, the respondents are also able to recognize their own deep emotions and express them naturally, as the majority of the respondents have a good understanding of why they have a certain emotion most of the time.

On top of that, others' emotional appraisal (OEA) obtained a moderate level ( $M=3.57$ ,  $SD: 0.869$ ) which explain that some respondents were not good at observing the emotions of others, however, there are still some respondents who were sensitive to the feelings and emotions of others. In other words, respondents' intuition about others' feelings and emotions was still at an intermediate level. The use of emotion (UOE) dimension is also recorded at a moderate level with a mean score of 3.55 and a standard deviation of 0.958.

Findings show that the sales personnel have the ability to use emotions to drive performance, just as emotionally intelligent respondents always encouraged themselves to do their best, yet some doubted their competence. As for regulation of emotion (ROE), the mean score of 3.51 ( $SD=0.974$ ) has shown that the respondents have the ability to control temper and can deal with difficulties



rationally but the capability to control emotions needs to be improved. This means that it may take some time for respondents to recover from psychological distress. Having said that, half of the respondents had good control over their emotions ( $M=3.54$ ,  $SD=1.038$ ), although very few respondents were able to calm down quickly when very angry ( $M=3.45$ ,  $SD=1.068$ ).

## 2 Level of Job Performance among Sales Personnel

Table 2 illustrates the findings of job performance among sales personnel of sport retailers companies in the central region of Malaysia. Mean score of 3.05 ( $SD: 0.710$ ) indicates that respondents' job performance is at a moderate level. Sales personnel perform moderately on core substantive or technical tasks that are critical to their work (TP). Likewise, they are less interested in performing tasks that are not directly related to work tasks but have a greater impact on the organizational, social, and psychological environment (CP).

Table 2

### *Level of Job Performance*

Dimension	Mean	SD	Level
Task performance (TP)	3.06	1.234	Moderate
Contextual performance (CP)	3.02	1.121	Moderate
Counterproductive work behaviour (CWB)	3.10	1.265	Moderate
<b>Overall Mean for Job Performance</b>	<b>3.05</b>	<b>0.710</b>	<b>Moderate</b>

Based on Table 2, the mean score of 3.06 ( $SD=1.234$ ) for task performance indicates that respondents are focused on the work outcomes they needed to achieve but unable to identify priorities. It means sales personnel of the companies studied know how to accomplish their sales goals, but do not know what is more important at work. Apart from that, the majority of respondents were not good at planning and organizing their work and rarely managed their time well. Besides that, it is identified that contextual performance dimension is at moderate level ( $M=3.02$ ,  $SD=1.121$ ).

The results show that respondents were show effort to keep their work-related knowledge and work skills, but reluctant to actively participate in meetings and/or consultations. This indicates that sales personnel are more likely to self-improve than to accept and learn from feedback during engagement sessions. For counterproductive work behaviour, the mean score of 3.10 ( $SD=1.265$ ) indicates that destructive behaviour of the respondents is moderate, as respondents were more likely to talk about negative aspects of their work with people outside the organization than to complain about minor work-related issues at work. It implies that negativity towards employees of the companies studied is moderate. Just like more than half of the respondents paid little attention to the negative aspects of their work environment.

## Relationship Between Emotional Intelligence and Employee Performance

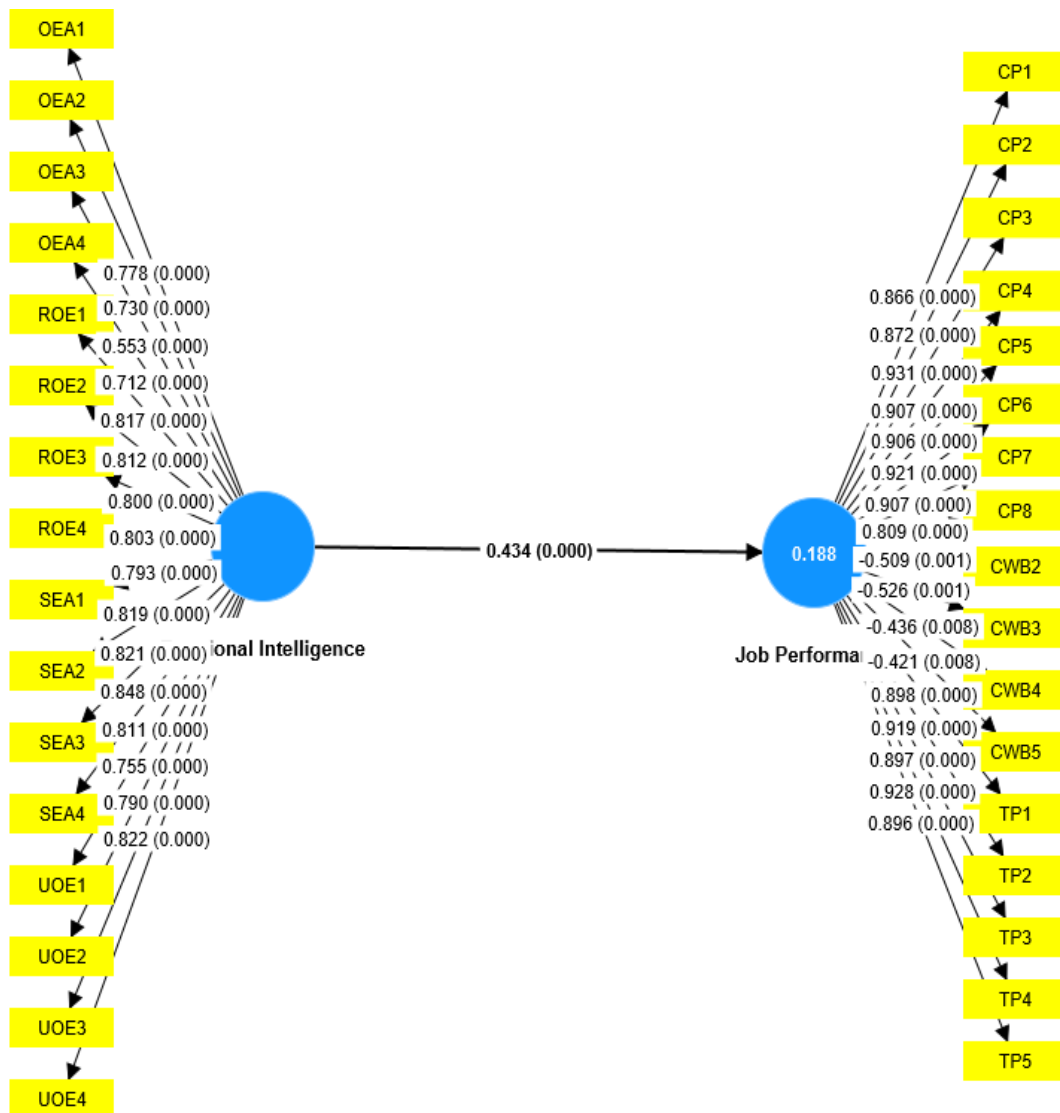
The data obtained were analysed through IBM Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23.0 and Smart PLS version 4.0.9.5. This is because Partial Least Square (PLS) is able to analyse all the constructs involved at the same time (Farooq and Markovic, 2016; Thaker et al., 2020). Thus, in this study, researchers use SmartPLS software based on structural equation modelling (SEM) using the PLS method. SEM is the second-generation multivariate data analysis method most commonly used for research in the social sciences because it can test theoretically supported linear and additional causal models (Haenlin and Kaplan, 2004).

Thus, the findings of this study are presented in Table 3 and the analysis of a model to measure the relationship between emotional intelligence and job performance is shown in Figure 3. Based on Ramayah et al. (2018), the effect of the relationship between two relationships can be known through the analysis of R<sup>2</sup>. The findings show that the value of R<sup>2</sup> obtained is 0.188. This means that the effect of emotional intelligence on job performance is 18.8% in this study. The t-value obtained is 5.479. According to Ramayah et al (2018), this t-value explains that the relationship between these two variables is significant. As a result, the hypothesis of the study is supported.

Table 3

Summary of analysis findings on the relationship between emotional intelligence and job performance

Hypothesis	Relationship	Path Coeff	t-Value	p-Value	Decision	R <sup>2</sup>
H1	Emotional Intelligence → Job Performance	0.434	5.479	0.000	Supported	0.188



SEA=Self-emotion Appraisal, OEA=Others' emotion appraisal, ROE=Regulation of emotion, UOE=Use of emotion, CP=contextual performance, TP=Task performance, CWB=Counterproductive Behaviour

Figure 3. Analysis of the model to measure the relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Job Performance

## Discussion and Conclusion

### 1 The level of Emotional Intelligence Among Sales Personnel in Sports Retail Companies

One of the objectives of this research is to determine the level of emotional intelligence among sales personnel in sports retail companies. The results showed that the sales personnel had a moderate level of emotional intelligence. Across all four dimensions of emotional intelligence, self-emotional appraisal was at the highest level of emotional intelligence among respondents in this study. This implies that sales personnel at the companies studied are good at identifying their own deep emotions, especially whether they are happy.

This result corroborates the ideas of Wong and Law (2002) that people should have a good understanding of their emotions before they can regulate their emotions. Meanwhile, others' emotional appraisal obtained the average level of emotional intelligence in this study. This means that sales personnel at the companies studied are not sensitive enough to emotions and feelings of those around them. This result is in contrast to Wong and Law (2002), who found that people should not ignore that many of their emotional responses are stimulated by the emotions of others, and that their understanding of their own emotions is related to the ability to understand the emotions of others.

Better understanding of customers through their reactions is very important in the retail industry as it leads to customer support and better performance. This view appears to be supported by Kidwell et al., (2021), who note that salesperson need to understand how customers feel and why to influence their purchasing decisions. In this study, it was found that the dimension of use of emotion was also in the average level of emotional intelligence. This indicates that sales personnel still have the ability to guide or push themselves to achieve their goals.

Since working in retail may come across different types of customers, and sometimes they can affect the mood of a salesperson. Therefore, use of emotion to facilitate thoughts is important for salesperson to rethink and find solutions to dealing with customers that lead to better performance. This appears to be consistent with Shamsuddin and Rahman (2014), which found the strongest linear relationship between emotion use and job performance. Another important finding was that the average score for regulation of emotion was the lowest compared to other dimensions.

This shows that the ability of sales personnel in companies studied to respond appropriately and regulate their own and others' emotions is at a low level. The findings of the current study do not support the previous research by Zainal et al. (2017) that regulation of emotions is a major factor affecting employee job performance. Yet, it is important to regulate emotions effectively to achieve excellent job performance.

### 2 The Level of Job Performance Among Sales Personnel in Sports Retail Companies

Another objective of this research is to determine the level of job performance among sales personnel in sports retail companies. The results showed that the sales personnel had a moderate level of job performance. It reveals that sales personnel at the companies studied are dissatisfied with the company, but they still get the job done. In this study, task performance for the

respondents was at the moderate level. Respondents seem to be particularly focused on the work outcomes they need to achieve. A possible explanation for this might be that sales personnel need to meet the sales target in order to receive the sales commission.

This result reflects those of Sultana et al. (2020) who also found that sales incentives make employees do their jobs better. The current study found that the companies studied had the lowest level of contextual performance compared to other dimensions. Respondents were more concerned about their work knowledge and skills. These results are likely to be related to the sales performance. Participating in meetings may seem less important to them, but the possibility is that communication and collaboration with others are less important to them, as salesperson are all competing with each other for sales performance. This view is in the agreement with Koopmans et al. (2011), contextual performance varies with interpersonal competence.

One unanticipated finding was that counterproductive work behaviour had the highest mean score in this study. This indicates that sales personnel at the company studied are perceived to be dissatisfied with the company and may do things that harm the company's well-being. Among them, sales personnel seem to enjoy talking to people outside the organization about the negative aspects of their work. A possible explanation for this could be that they do not have the right channels to listen to their problems, and it also causes them to focus only on negative aspects of their work.

The driving force behind counterproductive work behaviour in retail can be due to the stress of the work environment, loss of trust and expectations in the organization, and more. This is further supporting the idea of Sypniewska (2020) that negative emotions develop when employees are not recognized for goal achievement. However, counterproductive work behaviour is an invisible problem, but a serious one for companies. An important goal of modern management is to fully reconcile the enthusiasm of employees and reduce employees' behaviour that damages work performance. Therefore, performance management and organizational culture management must take place within the organization to maintain a healthier work environment.

### **3 Relationship Between Emotional Intelligence and Job Performance in Sports Retail Companies**

The third objective of this study was to identify relationship between emotional intelligence and job performance among sales personnel in sports retail companies. The results showed a significant relationship between emotional intelligence and job performance in the companies studied. This finding is consistent with Alheet and Hamdan (2021) study on the relationship between emotional intelligence and job performance of Jordanian retail employees. It is undeniable that emotional intelligence plays an important role in success at work and in life, and this is supported by research by Bar-on (2006) that high performers in the workplace are significantly more emotional intelligence.

Furthermore, this positive significant correlation suggests that the higher the emotional intelligence, the better the sales personnel's job performance. The results were similar to the study conducted by Welikala and Dayarathna (2017) argue that an increase in emotional intelligence is accompanied by an increase in job performance. Having said that, although the study showed a significant positive correlation between emotional intelligence and job performance, the relationship between the variables was moderately correlated which implies that higher levels of emotional intelligence may increasingly be able to perform better.

This was inconsistent with the findings by Welikala and Dayarathna (2017), which have a strong relationship with the variables studied. However, a moderately positive correlation still shows that respondents' emotional intelligence plays a critical role in achieving good sales performance at the company. The findings of this study suggest that emotional intelligence in sales personnel

needs to be addressed. The main reason is that emotional intelligence has always been claimed to be one of the factors that makes a person successful at work. This finding is in line with those of previous studies that emotional intelligence is one of the factors that may affect job performance (Mahdinezhad et al., 2017; Welikala & Dayarathna, 2017; Zainal et al., 2017; Khassawneh et al., 2022).

### Conclusion

Employee job performance plays a vital role for organisational outcomes and success, and emotional intelligence is one of the factors that may affect job performance. In recent years, emotional intelligence has received great attention in the field of organisational behaviour and human resource management and has become a hot topic in the workplace and life. Over the past 30 years, researchers have found that emotional intelligence is an important factor in distinguishing high performers, and it is also an important determinant of success in life.

A study by Zainal et al. (2017) concluded that there is a significant relationship between emotional intelligence and employees' job performance, as evidence from Goleman (1995) shows that emotional intelligence is a person's main contributor to success in life. Taken together, the findings of this study suggest that sales personnel with high emotional intelligence are more likely to excel on the job. Therefore, improving emotional intelligence is very important for organizations.

Although the current study is based on a small sample of respondents but it provides important contribution for researchers and organizations participating in this study. The empirical findings in this study have extended the knowledge on emotional intelligence and job performance particularly in the settings of sports retail businesses in Malaysia's central region. Overall, this study strengthens the idea that employees must properly control their emotions at work in order to do task or jobs with confidence. This present study lays the groundwork for studied companies to provide appropriate training that helps develop emotional intelligence skills to improve job performance among its employees. As suggested by many researchers, companies may consider using the emotional intelligence measurement scale as a tool to assess the mental state of potential candidates during the selection and recruitment process.

The findings of this study have to be seen in light of some limitations. First, the current research only focuses on the target respondents in two sports retail companies. The sample size is small, the respondents may not be representative of other sales personnel of sports retail companies, and the study has a statistical "selection bias". Thus, further research might explore larger sample size, or other job levels, and other companies to gather more reliable and valid results.

Thus, for the future study it is recommended to apply qualitative approach such as interviews, as it is a more flexible method that allows for more in-depth data collection and more accurate screening. In addition, it is recommended to carry out emotional intelligence development training programs to improve the job performance of sales personnel. Moreover, the communication of job performance cannot be ignored, so that employees and the organization are more integrated.

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