

# Assessing the Social Intelligence of Service Sector Employees in India

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*Social Intelligence (SI) is an important skill in a workplace setting as it enables employees to maintain cordial relations, be good team players and resolve conflicts. SI is an important employee trait that affects various work related behaviors like positive work attitude, job satisfaction and management of organizational change. Thus, SI is a key employee trait to be studied within the organizational context. With this point in view, this study aims to assess the SI level of employees from three service sector industries – IT, banking, financial services and insurance (BFSI) and hospitality. Results of the study indicate that employee's SI level changes with work experience.*

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## Introduction

In a highly competitive business environment, organizations hire and retain employees with sound technical and cognitive skills. However, traditional cognitive intelligence alone does not ensure success at workplace (Singh, 2008). According to Cherniss (2000), two-thirds of competencies leading to superior performance in the workplace are emotional or social in nature. Contemporary work environment is marked by team based organizations, where employee interpersonal relations are crucial for effectiveness of such an organization. Social Intelligence (SI) is intelligence applied to how individuals behave in various social settings. It facilitates cordial interpersonal relations, understanding of social context, related norms and harmony among team members. Thus, SI is one of the important prerequisites in workplace settings. SI as a concept was first given in 1909 but very little research has been undertaken on it within organizational sphere. SI is useful in many ways as it “creates a sense of identity for the individual in addition to emphasizing self-management and interpersonal skills; more importantly, it focuses on thinking

and resultant behavior within social contexts” (Njoroge & Yazdanifard, 2014:168). Employees with low SI make others feel angry and irked through their behavior which often leads to conflict and hostility at workplace (Wawra, 2009). Socially intelligent employees are confident in social situations, confident and appropriate in expressing their feelings and emotions, capable of adapting, understanding and responding effectively, demonstrate a genuine interest in their co-workers and show a great level of self-awareness (Joseph & Lakshmi, 2010). Thus, SI is an important skill in a workplace setting enabling employees to get along with colleagues, maintain cordial relations, be good team players and work in harmony with others. In present day team based organizations SI is a crucial employee trait. A socially intelligent workforce would be able to develop relationships and business networks that will further organizational interests (Njoroge & Yazdanifard, 2014). SI positively impacts employee behaviors in terms of job related outcomes such as job satisfaction, positive work attitudes, leadership skills and management of organizational change (Njoroge & Yazdanifard, 2014).

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Previous studies in India in the realm of SI have mainly focused on assessing the SI level of school or college students (Gani & Mudasir, 2015; Sembiyan & Vishwanathan, 2012), thus, indicating an obvious gap in the research on SI in

Indian business organizations. The present study intends to address this research gap by assessing the SI level of employees from service sector industries – IT (information technology), BFSI (banking, financial services and insurance) and hospitality in India. The study also aims to study if the level of SI of employees differs with respect to demographic factors like gender, age, work experience and industry. Thorndike (1920) stated SI increases with age and experience of a person. Previous studies having assessed whether SI differs with gender show contrasting results, some of them conclude that SI does not differ with gender (Lovejoy, 2008; Mackova, 2014) whereas others hold that SI differs significantly with gender (Sembiyan & Vishwanathan, 2012). Due to lack of unanimity in the results of previous studies further research is needed to explore if SI differs with gender. Thorndike and Stein (1937) stated that SI increases with experience. Emotional intelligence (EI), a subset of SI, (Salovey & Mayer, 1991) varies with age (Singh & Srivastava, 2012). Therefore, SI should vary with age. With this point in view, this study intends to examine the differences in SI of employees with respect to gender, age, work experience and industry.

In the domain of business management research EI is a popular variable that has been widely studied and measured across various industries and cultures. EI is a subset of the wider concept of SI (Salovey & Mayer, 1990) and makes up the intrapersonal aspect of SI that focuses on knowing one’s feelings,

thoughts and emotions and managing them. However, there has been a lack of research in the area of SI due to inability to distinguish SI from general intelligence (Marlowe, 1986; Riggio, 1991) and lack of appropriate measurement scales for measuring SI (Zeidner Matthews, Roberts & MacCann, 2003). But in recent times, works of Albrecht (2006), Boyatzis and Goleman (2008) have established the importance of SI by clearing the ambiguity surrounding the construct and its tools of measurement.

The labor market increasingly rewards social skills (Deming, 2017) and more importantly, social interaction is difficult to automate (Autor, 2015). Therefore, studying and assessing social skills of employees is crucial for the success of contemporary organizations. Social skills are critical to business performance in service sector and to an employee's ability to advance at workplace. With this point in view the present study was undertaken with the intent to assess the SI level of employees in service sector industry and to explore if SI level changes with regard to certain demographic factors – gender, age, work experience and industry. Results of the study would help organizations in assessing SI level of their employees and in understanding the impact of demographic factors on SI level of employees.

### **Social Intelligence**

The term social intelligence (SI) was first used by Dewey (1909) and Lull (1911), but the modern concept was given by Thorndike's (1920) who divided

intelligence into three facets pertaining to the ability to understand and manage ideas (abstract intelligence), concrete objects (mechanical intelligence), and people (SI). Moss and Hunt (1927:108) defined SI as the "ability to get along with others". Zirkel (2000) believed that SI is closely related to an individual's personality and behavior. Those with higher degree of SI are fully aware of themselves and their environment; as a result they are well in control of their emotions; make sound decisions about their goals in life. SI competencies include social awareness and relationship management competencies, such as empathy and teamwork (Boyatzis, 2011). Silvera et al. (2001) introduced three components of SI namely, social information processing, social skills and social awareness

Although many definitions of SI have been formulated, the majority can be placed into one of two categories (Ford & Tisak, 1983): those that endorse social-cognitive skills (i.e. skills involved in planning social actions and in decoding social information) and the others that stress upon the ability to respond adaptively in social situations.

This study considers SI as the ability to understand people, social situations and social norms and to act in a socially acceptable manner. It involves the ability to read and interpret individual's behavior, mannerisms, moods, emotions and body language; knowledge of social norms and rules and socially acceptable behavior patterns in various settings; ability to communicate with others and main-

**Table 1 Definitions of Social Intelligence and Related Traits**

Social Intelligence Defined	Social Intelligence Traits
1. The ability to understand others and how they will react to situations (Silvera et al., 2001)	1. Values relationships
2. The ability to get along with others and get them to cooperate with you (Albrecht, 2006)	2. Builds trust
3. The ability to understand others (Barnes & Sternberg, 1989)	3. Builds a strong emotional base
4. The ability to interact successfully with other people (Ford & Tisak, 1983)	4. Strong interpersonal skills 5. Collaborative spirit 6. Empathetic, compassionate 7. Understands others 8. Connects with others

tain cordial interpersonal relations and ability to regulate one's own behavior, moods and emotions as per social situation. As per the study SI comprises four components, namely:

- ◆ *Social Information Processing* implies how an individual understands or makes sense of the social world. Individuals take cues from facial expressions and body language of others whom they interact with. This helps them to perceive the mood and apparent nature of the person. A five step model of social information processing elaborates how individual's process information received from the social environment (Crick & Dodge, 1994).
  - Encoding receives social cues from the environment.
  - Mental representation integrating the cues and matching it with past experiences to make sense of it.
  - Response search – Once the information is represented in a meaning-
- Response decision evaluates the potential consequences of each of the responses.
- Enactment – Selected behavioral response is acted out. Individual monitors the effect of his behavior on the environment.
- ◆ *Social Skills* includes ability to communicate with others, understand social situations and effective social role playing skills. It includes verbal skills, listening skills, ability to stay calm in social situations, being empathetic and ability to build rapport with others.
- ◆ *Social Sensitivity* is the degree of emotional responsiveness towards social events and experience (Way & Lieberman, 2010). It implies how an individual emotionally responds in various social settings. It is the ability to experience and understand the affective and emotional states of oth-

ers. Being empathetic within social setting and reciprocating such emotional responses that compliment the affective state of other individuals. Without being socially sensitive an individual cannot have good interpersonal skills.

- ◆ *Social Awareness* is the ability to understand others and what they think of you. Also includes being aware of the socio cultural values and norms. This awareness is important to act accordingly in a given social situation. Social awareness is an important attribute that shapes an individual's social perspective. It is a very important component of SI that influences the social behavior of an individual.

### **Emotional Intelligence (EI) different from Social Intelligence (SI)?**

SI consists of two key components – interpersonal and intrapersonal. These interpersonal and intrapersonal factors are of importance in the domain of emotional and SI. EI is closely related to SI. Salovey and Mayer (1990:189) defined EI as “the subset of SI that involves 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”. Salovey and Mayer's definition of EI clearly acknowledges that ‘EI is constructed under the umbrella term of SI’ and the end goal of both the intelligences – social and emotional is the same, that is, to have efficient interactions with others and act accordingly in the given situation. The intrapersonal components of SI involve understanding one's own

**SI is a broad construct that incorporates EI, which focuses on abilities related to emotional perception, thought facilitation, understanding and management of oneself and others.**

thoughts (Marlowe, 1986) and decoding social information (Fedakova & Jelenova, 2004). SI is a broad construct that incorporates EI, which focuses on abilities related to emotional perception, thought facilitation, understanding and management of oneself and others (Mayer & Geher, 1996). Thus, these skills are related to emotional side of social interactions. As a result, a new concept of ESI (EI and SI Competencies) has emerged. The new term ESI helps to differentiate the behavioral manifestations of the intrapersonal awareness and management of emotions within the self (EI) from the behavioral manifestations of the interpersonal awareness of others' emotions, needs, thoughts, and perceptions as well as navigate the larger social environment and working with others (SI). Boyatzis and Goleman (2007) have classified the various personal competencies into two clusters:

- ◆ Firstly, interpersonal cluster includes social awareness and relationship management, and is rightly named SI
- ◆ Secondly, intrapersonal cluster includes self awareness and self management, and is named EI.

### **Hypotheses**

SI is a multi dimensional construct which is affected by numerous other fac-

**Women are more emotionally intelligent than men, as they spend more time socially.**

tors. Previous studies have established that empathy is an important factor for development of interpersonal competence in social interactions (Marsh et al., 1981; Shure, 1982; Spivack & Shure, 1974). Similarly, SI is profoundly influenced by the culture in which an individual lives (Dong et al. 2008). Gender is one of the factors affecting SI, as women have stronger interpersonal skills than men (Baron, 2006). Previous studies have found that women are more emotionally intelligent than men, as they spend more time socially (Candela et al., 2001) and are more engrossed with maintaining the positive tone of their and others' emotions so as to prevent worsening of interpersonal relations and to construct fulfilling social relations (Nolen-Hoeksema & Jackson, 2001). Feminine brain is essentially organized to feel empathy, while the masculine brain seeks to understand and construct systems (Baron-Cohen, 2002). Previous studies conclude that women have greater emotional knowledge, they express positive and negative emotions conveniently, they have greater interpersonal competencies, and they are more socially accomplished (Brody & Hall, 2000; Hall & Mast, 2008; Hargie et al., 1995). Women are more likely to score higher on measures of EI than men, both in professional and personal settings (Mayer et al. 1999; Mandell & Pherwani, 2003). Some studies in the past have concluded that females have higher EI levels as compared

to males (Adeyemo 2008; Brackett et al. 2004; Ciarrochi et al. 2001; Harrod and Scheer 2005; Katyal & Awasthi, 2005; Mandell & Pherwani, 2003; Nasir & Masrur, 2010; Thingujam & Ram, 2000). On the contrary some studies have reported that males have higher EI levels than their female counterparts (Carr, 2009; Hunt & Evans, 2004; Uma Devi & Rayal, 2004). However, some other researchers are of the view that no gender differences in EI exist; overall levels of EI are equivalent for both the genders (Balci-Celik & Deniz, 2008; Goleman, 1998; Mathur et al. 2005; Pant & Prakash, 2004; Tyagi, 2004). So previous studies on gender differences in EI were inconclusive. However, past research on gender differences in SI, which is a wider concept than EI, found no differences in SI levels across gender (Hopkins & Bilimoria, 2008; Lovejoy, 2008; Mackova, 2014). On the basis of the discussion above following hypothesis is proposed:

H<sub>1</sub>: SI of employees varies across gender.

Salovey and Mayer (1990) suggested a strong, steady and significant increase in EI with advancing age. Previous studies have reported an increase in EI with age (Gowdhaman & Murugan, 2009; Kalyoncu et al., 2012; Srivastava & Bharamanaikar, 2004, Van Rooy et al. 2005). A study conducted on employees in auto mobile industry in India revealed that EI level increases with increase in age (Devi & Devi, 2017). There has been hardly any research in the past which studies the change in SI of individuals with respect to their age. Since EI is a

subset of SI therefore SI level should increase with age. However, on the contrary, some studies conducted in the past have reported that EI does not change with age (Birks et al, 2009; Jacques, 2009; Tyagi, 2004). Drawing from the discussion above the following hypothesis is being proposed:

H<sub>2</sub>: SI of employees varies with age.

Thorndike and Stein (1937) stated that SI increases with academic level and experience of a person. Previous studies reveal that EI, which is a subset of SI, increases with work experience (Kumar & Muniandy, 2012) whereas certain other studies report that level of EI (subset of SI) of the employees varies with respect to their work experience (Cook et. al., 2011, Roy & Chaturvedi, 2011, Shipley et al., 2010). Based on these perspectives the following hypothesis is being proposed:

H<sub>3</sub>: SI of employees varies with work experience.

Past research across different cultures has established that distinguishing competencies (includes SI) which predict performance tend to be universal in nature (Boyatzis 1982, Koman & Wolff, 2008; Spencer & Spencer, 1993). SI is influenced by the culture in which an individual lives (Dong et al., 2008). Since this study has been conducted in the Indian cultural context, level of SI should remain consistent across various industries included in the study. On the basis of the available literature the following hypothesis is proposed:

H<sub>4</sub>: SI of employees varies across industries.

## **Methodology**

This research uses quantitative approach for data collection and analysis. A cross sectional design is used for the study where data was collected only once (Babbie, 1989; Mallhotra et al., 1996). This research started from the review of large amount of literature and developed a hypothesis for empirical examination. Therefore, research design applied for this study is based on the hypothetico-deductive method. This method starts from a literature review, theoretical framework, formulating hypotheses and making logical deductions from the results of the study (Sekaran, 2006).

## **Measurement Scale**

Edgar Doll came up with one of the earliest instruments to measure SI way back in 1935 (Bar-on, 2006). Besides, there are a few more tests to measure SI, one of them being the George Washington University Test of SI developed by F.A. Moss, which tests six aspects of SI. Cognitive Test of SI (Candeias, 2007) is a pictorial self report instrument for assessing SI among adolescents, aged 12-17 years of age. Another important scale to measure SI is the Emotional and Social Competency Inventory developed by Daniel Goleman and Richard Boyatzis in 2007. It is a multi source assessment tool that measures leader behavior on 12 traits. SI Scale developed by Chadda and Ganesan is an Indian scale to measure 8 dimensions of SI - patience, cooperativeness, confidence, sensitivity, recognition of social environment, tactfulness, sense of humor and memory.

Tromso SI Scale, developed by Silvera et al. (2001) in Norway has been used for the present study. It is the most widely used scale for measuring SI. It is a self report measure of SI in Norwegian language. Its English version has been adapted from the work of Gini (2006). Before using this scale in the Indian context an exploratory factor analysis was conducted to identify underlying constructs and check for internal consistency. Based on eigenvalues (greater than 1.5) Scree plot four factors were extracted, namely: social information processing (6 items), social sensitivity (3 items), social skills (4 items) and social

awareness (5 items). Five-point Likert scale was used in the design of the questionnaire.

For this study random sampling technique has been employed. Data was collected from employees working in three service sector industries – IT, BFSI and Hospitality. The survey questionnaire was sent through email to the respondents, except a few which were personally given to them by the researcher. A total of 450 samples were collected. Table 2 shows the number of respondents from each industry.

**Table 2 Industry Wise Distribution of the Total Sample**

Industry	Frequency	Percentage
IT	156	34.7%
BFSI	140	31.1%
Hospitality	154	34.2%
Total	450	100.0%

## Results & Discussion

In this study t-test has been applied to compare means on the basis of – gender, age and work experience. While comparing means from more than two samples ANOVA is used. This study was undertaken with the objective to find out if the SI level of the employees varies with regard to demographic factors – gender, age, work experience and industry. The results of the study reveal that SI level of the employees does not vary with regard to gender (Table 3), results

of the t-test have significance value greater than .05. These findings align with the results of the previous studies that have empirically established that there is no difference in the level of SI of males and females (Hopkins & Bilimoria, 2008; Lovejoy, 2008; Mackova, 2014). Therefore, hypothesis H<sub>1</sub> is found to be false.

**The results of the study reveal that SI level of the employees does not vary with regard to gender.**

**Table 3 Comparison of Mean with Respect to Gender**

		Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
Social Intelligence	Equal Variances Assumed	448	.451	.039

Results of this study reveal that SI level of employees does not vary across different age groups (Table 4). This finding is further supported by studies conducted in the past which have reported that EI does not change with age (Birks et al., 2009; Jacques, 2009; Tyagi, 2004).

EI is a subset of SI, therefore hypothesis H<sub>2</sub> is false as SI level does not vary with age of the employees.

**SI level of employees does not vary across different age groups.**

**Table 4 Comparison of Mean with Respect to Age**

		Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
Social Intelligence	Equal Variances Assumed	448	.357	-.038

Results for hypothesis H<sub>3</sub> (Table 5) show a significance level of less than .05 thus, indicating a difference in SI across work experience of the employees. Previous studies report that level of EI (subset of SI) of the employees does vary with respect to their work experience (Cook et.al. 2011; Roy & Chaturvedi, 2011; Shipley et al., 2010). The results of the present study also reveal that SI var-

ies with work experience of an individual. Thus, the results of the present study are in line with the past research findings. Hypothesis H<sub>3</sub> is true as SI level varies with regard to work experience of the employees.

**SI level varies with regard to work experience of the employees.**

**Table 5 Comparison of Mean with respect to Work Experience**

		Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
Social Intelligence	Equal Variances Assumed	<b>448</b>	<b>.036</b>	-.0856556

Hypothesis H<sub>4</sub> has been tested using ANNOVA to compare mean values of SI across the three industries. The result

(Table 6) shows that SI level does not vary across the three industries. Thus, hypothesis H<sub>4</sub> is false.

**Table 6 Comparison of Mean with respect to Industry**

		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Social Intelligence	Between Groups	.310	2	.155	.823	.440
	Within Groups	84.135	447	.188		
	Total	84.445	449			

Analysis of the results confirms that SI of employees does not vary with regard to demographic factors like – gender, age and industry. These findings are

in line with the results of the previous studies. Past research on gender differences in SI, found no differences in SI levels across gender (Hopkins &

Bilimoria, 2008; Lovejoy, 2008; Mackova, 2014). However, SI of employees does vary with their work experience. Evidence from literature also reports that EI, which is a subset of SI varies with respect to their work experience (Cook et.al. 2011; Roy & Chaturvedi, 2011; Shipley et al. 2010); rather increases with work experience (Kumar & Muniandy, 2012). There has hardly been any research on differences in SI with respect to age and industry. However, previous studies on differences in EI with regard to age concluded that it does not change with age (Birks et al., 2009; Jacques, 2009; Tyagi, 2004).

### Conclusion

This study was undertaken to assess the differences in SI of employees in three sectors across demographic factors like gender, age, work experience and industry. Based on the results, the study proposes that SI level does not vary on the basis of gender, age and industry of the employee. Thus, SI level is the same for both males and females and also across different age groups. However, the results reveal that SI varies with work experience of the employees. This study contributes to literature on SI by assessing the level of SI of employees in Indian business organizations and also studies whether SI varies with regard to certain demographic factors. The study highlights the importance of SI and how it can be advantageous for business organizations. Organizations could assess the SI level of their employees and based on the results, they can adopt certain organizational intervention techniques to improve SI level of

employees. The study reveals that of the four demographic factors only work experience causes a change in SI level, taking a cue out of this study; organizations must ensure such division of work where employees having greater work experience should be given key roles that take advantage of their high SI for purpose of supervision, communication, negotiation, conflict resolution, mentoring and employee engagement.

Like other research studies this study is also not free from limitations. Cultural norms affect the pattern of interpersonal relations (Morris et al. 2008). Thus, SI is a culture specific construct; degree of SI is affected by cultural differences. This study does not take into account the cultural differences that would have had an effect on the SI level of the employees. Data for the study was collected from cities across India. Since India is a culturally diverse country, there is a possibility that these cultural differences might have crept into the assessment of SI level of employees. The findings need to be replicated with larger sample size across various age groups, industries and level of work experience of the employees before final conclusions can be drawn regarding differences in SI of employees with respect to demographic factors. This is a cross sectional study where data was collected once. To obtain more reliable results a longitudinal study needs to be undertaken. The results of the study merely reveal which demographic factor causes a change in SI level of the employees but it does not answer as to why and how this change in SI is caused. For this purpose a qualitative study can be undertaken to ex-

plore the underlying reasons for change in SI with regard to work experience of the employees.

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