

An investigation of Emotional Intelligence and the use of Online Social Media tools in organisations (#EISM Report)

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Introduction

The use of Online Social Media tools in organisations is on the rise. With email approaching saturation levels in terms of usage, attention is now shifting to other forms of Online Social Media. We tend to think of online communication as devoid of emotion and as a result we often neglect to consider the impact of these conversations. The aim of this project is to better understand how emotions expressed through online channels of communication can affect our private and work lives and how so. We bring together for the first time an investigation of Emotional Intelligence levels and online communication and the effects they have on each other. In the context of this investigation, Emotional Intelligence refers to the capacity to deal effectively with one's own and others' emotions.

We addressed issues such as whether Online Social Media is a way to reach out to the extended network outside the company. How using Social Media may affect ones workload. Is Social Media considered something that takes more time and energy than it is worth? Do individuals demonstrate to others that they have considered their feelings when making decisions in the workplace? How does using Online Social Media affect ones workload? When someone is upset at work do they express their feelings effectively? Do organisations have a Social Media policy or guidelines stating how employees should conduct themselves online? Are people aware of how their feelings influence the decisions they make at work? And do organisations measure the success of their Social Media strategy if they have one? These are just a few of the questions which we explored during the survey and will reveal in this report.

In the context of this paper Social Media is online content, created by using highly accessible and scalable publishing technologies, which represents a shift in how people discover, read and share news, information and content. It's a fusion of sociology and technology, transforming monologues (one to many) into dialogues (many to many). Information is now so readily accessible to everyone it transforms people from content readers into publishers. Social Media can take many different forms including Internet forums, bulletin boards, wikis, podcasts, micro-blogs, picture-sharing, vlogs, RSS, email and instant messaging to name a few. Social Media has become extremely popular because it allows people to connect in the online world, to form relationships for personal, political and business use, and to build online communities. Face-to-face interactions often result from the building of these online communities, leading to even stronger relationships and possible business collaborations. Thus, the influence Social Media now has on both personal and professional lives is becoming significant.

Regardless of the Social Media tools a business uses, their online personality is not only part of their overall brand; it becomes an interactive experience for their business and clients. Social Media use in business is about return on engagement - connecting with people; building opportunities through

dialogue which would not have otherwise occurred; then connecting them with the business. In today's new media environment, business needs to understand the context they're communicating within, and the attitudes and demands of the people they deal with. Thus, the use of Social Media is not just about the technology but also the intrapersonal and interpersonal skills of the individuals using these tools. One method of evaluating the intrapersonal and interpersonal skills of individuals in the workplace is by using Emotional Intelligence skills assessment.

Emotional Intelligence comprises a number of different aspects of emotional ability including: emotional self-awareness, accurate self-assessment, understanding the emotionality of others, the ability to influence the emotional content of social situations, the self-regulation of emotions and the ability to effectively communicate emotion. There are numerous studies that have demonstrated links between Emotional Intelligence and important workplace criteria including staff morale, productivity, job satisfaction and organisational commitment. However, as business moves more and more to the use of Social Media tools, it is unclear what that means for their ability to communicate effectively online and whether the skills of Emotional Intelligence are influential for business success when using these tools. One thing is known and that is that Social Media and Emotional Intelligence skills can be learnt and developed.

As Social Media, and in particular micro-blogging, continues to grow as an accepted forum for real time communication by organizations, it is important to understand the relevance of interpersonal and intrapersonal skills on the effective use of Social Media tools. As there is currently little research in this area, the aim of this study is to conduct a preliminary investigation of the use of Social Media tools in organisations and the relevance of Emotional Intelligence skills to the effective use of such tools.

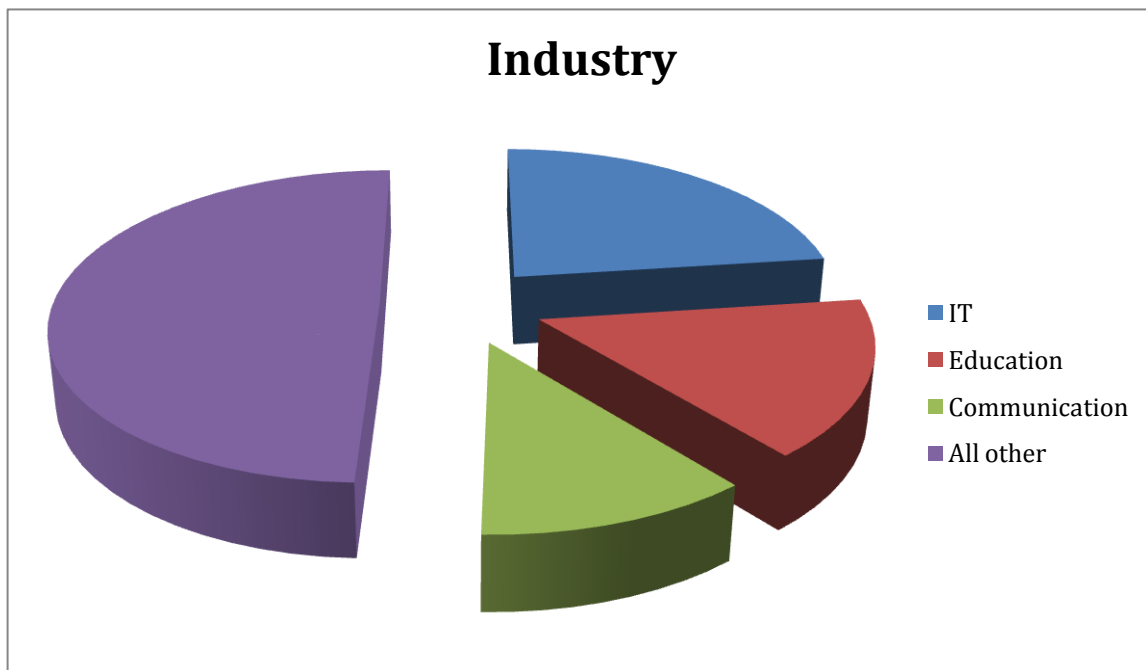
This study was initiated by Knowledge Solutions together with the Brain Sciences Institute (BSI) from Swinburne University of Technology using an open innovation approach. In order to ensure relevance and usefulness the first phase of the study was to develop the questionnaire. This was promoted through the internet to interested parties for their input. A Wiki was established which outlined the project and invited participation (<https://www.socialtext.net/knowledge-solutions-research/>). The Emotional Intelligence questionnaire used was an established psychometric tool (developed by Genos Pty Ltd) and was not altered in any way in order to retain its scientific validity.

The Social Media research questions were formulated by the Wiki community and combined with the Emotional Intelligence scale by the BSI to ensure outcomes were meaningful.

The Sample

The survey was conducted between January and March of 2010. Eighty-eight participants completed this extensive survey. The majority (65%) of respondents were located in Australia with 20% in the USA. The average age of the sample was 40.8 years. There was a reasonable balance of males (51.1%) and females (48.9%). The majority of participants were from the Information Technology (23%), Education (16.1%) and Communication (11.5%) industries and the size of the organisations the participant's worked for varied with 35.6% having 1-10 employees and 42.5% having over 500 employees.

Figure 1. Percentage of respondents working in different industries



Seventeen percent of respondents indicated that they were in the position of CEO/Director while 26% indicated they were in a management position. 20% of respondents were organisation staff.

Social Media Use in the workplace

Approximately one third of the sample (34%) defined Social Media as a place to connect to people who have the same interests (professional and personal). Only 1% of the sample defined Social Media as something that takes more time and energy than it is worth. This result suggests that in the sample surveyed, people are driven to be connected with like-minded individuals.

The majority (91%) of respondents indicated that they were able to access Social Media tools at work for personal purposes; however, it needs to be established which methods they use to do this (work computer, personal mobile device etc.).

In terms of barriers to the use of Social Media in the workplace, 48.9% indicated there were no barriers while 17% indicated that a lack of time was a barrier. An additional 17% indicated that the perception that Social Media tools were a time waster was also a barrier.

The two main goals of using Social Media in business were to engage with the community (45.5%) and to keep up with trends (20.5%). This result may suggest that dialogue (engaging with the community) is considered to be more important than simply listening (keeping up with trends).

Just over half of the sample (51%) indicated that their organisation does not have a Social Media strategy while 7% indicated they weren't sure. The high numbers of *no* and *not sure* responses suggests that Social Media is still relatively new in organisations and many have either not recognised the need for, or not had time to put in place a Social Media policy. Of the participants that indicated that their organisation did have a Social Media strategy, 44% indicated that their organisation measured the success of the strategy. This suggests that measurement is an important part of the strategy and that these companies are setting Social Media objectives. In terms of

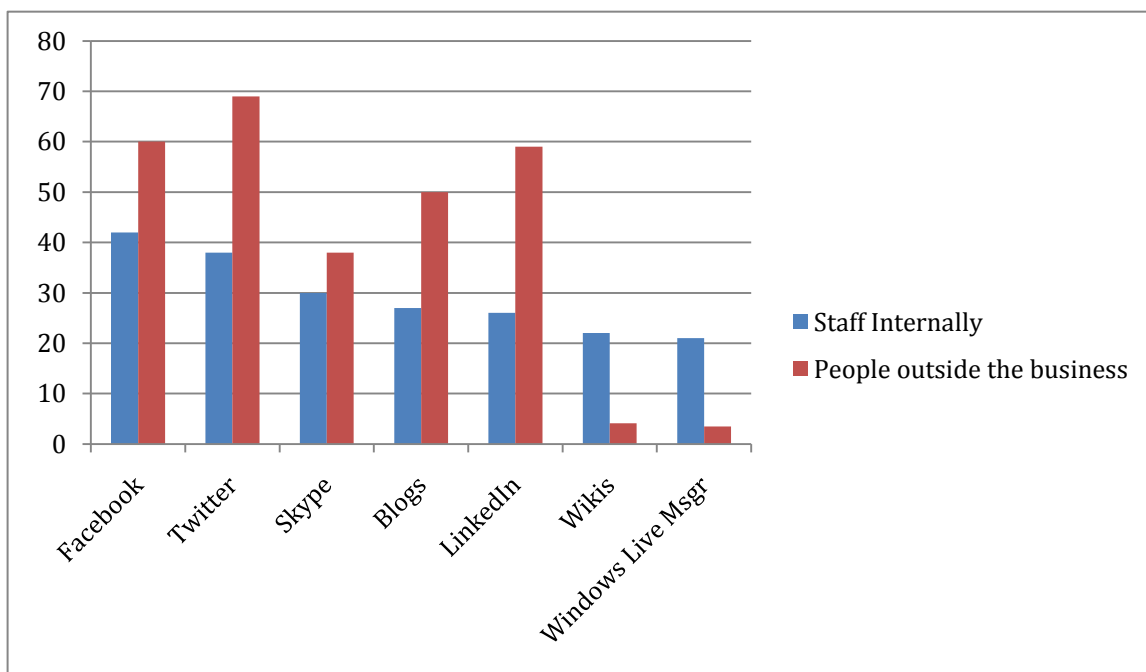
measuring business success, revenue was most prevalent (45.5%) while achieving core values was next prevalent (18.2%).

Almost half (43%) of the participants indicated that their organisation has a policy for how people conduct themselves online. 39% of respondents indicated that they were involved in the development of Social Media policy within their organisation. This figure corresponds to the percentage of respondents in high level positions (CEO/Director). Further analysis indicated that 86% of respondents in the 'CEO/Director' positions indicated they were involved in setting Social Media policy development. In contrast, only 27% of respondents in 'organisation staff' positions were involved in Social Media policy development.

For companies that don't have a Social Media policy, 41% of respondents indicated that their company planned to create a Social Media policy. This suggests a growing trend towards companies putting in place policies to govern how employees act online and assisting staff to become good Social Media citizens that are able to protect their brands online. It also suggests that trust is being given and that there is a movement towards staff democratization.

When engaging with staff internally, the most used Social Media tools were: Facebook (used by 42% of respondents), Twitter (38%), Skype (30%), Blogs (27%), LinkedIn (26%), Wikis (22%) and Windows Live Messenger (21%). Conversely, when engaging with people outside the business, the most used Social Media tools were: Twitter (69%), Facebook (60%), LinkedIn (59%), Blogs (50%) and Skype (38%).

Figure 2. Percentage of respondents using a range of Social Media tools internally and outside the business



Facebook's popularity for both private and business appears to be rising. This may reflect the fact that business life is very much a part of private life for many people these days. Facebook also has the ability to segment by way of security levels so people can have work colleagues see only certain sections of their Facebook account.

86.4% of respondents indicated they were confident using Social Media tools. In terms of the impact of Social Media tools on workload, 41% indicated that the use of Social Media tools had no real impact on their workload with 45% suggesting that the use of Social Media tools at work slightly increased their workload.

Micro-blogging (Twitter)

The average length of time that respondents had been using Twitter was 8.17 months which is consistent with trends in Australia. Less than half of the sample (40.7%) indicated that they had a personal strategy for using Twitter while slightly more (43.8%) indicated that they had a professional strategy when using Twitter. 78.4% of participants were aware of other companies using Twitter suggesting that companies using Twitter are socially aware and therefore also aware of what their competitors are doing in the social space. Only 7.8% of participants indicated that they almost always abbreviate when using Twitter suggesting that 140 characters is enough for most messages and/or that an etiquette for whole words has been established.

Of the participants that indicated they used micro-blogging for personal purposes, the average time spent micro-blogging per day was 1.09 hours while the average number of 'tweets' sent per day was 4.8. Conversely, participants that indicated they used micro-blogging for work purposes spent an average of 24.52 minutes per day micro-blogging and sent an average of 1.65 'tweets' per day.

When using micro-blogging for business purposes, 40% of respondents indicated that they would respond to 'tweets' within 2 hours while only 6.7% took more than 48 hours to respond. This would seem to demonstrate that Twitter requires constant monitoring and quick responses to be part of the conversation otherwise opportunities to engage effectively are missed. In terms of broadcasting, only 1.6% of respondents indicated they would broadcast every 0-1 hours. 19% indicated they would broadcast every 12-24 hours, 22.2% indicated they would broadcast every 24-48 hours while 19% indicated they broadcast every 48 hours plus. As broadcast implies sending messages that are not part of community engagement or conversation, it appears that companies tend to send broadcast messages only a couple of times a day. This is consistent with the statistic that participants send an average of 1.65 'tweets' per day for business purposes.

Almost half of the respondents (40.8%) indicated that their 'tweets' are re-tweeted occasionally while 19.7% didn't know how often their tweets were re-tweeted. This is somewhat surprising given that there are simple ways to find out if you are being 're-tweeted'. This would imply that the etiquette to acknowledge 're-tweets' is not always adopted.

Training in the use of Social Media at work

Most respondents (88.6%) indicated that they had not received any training in the use of Social Media tools in the workplace. Given most respondents indicated they were 'very confident' using Social Media tools in an earlier question it's not surprising that formal training hasn't taken place. This result also suggests that companies are not yet investing in Social Media training for employees. For those that had received training the average number of hours of training was 2.31 hours; however, we suspect that this would be focused on technical training in the tool rather than on the subject of appropriate and potentially inappropriate behaviour on-line.

Impact on workload

The majority of respondents (87.5%) indicated that using Social Media tools helps them accomplish work tasks either 'sometimes', 'usually' or 'almost always' with only 8% indicating that using Social Media tools 'almost never' helps them accomplish work tasks. Only 4.6% of respondents indicated that using Social Media tools at work 'usually' made their work day more stressful while 36.8% indicated that using Social Media tools 'almost never' made their work day more stressful.

Only 2.3% of participants indicated that the use of Social Media tools 'almost never' made their work day more fun while 62.5% suggested that the use of Social Media tools 'usually' or 'almost always' made their work day more fun. If increasing fun in the workplace has the knock on effect of increasing productivity this may have implications for business in terms of incorporating the use of Social Media tools in the workplace for effective gain.

Approximately equal numbers indicated that their email traffic had 'not changed' (43.7%) or 'increased' (41.4%) as a result of using Social Media tools. The increase may be due to auto notifications sent by some Social Media sites.

Problems with Social Media tools

Over half of the sample (54.1%) indicated that at some point they have had an online message misinterpreted. Of those, 61.7% resolved the misinterpretation using the same Social Media tool with 21.3% using email to resolve the misinterpretation while 2.1% indicated that they failed to resolve the misinterpretation. Thus, when a message was misinterpreted, the majority of people used the same channel to resolve the misunderstanding. Interestingly, 88% of respondents indicated that they believed they 'usually' or 'almost always' express themselves online effectively.

Emotional Intelligence and Social Media Use

The **Genos EI Inventory** Concise Version was used to measure workplace Emotional Intelligence. This version of the Genos EI inventory consists of 31 items scored on a five-point Likert scale, from 'Almost Never' to 'Almost Always'. The Genos EI inventory is designed to measure the frequency with which an individual displays emotionally intelligent behaviours across seven dimensions. In this study; focusing within the context of Social Media.

The seven dimensions are:

Emotional Self-Awareness (ESA)

Emotional Self-Awareness measures the relative frequency with which an individual consciously identifies their emotions at work. It also represents the frequency with which an individual is aware that their emotions may motivate or affect their thoughts and behaviours at work. The subscale does not emphasize either negative or positive emotions. Rather, the subscale incorporates a balance of both positive and negative affect states. Total score on this dimension ranges from 4 to 20.

Emotional Expression (EE)

Emotional Expression measures the relative frequency with which an individual expresses their emotions in an appropriate way at work. Appropriate, in this context, implies the right way, at the right time, and to the right people. The subscale incorporates a balance of items relevant to positive and negative emotions, such as positive feedback and anger, for example. The subscale does not explicitly specify any method of emotional expression, as the appropriate expression of an emotion

may be verbal or non-verbal in nature (or a combination of the two). Total score on this dimension ranges from 5 to 25.

Emotional Awareness of Others (EAO)

Emotional Awareness of Others measures the relative frequency with which an individual identifies the emotions expressed by others in the workplace. There is also an emphasis on understanding the nature of the emotions that may motivate or affect the behaviours of others at work. Total score on this dimension ranges from 4 to 20.

Emotional Reasoning (ER)

Emotional Reasoning measures the relative frequency with which an individual incorporates emotionally relevant information in the process of decision making or problem solving at work. It should be noted that the Emotional Reasoning subscale does not represent an anti-rationality disposition. Instead, the subscale was designed to measure a balanced approach to problem solving that incorporates some consideration of one's own emotions and the emotions of others when making decisions at work. There is also an emphasis on the use of emotions for the successful engagement of others. Total score on this dimension ranges from 5 to 25.

Emotional Self-Management (ESM)

Emotional Self-Management measures the relative frequency with which an individual manages their own emotions at work, successfully. A substantial emphasis is placed upon the successful adjustment to negative emotional states at work, although there is some focus relevant to the engagement in activities to maintain a positive emotional state while at work. Emotional Self-Management often involves moving on from an emotional set-back, rather than dwelling or ruminating over the situation. Total score on this dimension ranges from 5 to 25.

Emotional Management of Others (EMO)

Emotional Management of Others measures the relative frequency with which an individual manages the emotions of others at work, successfully. Actions taken to motivate colleagues or subordinates are included within this subscale, as are demonstrations of modifying the emotions of others for their own personal betterment at work. Emotional Management of Others involves creating a positive working environment for others, or specifically helping an individual resolve an issue that is causing them distress. Total score on this dimension ranges from 4 to 20.

Emotional Self-Control (ESC)

Emotional Self-Control measures the relative frequency with which an individual controls their strong emotions appropriately in the workplace. A substantial focus is placed on the demonstrable maintenance of focus or concentration on the task at hand in the face of emotional adversity. Although similar to Emotional Self-Management, Emotional Self-Control incorporates an additional focus on the behavioural demonstration of controlling intense reactive emotions at work, such as anger or jubilation. In this sense, Emotional Self-Control is more reactive, while Emotional Self-Management is more proactive. Total score on this dimension ranges from 4 to 20.

To investigate the relationship between Emotional Intelligence and the use of Social Media tools in the workplace, a series of one-way analysis of variance tests were conducted to examine group differences on Emotional Intelligence dimension scores. The significant results are presented below.

Gender and Emotional Intelligence

There was one significant difference between males and females on the Emotional Intelligence measure. In this sample females rated themselves significantly higher on the measure of emotional self-awareness compared to males $F(1,84) = 9.19, p < .01$.

Table 1. Means and Standard Deviations for Emotional Intelligence subscale scores for males and females

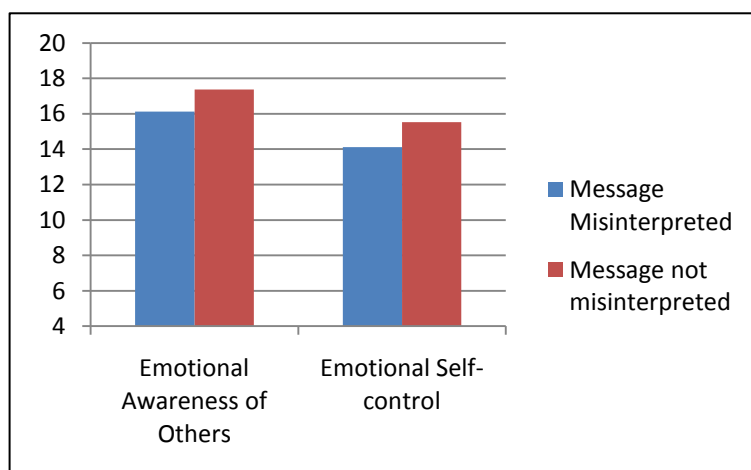
	Male		Female		Total		F
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	
ESA	15.75	2.30	17.17	2.01	16.44	2.27	9.19*
EE	18.55	2.99	19.72	2.81	19.13	2.94	3.57
EAO	16.18	2.49	17.12	2.23	16.64	2.40	3.40
ER	20.18	2.81	20.79	2.66	20.48	2.74	1.08
ESM	18.25	2.48	18.79	2.51	18.51	2.50	0.99
EMO	15.56	2.02	16.47	2.63	16.01	2.37	3.22
ESC	14.37	2.55	15.16	2.74	14.77	2.66	1.92

Note: * $p < .01$; M=Mean; SD=standard deviation; ESA=Emotional Self-Awareness; EE=Emotional Expression; EAO=Emotional Awareness of Others; ER=Emotional Reasoning; ESM=Emotional Self-Management; EMO=Emotional Management of Others; ESC=Emotional Self-Control.

Online message misinterpreted and Emotional Intelligence

There were two significant differences on the Emotional Intelligence measures between participants who indicated that they have been misinterpreted online versus participants who indicated they haven't.

Figure 3. Means for Emotional Intelligence dimensions (EAO and ESC) for respondents who have and haven't been misinterpreted online.



The group that had been misinterpreted online reported significantly lower Emotional Awareness of Others scores $F(1,82) = 5.97, p < .05$ and significantly lower Emotional Self Control scores $F(1,81) = 6.12, p < .05$ compared to respondents who had not been misinterpreted online. These results suggest that individuals who are able to identify with others emotions, demonstrate empathy and are not prone to being 'hijacked' by their emotions or overreacting emotionally are also less likely to post an online message that is misinterpreted by others.

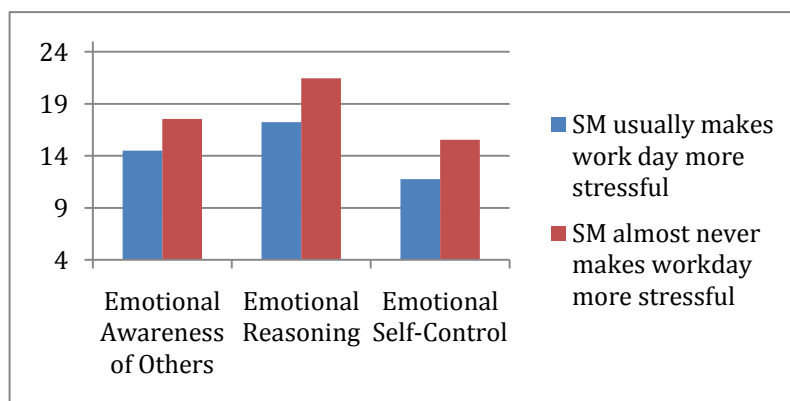
Expressing online messages effectively

Participants that indicated they *'almost always'* express online messages effectively rated themselves higher on emotional reasoning (M=21.21) than participants who indicated they *'sometimes'* express online messages effectively (M=18.30) $F(2,80) = 4.50, p < .05$. This result suggests that respondents who believe they have a balanced approach to problem solving (incorporating some consideration of one's own emotions and the emotions of others in the decision-making process) and who use emotions for the successful engagement of others, believe they effectively express their online messages more frequently than respondents who are less inclined to incorporate emotion in the decision-making process.

Social Media and stress

There were three significant differences on the Emotional Intelligence measures between participants who indicated that Social Media tools *'usually'* made their work day more stressful compared to participants who indicated that Social Media tools *'almost never'* made their work day more stressful.

Figure 4. Means for three Emotional Intelligence dimensions (EAO, ER, ESC) for participants who find Social Media tools make work more stressful versus individuals who don't think Social Media tools make workday more stressful



The participants that indicated that the use of Social Media tools *'usually'* made their work day more stressful rated themselves lower on Emotional awareness of others $F(3,82) = 3.56, p < .05$; Emotional reasoning $F(3,82) = 3.78, p < .05$; and Emotional self control $F(3,81) = 2.30, p < .05$. These results suggest that participants that have an awareness of others' verbal and non-verbal expressions of emotions, understand how emotions motivate or affect the behaviours of others at work, have a balanced approach to problem solving, who use emotions for the successful engagement of others and who are able to maintain focus or concentration in the face of emotional adversity find the use of Social Media tools in the workplace less stressful than individuals who have poor awareness of others, who tend not to incorporate emotions in problem-solving and are prone to overreacting emotionally.

Social Media and fun at work

Participants that indicated that the use of Social Media tools *'almost always'* made their work day more fun rated themselves significantly higher on emotional self control (M=16.00) than participants that indicated that the use of Social Media tools *'almost never'* made their work day more fun (M=12.50), $F(3,82) = 3.44, p < .05$. This result suggests that individuals who are prone to emotional

'hijacking' and overreacting emotionally find the use of Social Media tools at work less fun than individuals who are more balanced emotionally.

Participants who indicated that they '*almost never*' abbreviate when using Twitter rated themselves higher on emotional awareness of others (M=17.78) than participants who indicated that they '*almost always*' abbreviate (M=14.33), $F(4,71) = 3.00, p < .05$. This result suggests that individuals who are able to identify with others and demonstrate empathy are more aware of the potential impact of using abbreviations when micro-blogging.

Interestingly, there were no links between Emotional Intelligence and personal or professional strategies for using micro-blogging tools.

Conclusion

Previous research has suggested that a poor understanding of emotions, especially strong emotions such as fear, anger, resentment and even excitement, can result in emotional 'overreactions' that make the workday more stressful and communication difficult. The results of the present study offer preliminary evidence that the effective use of emotion also matters when communicating using Online Social Media tools.

As mentioned in the body of the report, there are numerous studies which have demonstrated significant links between Emotional Intelligence and workplace criteria such as, morale, productivity, job satisfaction and staff retention. The purpose of this study was to investigate whether there are any links between Emotional Intelligence and the use of Social Media in the workplace. Our preliminary results suggest that there are links between how frequently individuals demonstrate Emotional Intelligence behaviours in the workplace and how effectively they use Social Media tools.

The results also suggest those individuals who pay attention to their own and others emotional states are less likely to have online messages misinterpreted, are less likely to experience stress in the workplace and are more confident in their ability to communicate effectively. Furthermore the study suggests individuals who believe they have a more balanced approach to problem solving (incorporating some consideration of one's own emotions and the emotions of others in the decision-making process) and who use emotions for the successful engagement of others, will be more consistent in effectively communicating online than those that are less likely to incorporate emotion in the decision making process.

We would like to take a moment to thank all those who took part in the research for their time and commitment to the project.

Next steps:

The next phase of this project will be to run the same research one year from the date of first survey. The purpose is to understand how Social Media is advancing and establish further links between Social Media and Emotional Intelligence.

If you would like to be part of the next phase please send an email to: info@knowledge-solutions.com.au by the end of September 2010.

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