

# Emotional Competence as Antecedent to Performance: A Contingency Framework

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**ABSTRACT.** Emotional intelligence is the ability to monitor one's own and others' thinking and actions. In this integrative review, the author seeks to determine the causes of the weak relationship between emotional intelligence and performance by positing that certain emotional competencies, rather than emotional intelligence, are the true predictors of performance. The author theorizes that emotional competencies (including self-control, resilience, social skills, conscientiousness, reliability, integrity, and motivation) interact with organizational climate and job demands or job autonomy to influence performance, as represented in the form of 5 empirically testable propositions. Self-control and emotional resilience are considered to delay the onset of a decline in performance from excessive job demands. Social skills, conscientiousness, reliability, and integrity assist to promote trust, which in turn may build cohesiveness among the members of work groups. Motivation may fuel job involvement in environments that promise psychological safety and psychological meaningfulness. A combination of superior social skills and conscientiousness may enhance the self-sacrifice of benevolent employees to heightened levels of dependability and consideration. Finally, emotional honesty, self-confidence, and emotional resilience can promote superior performance, if positive feedback is delivered in an informative manner, and can mitigate the adverse effects of negative feedback.

**Key words:** contingency framework, emotion, emotional competence, emotional intelligence, performance, workplace

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**A GROWING BODY OF SUPPORT FOR EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE** as a prerequisite to superior corporate performance (Kagan & Rodriguez, 1999; Lamm & Kirby, 2002; Prossick-Schirmer, 2001; Weisinger, 1998; Young, Arthur, & French, 2000) has appeared ever since its definition in Goleman's (1989) seminal work. *Emotional intelligence* is the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them, and to use this information

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to guide one's thinking and actions (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Conceptually, emotional intelligence effectively supplements cognitive intelligence to predict superior performance through its dimensions of self-appraisal, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. Accurate self-appraisal promotes determination, farsightedness, and enhanced purpose in life, direction, and meaning (Sosik & Megerian, 1999). *Self-regulation*, defined as the management of internal states and impulses, promotes positive moods while suppressing negative ones (Mayer & Gaschke, 1988; Tesser, 1986). It is capable of charismatically motivating desired emotional responses in others. With its awareness of others' feelings, empathy becomes the cornerstone of understanding and helping others develop in superior-subordinate relationships. By inducing desirable responses in others, the social skills component of emotional intelligence is critical for teamwork, conflict resolution, and collaboration.

Much of the literature on emotional intelligence in organizations assumes that it directly results in superior performance, organizational commitment, organizational citizenship, and transformational leadership (see Abraham, 2003, for a review). Of these outcomes, performance is critical in that the competitiveness of a firm depends on the performance of its employees. Yet, prior empirical studies of actual organizations have found that emotional intelligence contributes marginally to overall performance (Murensky, 2000; Wolff, Pescosolido, & Druskat, 2002; Wong & Law, 2002). As emotional intelligence is the composite of 27 competencies, and as the competencies themselves never have been tested separately to determine their ability to predict superior performance, it is possible that the weak relationship between emotional intelligence and performance may result from the suppression of effects of some competencies with little or no impact on performance by others. Therefore, this review posits that, before emotional intelligence may be successfully tested as a predictor of performance, it is necessary to identify theoretically the true predictors of performance among the plethora of emotional competencies. Goleman (1989) demonstrated that emotional intelligence acts through emotional competencies to predict performance. Yet, emotional competencies do not act in isolation. They influence performance in conjunction with an organizational climate and moderate job demands favorable to employees.

The voluminous literature on person-organization fit sets forth that behavior is a function of both the person and the environment (Lewin, 1951; Magnusson & Endler, 1977; Schneider, 1983; Terborg, 1981). Individual values, including emotional intelligence, are enduring beliefs through which a specific end-state is personally preferable to its opposite (Rokeach, 1973). Preferences for end-states driven by emotional competencies shape a person's adaptation to the environment, which in turn influences behavior and performance. The extent of adaptation and the behaviors exhibited depend on their congruence with organizational norms and value systems (Chatman, 1989). Emotionally driven values, such as empathy and self-awareness, find expression only in organizations in which there

is a fit between emotional competencies and the prevailing organizational climate. Low congruence in person-organization fit leads to either modification of the individual's values, modification of the organization's values, or, in the event of enduring conflict, induces turnover. This thesis is supported by one study's empirical finding that people adopted the values that were either rewarded in previous jobs or adopted the values of their supervisors, if they perceived the supervisors to be compassionate and successful (Mortimer & Lawrence, 1979).

Likewise, the demands of a specific job—whether minimal or onerous, challenging or monotonous, ambiguous or clear, with or without conflicting demands—affect displays of empathy, social skills, and self-awareness. For example, confusion over task responsibilities impedes self-awareness. An employee cannot assess his or her personal strengths and weaknesses for different tasks and ability to perform effectively if different supervisors establish conflicting parameters. It is impossible to empathize with multiple superiors whose opinions conflict. Similarly, employees cannot build relationships with customers and suppliers if they do not comprehend the types of products, services, and processes that the firm wishes to promote.

Replacement of emotional intelligence by certain emotional competencies as predictors of performance within the context of a positive organizational climate and reasonable job demands may provide the missing links between emotional intelligence and performance. Accordingly, in this review, I propose to specify the sequence of causes that relates emotional competencies to performance within the framework of organizational climate and job demands by establishing the sequence's theoretical underpinnings and delineating empirically testable propositions.

### **Emotional Intelligence and Emotional Competence**

Goleman (1989) argued that emotional intelligence underlies emotional competence and that emotional competence is a required antecedent to performance. Emotional intelligence enhances employee potential for learning, and emotional competence translates that potential into task-mastering capabilities. Merely displaying high emotional intelligence is insufficient. Emotional intelligence traits only suggest that an employee has the capability for learning task competencies, not that the competencies have actually been learned. Goleman drew an analogy from musical training: Although some individuals are born with perfect pitch, those who do not receive voice training never blossom into opera singers. Similarly, only emotionally intelligent employees with sufficiently strong social skills (emotional competence) are able to build relationships and resolve conflicts (Young et al., 2000).

Next, I describe the relevant competencies for this review and present the basic theoretical arguments relating these emotional competencies to superior performance. Some of these arguments are physiological in nature and are in-

cluded in each section rather than separately to facilitate greater coherence with the other arguments in the respective sections.

The competencies of emotional awareness, accurate self-assessment, and self-confidence may be perceived as providing a road map toward making necessary adjustments on the job, managing uncontrolled emotion, motivating oneself, and assessing others' feelings, thereby developing the social skills to lead and motivate. Feelings are capable of assessing whether actions are in keeping with personal values. Choices made with values and feelings in congruence "feel right" (Goleman, 1989, p. 58) and propel the individual to direct all of his or her energy toward pursuing them. Kelley (1988) observed that stellar technical workers selected projects on the basis of their intellectual stimulation (instead of just accepting any project, as was the norm among average performers), rapport with the project leader, and personal competency (i.e., they chose the projects in which they felt they could excel and did, indeed, excel in them because the projects fit perfectly with their inner desires). Self-confidence is akin to *self-efficacy*—the belief that one is equipped to succeed—thereby conferring on oneself the ability to influence events and their consequences. Efficacious employees accept challenges, plunge into learning new job skills, initiate and direct new ventures, decisively make and sustain difficult decisions, and are undeflected by resistance and rejection. Studies of managers at AT&T revealed that self-confidence predicted promotions (Goleman). Holahan and Sears (1995), in a mammoth 60-year longitudinal study in which participants were followed from childhood through their work lives into retirement, found that self-confidence in youth predicted job success.

Self-control, resilience, and integrity also are competencies that may be linked to performance. *Self-control* is the effective management of disruptive emotions and impulses or the buffering of negative emotion in favor of mood enhancement. *Resilience* is the basis of self-control. It harnesses angry reactions when workers are confronted with the vicissitudes of corporate life and suppresses personal needs for organizational goals. Studies of law enforcement officials have found that calm responses helped avoid confrontation with hostile suspects (Brandolo, Jellife, Quinn, Tunick, & Melhado, 1996), and self-controlled counselors and flight attendants were able to deflect patient and customer anger (Hochschild, 1983). *Integrity* is the basis of strong customer relationships. Customer service representatives who renege on their promises and fail to follow through on commitments destroy the customer confidence crucial for continued business. Empirically, ethically inclined accountants had the courage to be harbingers of bad news, to insist on morally upright conduct, and to confront clients who pressed them to engage in unethical behavior, even at the risk of losing an account (Fountain, 1997).

*Conscientiousness* encompasses the qualities of meticulousness, self-discipline, and personal accountability. Conscientious employees complete tasks faithfully, toil diligently, assist new employees, accept extra responsibilities, and create an aura of dependability by keeping business operations functioning

smoothly. Innovation mandates that the emotional competencies of persistence and resilience turn novel ideas into functioning products and programs. Ideas in themselves are of little value. A tangible product emanates from the skillful execution of a creative idea that achieves profits.

Emotions, or feelings, may be considered to be the ultimate motivator as they fuel a passion for work such that the work becomes enjoyable, effortless, and physically and cognitively rewarding. In such a state, employees give their best in terms of creativity and intuition. Flow may be likened to personal engagement (Kahn, 1990), in which engaged employees become one with the job. Motivation and self-awareness give employees a clear sense of whether their personal values fit with those of the organization. If such a fit exists, commitment is strengthened. Emotional literacy is the ability to transcend impulsiveness in favor of a more rational approach to emotion (Cooper & Sawaf, 1997). Conflicts and frustrations experienced as a rising intensity of constrictive emotions are caught early and suppressed. Setbacks are viewed as learning experiences to be used constructively to spur future growth. Over time, the continuous substitution of positive for negative emotions improves satisfaction and commitment.

The competencies of understanding others and helping others develop include engaging in the art of effective listening, being able to discern customer needs, and then supplying the product that meets those needs. Researchers watching actual customers use products learn far more from their comments than from focus groups and market research. At the heart of helping others develop lies effective training and mentoring undertaken with a genuine desire to guide and develop (Goleman, 1989).

The competencies of influence, communication, conflict resolution, and leadership may be broadly classified as social arts. Every human being is at the locus of an emotional exchange that transmits positive and negative moods to each individual with whom he or she is in contact. Hatfield (1994) observed that the amygdala and the basal areas of the brain form a loop of biological connectedness, taking the emotional state of one party in an interaction and duplicating it in another and yet another. The most powerful art of social skill lies in persuading a few key employees of one's position and then leaving them to influence others within their own social networks. Effective communication is the ability to connect with an audience, which has been found to be a more powerful predictor of performance than the mere delivery of a speech (Young et al., 2000).

Concomitant with communication are listening and maintaining emotional self-control, judging the emotional cues of the speaker, modifying one's own response based on those emotional cues, avoiding dismissal and personal attacks in favor of focusing on positive outcomes and rectifying negative results, being open-minded, and soliciting suggestions. It follows that conflict resolution and negotiation flow from strong communication because the ability to judge emotional cues permits an individual to take a position, and modifying responses may allow him or her to make concessions that lead to partial victories.

Successful leaders are charismatic, capable of self-sacrifice, determined, farsighted, intellectually stimulating, inspiring, and dedicated to the development of followers through mentoring and individuation (Bass, 1990; Bennis, 1989; Megerian & Sosik, 1996). Each of these qualities has undertones of certain emotional competencies to the extent that self-awareness bestows determination and farsightedness. The relationship between self-awareness and purpose in life presupposes that a self-aware leader has strong purpose in life and meaning, which in turn motivates subordinates to exceed their expectations. Good moods are infectious, promoting positive affect in followers and inspiring novel ideas and creativity. Empathy facilitates individuation as the leader develops cognizance of the follower's individual needs for development.

### **An Integrated Model of Emotional Intelligence, Organizational Climate, and Job Demands**

Lewin's (1951) classic position that behavior is a function of the psychological environment formed the basis for Boyatzis' (1982) model of job performance. In this model, effective job performance is the interaction of individual competencies, job demands, and organizational climate. If emotional competencies are subsumed under individual competencies, they may be considered a person's characteristics that enable him or her to demonstrate appropriate specific actions. When job demands require the pursuit of certain actions, the employee draws on an emotional repertoire, among others, to respond.

The model states that peak performance occurs only when there is a fit among the three components of the model. The union of two variables is unlikely to result in consistently effective performance. If job demands and organizational fit exist, but the individual lacks the competencies to function, any superiority of performance is the temporary product of his or her predecessor's efforts. An employee with limited skills in a slow-moving and noncompetitive environment will not respond meaningfully to novel and challenging tasks. However, the individual cannot depend on the organizational structure and processes to shield his or her limitations. If the employee's risk-taking propensity matches the creativity of job demands within a restrictive organizational environment, little will be achieved as the employee has little latitude to implement innovative or challenging projects. Therefore, it should be the combined effect of specific individual competencies, dimensions of organizational climate, and job demands that predicts work performance.

Boyatzis (1982) used discriminant function analysis to provide empirical support for the model. Two discriminant functions with a total of 10 competencies were tested. The competencies were self-control, spontaneity, perceptual objectivity, diagnostic use of concepts, developing others, concern with impact, use of unilateral power, use of socialized power, use of oral presentations, and concern with close relationships. The set of competencies correctly classified 68%

of the managers as superior. The entire set predicted about half of the variation in performance, suggesting that the other half of the variation was explained by other factors, presumably organizational climate and job demands.

Subsequently, Boyatzis, Goleman, and Rhee (2000) directed their efforts toward obtaining clusters of competencies that explained performance. Using the Emotional Competence Inventory (ECI), they collapsed Goleman's (1989) 27 competencies into three clusters. The clusters of self-management, self-regulation, and social skills contributed toward raising performance beyond the threshold that demarcates superior performers from their average-performing counterparts. The resulting competencies may be grouped as dimensions of emotional intelligence. The self-regulation cluster, with its component competencies of self-control, conscientiousness, trustworthiness, adaptability, and innovation, emerged as the cluster that contributed the highest differential profit per year. Self-regulation was followed in profitability by the social skills and self-management clusters. The social skills cluster consisted of leadership, communication, influence, change catalyst, conflict management, building bonds, collaboration and cooperation, and team capabilities. The self-management cluster duplicated all of the competencies found in self-regulation, with the exception of innovation, indicating that innovation offered some contribution to profit, although its contribution was less significant than that of the other competencies within the self-regulation cluster. Therefore, the self-management cluster will be omitted from further consideration in the present discussion.

### *Organizational Climate*

The term *organizational climate* has been treated in the literature as encompassing perceptions of job attributes, including job control, job challenge, and technological complexity, along with interfaces between individuals and subsystems consisting of role conflict and pay equity (see Chatman, 1989, for a review). As job attributes are functions of tasks rather than of the organization, we may confine them to the job demands dimension of the Boyatzis model (1982). Using James and James's (1989) framework, organizational climate may be perceived as the end result of the assessment of the environmental attributes in terms of schemas derived from values such as pay equity and opportunity for gain (James & James; Jones & Gerard, 1967; Mandler, 1982).

Valuation is internally oriented in that it requires information processing to determine the value of certain environmental attributes (e.g., how much equity is represented by a pay raise). Such value judgments are seen as emotional to the extent that they reflect subjective meanings that determine the direction and intensity of response (i.e., a meager pay raise elicits an emotionally negative response; Reizenzein, 1983; Schachter & Singer, 1962). Furthermore, an employee with the emotional competence of optimism is likely to respond positively to environmental attributes that enhance positive mood. For example, for the envi-

ronmental attribute of perceptions of friendliness in interactions with coworkers, optimism leads the individual to overlook minor differences with coworkers and inculcates a genuine desire to create a healthy work environment. Jones and James's (1989) factor analytic work yielded role stress, leadership facilitation and support, work group cooperation, friendliness, and warmth as dimensions of organizational climate.

Brown and Leigh (1996) developed an alternative definition of organizational climate as psychological climate: the extent to which employees perceive an environment to be psychologically safe and meaningful. Employees either engage fully in their work environment or detach themselves from it depending on whether they find meaning in it (Kahn, 1990). Organizational climate may be viewed as comprising psychological safety—"sense of being able to show and employ one's self without fear of negative consequences to self-image, status or career" (Kahn, p. 708)—and psychological meaningfulness—"a feeling that one is receiving a return on investment of one's self in a currency of physical, cognitive, or emotional energy" (Kahn, p. 703). Psychological safety comprises management flexibility and support, role clarity, and freedom of self-expression. Management flexibility gives employees the freedom to pursue projects without fear of reprisals in the event of failure. Clear work expectations avoid confusion and disengagement as the employee is able to function decisively (House & Rizzo, 1972). Freedom of self-expression permits employees to become emotionally involved as they transmit their values and emotions into their work roles. Environments that penalize employees for freely expressing their views are likely to reduce them to automatons that perform their work roles in a scripted manner. The dimensions of psychological meaningfulness include perceived meaningfulness of contribution and adequacy of recognition received. The third dimension of job challenge is inherently task-related and is categorized as a form of job demand.

Campbell, Dunnette, Lawler, and Weick's (1970) review of managerial climate as perceived by employees (Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, & Rosenthal, 1964; Litwin & Stringer, 1966; Schneider & Bartlett, 1968) yielded individual autonomy, degree of structure imposed on the position, reward orientation, and consideration, warmth, and support as the prevailing taxonomy of climate. Campbell et al. expressed concern at the paucity of dimensions, stating that much of the variation in organizational climate had been ignored. To improve explanatory power, Pritchard and Karasick (1973) identified additional dimensions of climate, including achievement, flexibility and innovation, performance-reward dependency, social relations, decision centralization, structure, and status polarization, although only rewards and achievement correlated with performance. Table 1 summarizes the list of organizational climate factors.

If we cull the list in Table 1 into the likely predictors of performance, we would absorb the majority of James and James's (1989) factors into Brown and Leigh's (1996) psychological safety and psychological meaningfulness construct. Role stress includes role clarity, and leadership facilitation and support is

**TABLE 1. Dimensions of Organizational Climate**

Review	Organizational climate factor
James and James (1989)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Role stress, role ambiguity, conflict, role over-load</li> <li>• Leadership facilitation and support               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hierarchical influence, psychological influence</li> <li>Leader trust and support, leader interaction and facilitation, leader goal emphasis and facilitation</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Work group cooperation               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Friendship and warmth, responsibility for effectiveness, work group cooperation, work group warmth and friendliness</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Brown and Leigh (1996)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Psychological safety               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Management flexibility and support</li> <li>Role clarity</li> <li>Self-expression</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Psychological meaningfulness               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Meaningfulness of employee contribution</li> <li>Adequacy of recognition</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Campbell (1970)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Structure</li> <li>• Reward</li> <li>• Consideration, warmth, and support</li> </ul>
Pritchard and Karasick (1973)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Achievement*</li> <li>• Flexibility and innovation</li> <li>• Performance-reward dependency*</li> <li>• Social relations</li> <li>• Decision centralization</li> <li>• Structure</li> <li>• Status</li> </ul>

\*Correlates with performance.

management flexibility and support. Campbell et al.'s (1970) support is akin to Brown and Leigh's consideration, warmth, and support. Pritchard and Karasick's (1973) significant factors of performance-reward dependency may be considered as a surrogate for reward. The final list appears in Table 2. Consequently, I will construct propositions relating the final list of organizational climate variables to emotional intelligence.

### *Job Demands*

Janssen (2001) viewed job demands as a multifaceted construct with qualitative and quantitative role obligations. Quantitative demands include speed and

**TABLE 2. Relevant Organizational Climate Factors**

Main factor	Component
Psychological Safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Management flexibility and support</li> <li>• Role clarity</li> <li>• Self-expression</li> </ul>
Psychological Meaningfulness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meaningfulness of employee contribution</li> <li>• Adequacy of recognition</li> </ul>
Work Group Cooperation	
Structure	
Reward	
Achievement	

quantity of work in the short run and permanence of work quantity in the long run. The qualitative job demands of role conflict and ambiguity have been absorbed under James and James's (1989) organizational climate construct, which in turn is part of Brown and Leigh's (1996) organizational climate formulation. It follows that they will not be considered separately as job demands. Gardner (1986) proposed that activation theory be used to explain the effect of job demands. Every employee has an optimal level of activation in the reticular activation system of the central nervous system, resulting in superior performance. When actual activation levels deviate substantially from the optimal levels, nervous system efficiency declines, thereby inhibiting performance. Job demands depend on the level of activation of the employee, with low demands producing low activation levels and high demands producing high activation levels (Gardner & Cummings, 1988); an inverted U-shaped relationship between job demands and job performance results. Job performance increases as job demands increase up to a certain point. It then plateaus with moderate job demands that offer challenge without stress, and then declines as demands become onerous (Janssen). Empirically, inverted U-shaped relationships have been found between task difficulty and activation level (Baschera & Grandjean, 1979), job stimulation and job performance (Gardner), and job complexity and affective outcomes (Champoux, 1992). I consider moderate job demands to be the optimal predictor of performance.

### **Propositions**

#### *Emotional Intelligence, Job Demands, Reward, and Performance*

In this section, I argue that performance improves with the increase in job demands as long as employees feel that the demands are fair. However, performance then plateaus and declines as job demands become excessive. I argue that

emotional resilience and self-control delay performance declines so that the period of unchanging performance lengthens with rising job demands before the onset of diminished performance.

How do emotionally self-controlled and resilient employees faced with rising job demands perform with varying perceptions of fairness of pay and promotions? Equity theory (Mowday, 1991) maintains that fairness perceptions are motivational. Employees evaluate the exchange relationship with the organization in terms of the rewards the organization provides for the effort they put into their work. Underreward arouses an unpleasant emotional state, which requires action to reduce dissonance. Such actions could include reducing effort, mentally reframing efforts and rewards to make them more appealing, restraining additional unpaid service, including assisting new employees, initiating new projects, or withdrawal from the organization (Janssen, 2001; Mowday), all of which could affect performance. The crux of the issue is that underreward perceptions can be emotional in nature in that they invoke emotional reactions that demand adjustments to behavior. Underreward perceptions are more frequently experienced than overreward perceptions and induce more powerful reactions (Mowday). In neuroscience, the prefrontal area of the brain is the repository of working memory, the capacity to pay attention and keep in mind that which is salient. It functions best when the mind is calm (Mauri, Sinforiani, Bono, & Vignati, 1993). When threatened, the amygdala, the brain's alarm system, sends a signal that travels to the prefrontal lobes through a neural pathway, shutting off focus and creativity. Cortisol eruptions occur, mobilizing the body to combat the external threat and draining resources from the working memory and redirecting them to the senses. A pattern of underreward may be emotionally draining, leaving the employee emotionally exhausted, the hippocampus (the brain's memory center) diminished, and performance permanently retarded (Goleman, 1989; Mauri et al.).

The cornerstone of emotional self-regulation is self-control or the ability to encapsulate and control negative emotions. Self-controlled employees have highly developed prefrontal lobes, which, when faced with perceptions of underreward, control the amygdala's impulses, fashioning a controlled, moderate, and appropriate response (Lehmann, Tennigkeit, Haschke, & Haschke, 1992; Logan, Schachar, & Tannock, 1997). In comparisons of emotionally resilient and distressed individuals, the resilient individuals showed a remarkable capacity to inhibit stress, whereas the distressed individuals exhibited uncontrolled amygdala reactions for months after the source of distress was removed. Over time, the resilient individuals were not only able to stay calm during crises but also adapted to a variety of life's stresses (Lehmann et al.).

Emotional resilience, or flexible optimism, may reinforce the ability to cope with underreward stress. Instead of engaging in fault finding, emotionally resilient employees may be flexibly optimistic enough to put difficulties behind them and redirect their attention to positive means of coping with underreward by negotiating with supervisors, querying management on the reasons underlying

ing underreward, or bringing attention to the discrepancy. Equity sensitivity is the extent of an individual's perception of fairness. It relates to agreeableness, which encompasses friendliness, trustworthiness, compliance, and modesty (Costa & McCrae, 1989), all of which are akin to flexible optimism (emotional resilience) and self-control.

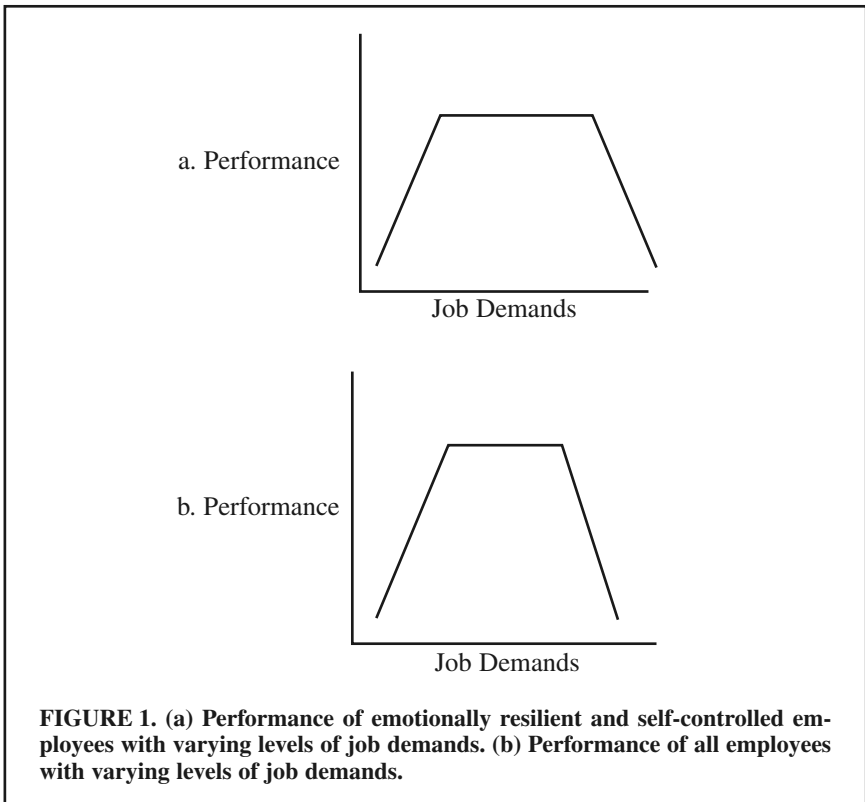
In the event that compensation is fair, emotionally resilient and self-controlled individuals are likely to reward the organization with increased diligence, dependability, and commitment. Over time, the continuous substitution of positive emotion for negative energy improves job satisfaction and, in turn, commitment to the organization. Although I did not test the impact of emotional competence (Abraham, 2000), I found that emotional intelligence was a powerful predictor of organizational commitment with a full 15% of the variance in organizational commitment being explained solely by emotional intelligence.

Janssen (2001) found that varying fairness perceptions resulted in an inverted U-shaped relationship between job demands and performance. With fairness, employees improve performance up to a point until job demands become so intense that their performance levels off (at the flat portion of the inverted U) and then declines with very high levels of job demand. As postulated earlier, this review holds that emotionally resilient and self-controlled employees are less likely to be adversely affected by underreward, so that for perceptions of fairness, such individuals will tolerate increased job demands longer than their peers, and the horizontal portion of the inverted U-curve will be flatter and the decline with increased demands will be delayed (see Figure 1). With underreward, the decline in performance is a distinct possibility, although it could be less steep at high levels of emotional resilience and self-control. Given that Janssen found a quadratic relationship for job demands and performance, we may assume that the relationship between emotional resilience, self-control, and job demands will be curvilinear as well.

*Proposition 1.* For all employees, rising job demands first lead to improved performance. After a point, performance levels off with increased job demands and declines as job demands become onerous. Emotional resilience and self-control are capable of delaying the onset of performance declines such that the leveling off of performance occurs for a longer period of time than it does for less self-controlled and resilient employees.

### *Emotional Intelligence, Work Group Cohesion, and Performance*

The emotional competency of social skills is seen here as strengthening work group cohesion, resulting in superior performance. I have argued (Abraham, 1999) that emotional intelligence is directly related to work group cohesion. The emotional competency of social skills has the capacity to monitor and evaluate others' feelings and emotions and to use that knowledge to guide actions



(Salovey & Mayer, 1990). At the level of the work group, I set forth the argument that social skills are manifested in harmonious relationships among workers. This harmony is the basis of synergistic sharing of skills within groups whose performance surpasses that of other groups with similar technical but fewer social skills (Goleman, 1995). In their comparison of groups engaged in an advertisement-generation task, Williams and Sternberg (1988) found that harmonious groups were able to benefit more fully from the creative abilities of their members than were those groups that had friction attributable to dominance by one or more members, resulting in anger or resentment between members or nonparticipants. Kelley and Caplan (1993) observed that peak-performing groups had members who built consensus, empathized with other members, promoted cooperation, and avoided conflict.

Social skills have been found to create and sustain informal networks. Kelley and Caplan (1993) distinguished between average and star researchers at Bell Laboratories. The work was such that no single individual possessed all of the knowledge required for task completion. Although group scores were comparable across cognitive measures, star performers were characterized by the ability

to create and maintain informal networks, whose assistance could be called on in those aspects of the task for which the scientist lacked knowledge. Such expertise networks were supported by communication and trust networks in which employees shared their private feelings and concerns. If we accept that one third of our workforce consists of knowledge workers whose efforts are so highly specialized that they can be productive only if well coordinated (Drucker, 1994), the social skills component of emotional intelligence may be mandatory for success. Trust among team members appears to be vital for superior performance. Emotions are at the heart of the experience of trust in that people initially determine their relationships with others depending on whether they can trust them (Jones & George, 1998). If they feel nervous or disconcerted, negative affect results, which in turn can influence others in the organization. Positive moods heighten positive perceptions of others and trust. Moods and emotions trigger positive or negative feelings in an ongoing relationship, enhancing or limiting trust over time (Fridja, 1978).

Next, I set forth the argument that the emotional competencies of heightened conscientiousness, reliability, and integrity arouse feelings of trust in the group by arousing positive moods and positive perceptions. Over time, positive moods enhance trust. Unconditional trust is the sharing of values between group members that leads to their investment in long-term relationships. Interpersonal cooperation and teamwork are enhanced by unconditional trust, as cooperative actions by group members stimulate others to similar action, strengthening shared beliefs and commitment. Group members sacrifice personal interests for the common good. Such positive affective states have been found to contribute to creativity (Isen, Daubman, & Nowicki, 1987).

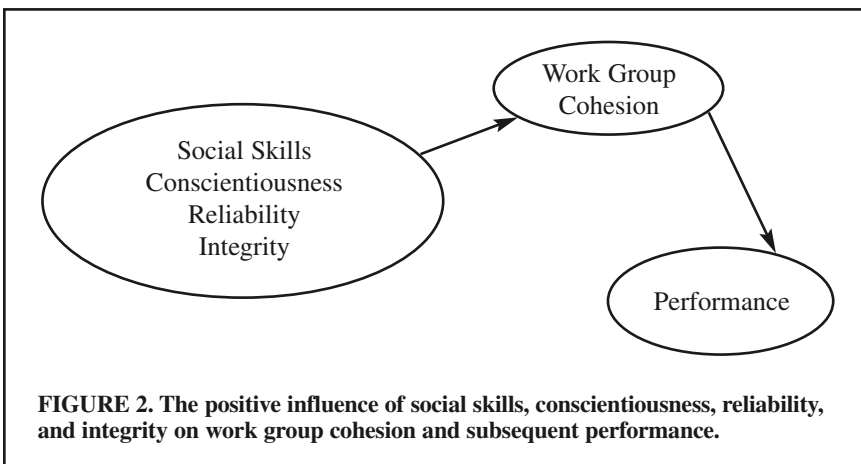
Quid pro quo relationships are replaced by communal relationships in which participants feel responsible for helping each other and cooperating, further increasing assistance and cooperation (Clark & Mills, 1979). Shared values promote confidence as group members are assured of the intentions and objectives of others, rendering them more likely to invest in promoting the organization and performing well (Dasgupta, 1988). When unconditional trust exists, group members do not hesitate to seek assistance from each other because they do not fear that they will become obligated to reciprocate favors or that others will use the knowledge as a source of power (Fama & Jensen, 1983). This sharing of values through unconditional trust provides individuals with the security of knowing that others have the same intentions of contributing to group goals, leading to greater task involvement and performance. Jones and George (1998) concluded that unconditional trust is the basis of synergistic group relationships, leading to superior performance benefits, such as the development of unique capabilities and voluntary behavior that gives an organization a competitive advantage. To this point, Petty, Beadles, Chapman, Lowery, and Connell (1995) found that teamwork was the only predictor significantly associated with performance over time (i.e., teamwork measured at Time 1 resulted in superior performance at Time 2).

*Proposition 2.* As summarized in Figure 2, social skills, conscientiousness, reliability, and integrity strengthen work group cohesion, which results in superior performance.

*Emotional Intelligence, Psychological Safety, Psychological Meaningfulness, and Performance*

Emotions drive motives, fuel perceptions, and dictate action. The amygdala contains emotional memory, repositories of experienced feelings, actions, and habits that act as storehouses of knowledge for future performance. As experiences enter the amygdala, they are evaluated and retained if they act as incentives for action. In other words, future action is determined in part by the deposit of experience in this nerve center of the brain. When experiences are inherently pleasurable or the employee is endowed with sufficient motivation that suppresses negative feeling, the emotional repository accumulates positive emotion that sends the employee into a state of flow (Csikzentmihalyi, 1990). As Goleman (1989) stated, “Flow is the ultimate motivator” (p. 106) because employees in flow are so engaged in work that the distinction between the self and the work role is temporarily blurred (Csikzentmihalyi, 1982). Effort (Hackman & Oldham, 1980), mindfulness (Langer, 1989), and intrinsic motivation (Deci, 1975) are associated with flow. Thus, employees in a state of flow—that is, those who find psychological safety and meaningfulness in their work—will be motivated to be superior performers.

Psychological safety and meaningfulness may be considered as contractual obligations by the organization, whereby the extent to which people agree to cast themselves in the roles desired by the organization depends on the benefits, guarantees, and resources available to fulfill their needs. The feelings of psychological



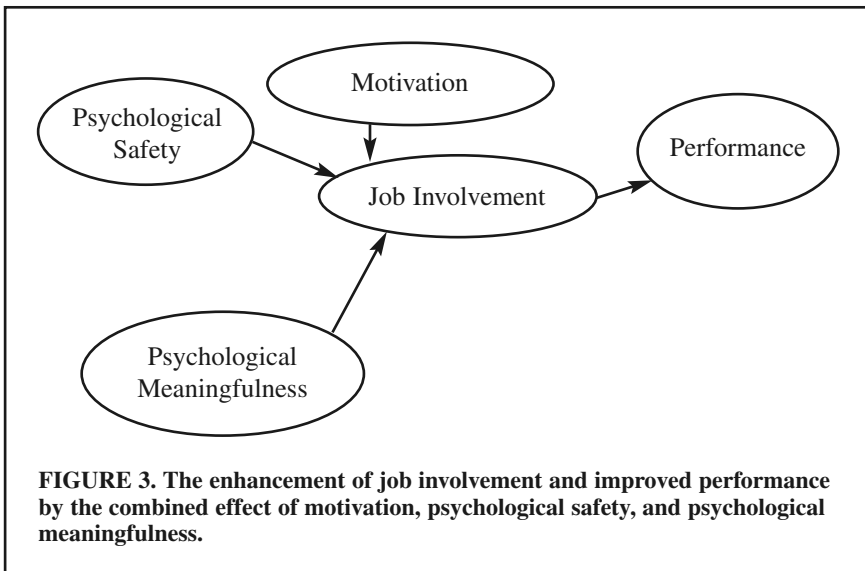
meaningfulness and safety, or lack thereof, are emotional. Kahn (1990) found that engagement (flow) was related to both higher levels of psychological meaningfulness and safety among camp counselors and architects. Employees feel cognitively and emotionally connected to the job when they perceive management support, clear expectations, freedom of expression, coherence between their work and organizational goals, and recognition for their efforts. Such emotional connection leads motivated employees to respond to psychological meaningfulness and safety with deeper job involvement.

Job involvement is a cognitive belief state of psychological identification with one's job (Kanungo, 1982; Lodahl & Kejner, 1965). Internal motivation or flow has been found to be an antecedent to job involvement (Gardner, Dunham, Cummings, & Pierce, 1989). The more individuals identify with their jobs, the more likely they are to invest time and energy in them or increase effort. Effort results in greater job involvement, which in turn raises performance levels (Brown & Leigh, 1996; Efraty & Sirgy, 1990). Brown and Leigh found a significant path from psychological safety and meaningfulness to job involvement to performance.

*Proposition 3.* In psychologically safe and meaningful climates, motivated employees will demonstrate greater job involvement and superior performance (Figure 3).

#### *Emotional Intelligence, Benevolence, and Performance*

In this review, the emotional competencies of conscientiousness and social skills are considered to enhance altruism and self-sacrifice, such that employees



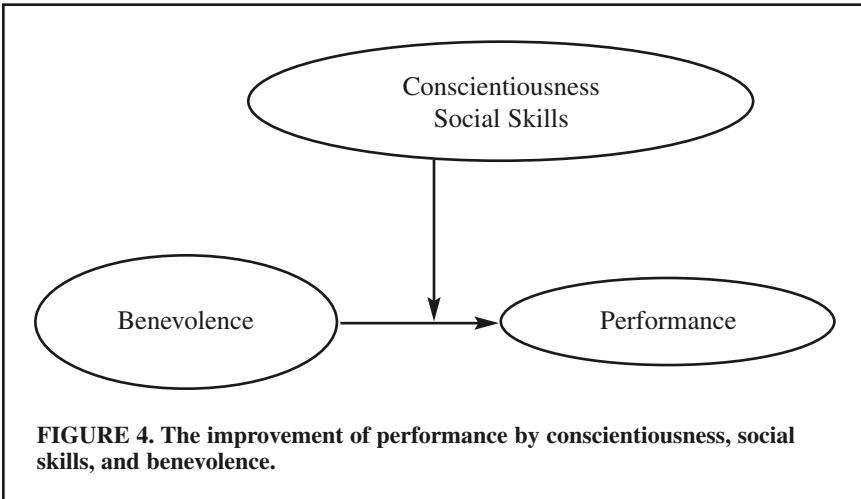
who exhibit *benevolence* may be expected to be superior performers. *Benevolents* are individuals who are prepared to cooperate. They are altruistic in that they expect fewer results from their work efforts than their counterparts (Huseman, Hatfield, & Miles, 1985, 1987; Miles, Hatfield, & Huseman, 1989). Empirically, benevolents have been found to place greater emphasis on work processes and building relationships than on tangible outcomes, including pay (King, Miles, & Day, 1993). Furthermore, they are willing to do more work for less pay than their peers (Miles et al., 1989, 1994), thereby positively contributing to team performance.

Because benevolent individuals are more concerned about the effort put into completing their duties rather than final rewards, it is expected that they will be more concerned about conscientiously fulfilling their duties rather than seeking higher pay or promotions. Therefore, individuals high in benevolence also are likely to be high in conscientiousness. Goleman (1989) holds that conscientiousness is particularly effective in enhancing job performance when combined with social skills. The extra effort of conscientious employees becomes counterproductive when they lack social skills. Because they hold themselves to exacting standards, they expect others to do the same and become excessively critical if they perceive laxness. Factory workers (Organ & Lingl, 1995) and salespersons (Barrick, Mount, & Strauss, 1993) have been found to criticize coworkers over insignificant omissions, thereby straining their social relationships. Individuals with highly developed social skills who are both benevolent and conscientious are unlikely to be overly critical of their peers, thereby displaying both dependability and consideration.

*Proposition 4.* Conscientiousness and social skills influence the relationship between benevolence and performance such that conscientious and socially skilled, benevolent employees are likely to be better performers (Figure 4).

#### *Emotional Intelligence, Job Autonomy, Feedback Valence, Feedback Style, and Performance*

In annual performance reviews, employees receive feedback regarding their performance. Feedback delivered in an informational style (i.e., the reviewer describes the process by which the evaluation was conducted) to employees with the emotional competencies of self-awareness and self-confidence will improve their performance, provided that they have the job autonomy to implement suggestions. Self-awareness, self-confidence, emotional resilience, and emotional honesty influence the relationship between job autonomy, feedback valence, feedback style, and performance. Drawing on intrinsic motivation theory, Zhou (1998) theorized the joint positive effect of these contextual variables on creative performance. Creativity mandates *intrinsic motivation*, the motivational state in which the task rather than external rewards motivates and guides the individual. Performance



assessment feedback enhances intrinsic motivation through feedback valence and feedback style. *Feedback valence* specifies the value placed by the organization on the employee's contribution (Herold & Greller, 1977; Sansone, Sachau, & Weir, 1989). *Feedback style* is the manner in which feedback is delivered. An informational style consists of constructive suggestions for improvement with genuine concern for the employee's feelings and a real desire to develop the individual, whereas a controlling style orders employees to accomplish tasks in a predetermined manner outside of their control (Ryan, 1982; Zhou).

Not surprisingly, positive evaluations delivered in an informational style for jobs recognized to be of high value increase intrinsic motivation. The informational style permits individuals to self-examine their performance, while giving them control over any changes that need to be made without supervisors imposing external restrictions (Zhou, 1998). Studies of schoolteachers who were given informational feedback through suggestions to improve student performance had higher levels of intrinsic motivation than those who were simply ordered to improve student achievement (Pajak & Glickman, 1989). Similarly, the creativity of adolescents' written assignments was enhanced when teachers instilled the need to take responsibility for one's actions rather than when teachers merely gave directions (Ryan & Grolnick, 1986).

Positive feedback reinforces an individual's feelings of perceived competence (Zhou, 1998) by providing validation of his or her ability to perform a given task. High feedback valence assures the employee that he or she is a valued member of the organization. Negative feedback threatens both perceived competence and the perception that the individual is the primary contributor to success. Task autonomy affects intrinsic motivation (Tauer & Harackiewicz, 1999), in that high task autonomy allows an individual to select a method to per-

form tasks (Hackman & Oldham, 1980) and, consequently, improve performance. In consecutive studies of the influence of job autonomy on performance, Amabile and Gitomer (1984) and Shalley (1991) demonstrated that participants in environments with the greatest job autonomy exhibited the greatest improvements in creative performance. Zhou also observed that only those employees who were given positive feedback in an informational style and control over the method of task completion were the peak performers. Therefore, the combination of positive valence (high value placed on the employee's contribution), informational feedback style, and job autonomy may enhance performance.

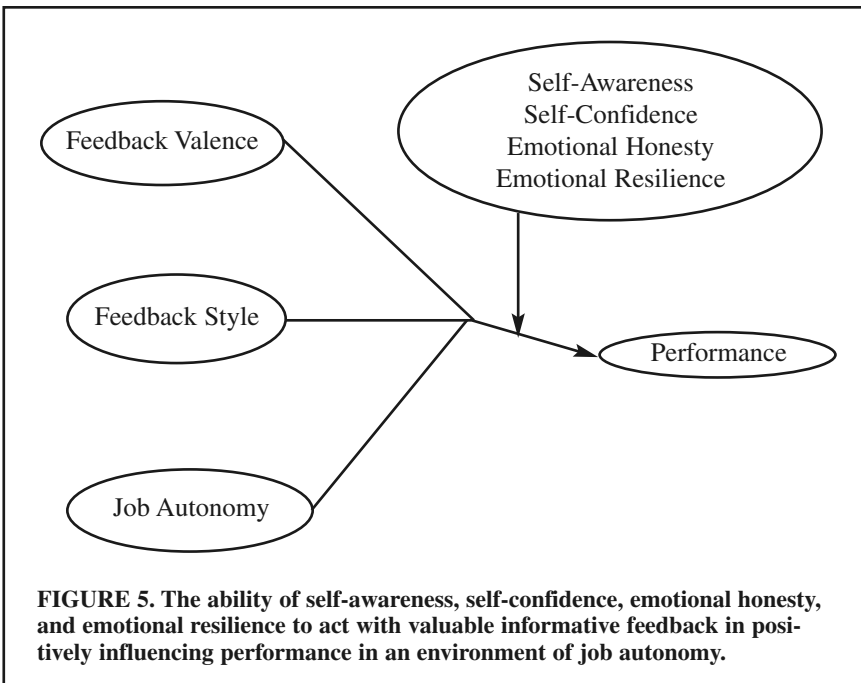
But can the variance in Zhou's (1998) three-way interaction be increased by personality variables? It may be argued that, to the extent that high achievement-oriented individuals place a premium on competence (Tauer & Harackiewicz, 1999), they favor performance assessments (Atkinson, 1974; McClelland, 1961; Trope, 1975). Positive feedback may reinforce feelings of self-worth and promote greater task focus, suggesting that positive feedback delivered in an informational style with autonomy produces superior performance among high achievement-oriented employees. However, Zhou was unable to corroborate this thesis empirically.

Zhou's omission of the emotional competencies of self-awareness and self-control may account for the disappointing result of his study (1998). Achievement can be seen as the single emotional competence that drives star performers to strive for superior performance through continuous self-improvement. But negative feedback may also have emotional effects. Negative feedback, even if delivered in an informational style, can have a devastating effect on individuals who place a high value on competence. Employees may redirect their efforts away from creative projects with long-term and potentially more valuable payoffs in the future toward those that are short term, predictable, and of less value. Task completion becomes perfunctory and automated as the joy of creativity is replaced by the desperate desire for conformity. However, people question their self-competence only if they are achievement oriented. An emotionally self-confident and self-controlled person may be imbued with sufficient internal strength to take negative feedback in stride.

This review upholds the argument that self-awareness provides the ability to understand clearly one's strengths and limitations and those of others (Salovey & Mayer, 1990) so the employee can arrive at a more rational assessment of his or her abilities and the supervisor's evaluation and then seek the means to reconcile the two positions. Emotional resilience permits the encapsulating of negative feeling from criticism that may be unjustified. The employee resorts to constructive responses, including seeking dialog with the supervisor, studying organizational objectives and linking them to personal objectives, and influencing key decision makers. Emotional honesty, as set forth in Cooper and Sawaf's (1997) conceptualization of emotional intelligence, rejects the repression of honest feelings for politically correct action, inducing an honest assessment of discrepancies between individual performance and organizational expectations.

Self-confidence or self-efficacy may be instrumental in providing the mental scaffolding to reinforce feelings of self-competence and self-determination. Regardless of the opinion of others, the employee may feel certain that he or she has the ability to succeed. Salovey and Mayer (1990) identified mood-directed attention as a facet of emotional intelligence, permitting the setting of priorities for tasks and attending to those of higher priority. As employees attend to their feelings, they permit themselves to be directed away from more trivial problems to those of greater importance. With sufficient job autonomy, they would have the freedom to set priorities and allocate their time and effort most productively.

*Proposition 5.* Self-awareness, self-confidence, emotional resilience, and emotional honesty influence the relationship between feedback valence, feedback style, job autonomy, and performance (Figure 5). More specifically, employees with these four emotional competencies and high levels of job autonomy will demonstrate improved performance in response to positive feedback delivered in an informational style. With negative feedback, informational style, and high job autonomy, individuals displaying these emotional competencies will still show greater positive increments in performance than non-emotionally intelligent employees, albeit to a lesser extent than for positive feedback.



**FIGURE 5.** The ability of self-awareness, self-confidence, emotional honesty, and emotional resilience to act with valuable informative feedback in positively influencing performance in an environment of job autonomy.

## Discussion

In this integrative review, I have reformulated the theoretical relationship between emotional intelligence and performance by replacing emotional intelligence, along with specific emotional competencies that act in conjunction with organizational climate and moderate job demands, as the predictor of improved performance. In other words, emotional competencies are lodged within a situational framework that reverses the weak associations of emotional intelligence with performance found in previous empirical work. The relationship between an employee's personality traits and performance is contingent on a fit between the task and organizational climate and, as a thesis, is in accordance with other fit-based approaches that have replaced universal perspectives that traits, considered individually, determine employee success (see Hollenbeck et al., 2002, for a review).

From a practical standpoint, employers are advised to create work environments in which the positive effects of emotional competencies flourish. Autonomy in task selection (i.e., permitting employees to select the tasks on which to work) is the only form of autonomy that has been found to interact significantly with emotional intelligence. The work environment must support this type of autonomy over the restrictive forms of process autonomy and method autonomy, whereby tasks are assigned to employees who may then exert a limited amount of freedom in determining the processes and techniques to be used for task completion.

In an era of continuous downsizing, job stress has risen exponentially as surviving employees are responsible for the work of those who have been laid off. With the widespread shrinking of pay raises and the elimination of secure, defined benefit retirement plans, employees have to accept the additional work with little or no extra compensation. It behooves firms to use the emotional competencies theorized to be related to performance in this review as criteria for hiring. Firms could find that emotional resilience permits such workers to tolerate both increased job stress and underreward, thereby reducing job dissatisfaction in favor of true bonding between individuals who unite to create the technologies for new product development. As socially skilled group members foster the growth of harmonious social networks, true collaboration could result, which in turn may be translated into products of superior quality.

Companies are charged with providing psychologically safe and meaningful work environments that promote engagement and job involvement. Generous compensation, adequate monetary and nonmonetary recognition of superior performance, sufficient research funding, and the management's assumption of additional administrative responsibilities so as to enable creative employees to concentrate on their jobs are some of the features of a psychologically meaningful environment. For the environment to be psychologically safe, the firm must be a profitable business, assured of a continuous stream of income so that employees do not have to fear job loss. Prompt action to curb acts of misconduct by supervisors assures subordinates of management's support and integrity. At annual

performance reviews, emotionally intelligent supervisors are more likely to engender employee support and commitment to improved performance as they act with sensitivity and tact in recognizing the importance of individual contributions to the firm, clearly justify their merit pay and promotion decisions, and grant sufficient freedom for employees to act on their recommendations as they seek to develop and grow.

If one or more of the components of psychological safety and meaningfulness are manipulated, several research issues arise. To what extent does emotional resilience prevent declines in performance among workers confronted with ambiguous demands even though management flexibility and support are forthcoming? If freedom of self-expression abounds, could emotional resilience assist employees in finding outlets for their frustrations with lack of role clarity if management is not supportive or flexible? If the organization is unaware of the value of an employee's contributions, will emotional honesty and self-confidence assist that employee in finding recompense?

Empirical testing of the five propositions advanced in this article also raises a number of methodological issues. Which functional forms are to be tested? How many interaction terms are to be specified? Tests of predictors do not exceed concurrent effects of three variables due to the possibility of excessive multicollinearity. However, if we accept that job demands follow a quadratic form, it is necessary to test the joint influence of four variables on performance. Given Zhou's (1998) finding of a significant four-way interaction, it is possible that the quadratic form of job demands, fairness perceptions, self-awareness, and self-confidence may be significant in predicting performance. For Proposition 2, the direct link from social skills, conscientiousness, reliability, and integrity to work group cohesion to performance may be tested using structural equations. A linear functional form may be used for Proposition 3, with an interaction term of Motivation  $\times$  Psychological Safety  $\times$  Psychological Meaningfulness being hierarchically regressed on job involvement as the criterion. In this model, the moderate nature of job demands may be assumed by including only those survey responses that indicate moderate job demands. Alternatively, the predictor may be refined by inclusion of job demands in quadratic form. The final proposition should have four-way effect of feedback valence, feedback style, self-awareness, or self-confidence and job autonomy with the assumption of moderate job demands. As stated earlier, four-way interactions are rare and multicollinearity will be even higher with four-way than with three-way interactions, hence both three-way and four-way interactions must be tested.

Certain emotional competencies may be particularly powerful in overcoming the negative effects of hostile organizational climates. Emotional honesty permits the regulatory system to evaluate unpleasant information, resulting in either the employee exerting more effort to become indispensable to the organization or adapting to improve organizational performance. Emotional stability also partially mitigates the negative effects of poor fit with the organizational climate

(Hollenbeck et al., 2002). As emotional stability is identical to the emotional competencies of conscientiousness, reliability, and integrity, it may be these factors that permit the resolution of conflicts with the organization over misaligned values. Future research should seek to replicate the Hollenbeck et al. study with the replacement of emotional stability by emotional self-regulation.

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