Emotional Intelligence and Coping Styles among Hospitality Industry Employees

Hyun Jeong Kim  
*Washington State University, jennykim@wsu.edu*

Jerome Agrusa  
*Hawaii Pacific University, jagrusa@hpu.edu*

Kim, Hyun Jeong and Agrusa, Jerome, "Emotional Intelligence and Coping Styles among Hospitality Industry Employees" (2010).  
http://scholarworks.umass.edu/refereed/CHRIE_2010/Saturday/8
EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND COPING STYLES AMONG HOSPITALITY EMPLOYEES

Hyun Jeong Kim
School of Hospitality Business Management
Washington State University

and

Jerome Agrusa
College of Business Administration
Hawaii Pacific University

ABSTRACT

This study examines the relationship between emotional intelligence (EI) and three coping styles (task-, emotion-, and avoidance-oriented coping) using an adult, hospitality industry population. The hierarchical regression indicates that EI is by far the most dominant predictor of task coping among all selected explanatory variables; EI does not have much influence on emotion coping after the entry of two basic personality traits (neuroticism and extraversion); and EI is significantly related to avoidance coping encompassing social diversion and distraction. In addition, this study reveals the critical role played by demographic characteristics (e.g., age, experience, and gender) in individual coping efforts.

Key Words: emotional intelligence, task coping, emotion coping, avoidance coping, hospitality employees

INTRODUCTION

Using the information from the National Survey on Drug Use and Health in the U.S. (Office of Applied Studies, 2007), Pizam (2008) reported that foodservice employees had the second highest incidence of depressive episodes in all job categories and female foodservice workers’ depression was so severe that their depression rate ranked first among all female full-time workers in the nation. Several other recent studies also note the high level of stress for hospitality employees at work in the other parts of the world (e.g., Murray-Gibbons & Gibbons, 2007; Pienaar & Willemse, 2008). Literature has shown that coping is a mediator between antecedent stressful events and outcomes such as anxiety, depression, psychological distress, and somatic complaints (Billings & Moos, 1981, 1984; Coyne et al., 1981; Pearlin & Schooler, 1978). Therefore, it is imperative for hospitality employees to have adaptive coping skills to remain psychologically healthy and productive at work.

Some evidence exists that EI may influence the choice of coping methods that individuals make under stressful circumstances (Baker & Berenbaum, 2007). Although EI has emerged as another critical individual variable that may protect people against stress, to date few studies have analyzed this issue. In addition, studies on EI often consist of student samples, which make it difficult to generalize the findings. Therefore, more studies using the general population or employment settings are needed.

This study investigates the relationship between trait EI and coping responses with hospitality industry samples. The researchers of this study are also interested in the effect of key socio-demographic variables, such as gender, age, education, position, and job experience, on trait EI and coping. Because of a shortage of research on EI and coping behaviors in the hospitality field, the fundamental information pertaining to the relationship between socio-demographic variables and EI and coping is lacking. Lastly, to detect the incremental predictive validity of trait EI, two basic personality traits, namely extraversion and neuroticism, are incorporated into the proposed model. This way the unique role of trait EI in coping can be attested along with the basic personality factors.
LITERATURE AND HYPOTHESES

Coping and its Relationship with Socio-Demographic Variables

Coping generally refers to a cognitive and behavioral response to negative external events (Billings & Moos, 1981). Coping experts have different opinions on how coping responses are determined. Lazarus and his associates (Lazarus & Launier, 1978; Folkman, 1982) conceptualize coping as a relational process between the person and the environment. The emphasis on the process leads to the approach of coping as a state-dependent or situation-specific response. Those in favor of this view devalue individual differences by presenting that an individual utilizes various coping mechanisms rather than a consistent mechanism. (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980; Pearlin & Schooler, 1978). The other approach is called disposition-based coping. Dispositional coping assumes that people employ relatively stable coping strategies across different stressful encounters (Carver et al., 1989; McCrae & Costa, 1986; Endler et al., 1994). McCrae and Costa (1986) argued the reason why individual differences had small impacts on coping in the earlier studies is attributable to the lack of the systematic approach and the selective use of personality dimensions by coping researchers for their particular research. The authors chose three broad, higher-level personality traits (extraversion, neuroticism, and openness) and demonstrated extraversion and neuroticism are systematically related to situational coping responses.

Whether it is a dispositional or situation-specific response, coping behaviors are divided into two basic frameworks: problem- and emotion-focused coping (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980). These two coping dimensions differ in the way coping behavior is targeted: problem-focused coping is aimed at solving the problem and emotion-focused coping is directed toward regulating the emotion of the person under stress (Latack & Havlovic, 1992). Other researchers identified avoidance coping as a third basic coping dimension (Endler & Parker, 1990; Feifel & Strack, 1989). Avoidance coping involves efforts to avoid stressful situations via engaging in a substitute task or seeking out other people (Endler, 1997). Past research generally implies that the more reliance on active, problem-focused coping and the less use of emotion- and avoidance-oriented coping lead to positive and desirable outcomes in work and other daily life situations (Billings & Moos, 1981; Koeske et al., 1993; Latack, 1986).

Numerous studies suggest gender differences in coping behaviors. The general consensus is that women are inclined for emotion- and avoidance-oriented coping and men tend to employ task- and problem-focused coping (Endler & Parker, 1994; Pearlin & Schooler, 1978). Age-graded developmentalists portray old age in terms of withdrawal and regression, suggesting a high possibility of old person’s use of primitive and defensive coping mechanism (Vaillant, 1977). Empirical results, however, do not necessarily support this theory. More often, age was not an influential factor, suggesting that old-aged people can cope in the same way as young or midie-aged people (Falkman & Lazaus, 1980). In some cases, favorable results were reported: older individuals engage in a significantly less amount of emotion and avoidance-oriented coping (Feifel & Strack, 1989). Therefore, this study predicts the similar gender and age effects on the coping styles used by hospitality workers. Fewer researchers have investigated the relationship between coping and education, position, and work experience. Literature shows people with higher social status (more education and income) favor more effective coping strategies (e.g., active-cognitive and problem-focused coping) and those with lower social status are inclined to use less effective coping strategies (Billings & Moos, 1981; Cronkite & Moos, 1984). Although the job position variable has not been specifically examined previously, the higher position relates to higher social status. Therefore, people with higher education and/or in managerial positions are expected to rely on more effective coping methods and the less educated and/or non-managers rely on less effective coping methods. Experience is likely to help people learn the best way to cope with stressful situations and therefore, it seems reasonable to assume that those with more experience would engage in more effective, active coping activities and those with less experience would engage in more passive coping activities. The following summarizes the proposed hypotheses on socio-demographic variables and coping styles:

\[ H1: \text{Task coping is associated with men (a), managers (b), higher education (c), and greater amount of work experience (d).} \]
H2: Emotion coping is associated with women (a), non-managers (b), younger age (c), lower education (d), and less amount of work experience (e).

H3: Avoidance coping is associated with women (a), non-managers (b), younger age (c), lower education (d), and less amount of work experience (e).

Nature of EI and Scales

The nature of EI is unsettled with two different views: ability vs. disposition. Salovey and Mayer (1990) who first introduced the term of EI shaped the ability-based model. The authors define EI as “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 action” (p.189). They used three categories with ten facets to describe the scope of EI: appraisal and expression of emotion (verbal emotion in the self, non-verbal emotion in the self, non-verbal perception of emotion in others, and empathy); regulation of emotion (regulation of emotion in the self and regulation of emotion in others); and utilization of emotion (flexible planning, creative thinking, redirected attention, and motivation). Mayer and Salovey (1997) substantially refined the initial definition of EI with focus on more cognitive characteristics and developed a four-branch model. According to the four-branch model, EI is involved in the capacity to perceive emotions, use emotion to facilitate thought, understand emotions, and manage them; and is measured through problems in the content of correctness similar to the conventional intelligence test.

Ironically, Salovey and Mayer’s (1990) early concept of EI led to a disposition-based EI model partly because in their original model the authors included factors such as empathy, planning, and motivation that are linked to personality domains rather than abilities or skills. Petrides and Furnham (2003), who are supportive of trait EI, define EI as “a constellation of behavioral dispositions and self-perceptions concerning one’s ability to recognize, process, and utilize emotion-laden information” (p. 278). In other words, as a disposition, EI is a stable individual characteristic, which can be measured through a self-report questionnaire akin to other personality scales. Because of the various definitions and poorly validated earlier measures of EI, there have been criticisms regarding EI as an elusive construct (Davies et al., 1998). However, Ciarrochi et al. (2000) argued all these different views tend to be complementary rather than contradictory, acknowledging the unique value of each different EI measure. In addition, results of the recent meta-analysis encompassing ability and trait EI measures (Van Rooy & Viswesvaran, 2004) demonstrated that EI has the incremental validity over the Big Five personality factors and can be a valuable predictor of performance. Similarly, reviewing a number of disposition-based EI scales, Tett (2005) pointed out that trait EI is distinct from other personality domains and is not very susceptible to socially desirable responding.

EI and Socio-Demographic Variables

Speaking of the relationship between EI and socio-demographic variables, gender is the most frequently studied variable of all. It is commonly believed that women are more competent than men in the emotional sphere. The ability EI studies demonstrated the authors included factors such as empathy, planning, and motivation that are linked to personality domains rather than abilities or skills. Petrides and Furnham (2003), who are supportive of trait EI, define EI as “a constellation of behavioral dispositions and self-perceptions concerning one’s ability to recognize, process, and utilize emotion-laden information” (p. 278). In other words, as a disposition, EI is a stable individual characteristic, which can be measured through a self-report questionnaire akin to other personality scales. Because of the various definitions and poorly validated earlier measures of EI, there have been criticisms regarding EI as an elusive construct (Davies et al., 1998). However, Ciarrochi et al. (2000) argued all these different views tend to be complementary rather than contradictory, acknowledging the unique value of each different EI measure. In addition, results of the recent meta-analysis encompassing ability and trait EI measures (Van Rooy & Viswesvaran, 2004) demonstrated that EI has the incremental validity over the Big Five personality factors and can be a valuable predictor of performance. Similarly, reviewing a number of disposition-based EI scales, Tett (2005) pointed out that trait EI is distinct from other personality domains and is not very susceptible to socially desirable responding.

The next often discussed socio-demographic variables are age and experience. One of the important characteristics of intelligence is that it develops over time; therefore EI must increase with age and experience to be
considered as true intelligence (Mayer et al, 1999). Although previous research is not always supportive of the developmental criterion of EI (Cote & Miners 2006), it seems plausible to expect a positive relationship between EI and age and job experience because more experience and old age obviously can offer multiple opportunities to learn about one’s own and others’ emotions. The relation of EI to the job position has not been studied to a great extent. The hospitality industry is known as a people business. In the people business, EI is likely to be required at work. Strong performers are often promoted to managerial positions and the hospitality literature evidently shows a higher level of professional efficacy for managers (Kim et al., 2009). Therefore, managers are likely to exhibit higher EI skills than non-managers. EI researchers believe EI is teachable (Brackett & Salovey, 2006). However, the current form of education focuses on enhancing cognitive abilities rather than emotional skills. Consequently, no significant relationship is expected between education and EI. Based on a review of literature and our own rationale, the following hypothesis is put forward:

\[ H4: \text{High trait EI is associated with women (a), older age (b), and greater amount of work experience (c), and managers (d).} \]

**EI, Neuroticism, Extraversion, and Coping**

The most pervasive and replicable factors in coping are closely associated with two personality domains: neuroticism and extraversion (McCrae & Costa, 1986). Neuroticism and extraversion typically display a differential pattern of correlations with coping behaviors. Specifically, neuroticism is positively related to maladaptive, passive coping (e.g., emotional coping and avoidance coping) and is negatively related to adaptive coping (e.g., task-oriented coping, rational action, and detached coping). Extraversion produces the opposite outcomes: negative associations with maladaptive coping and positive associations with adaptive coping (McCrae & Costa, 1986; Endler & Parker, 1990). Because EI has a close relationship with neuroticism and extraversion (Van Rooy & Viswesvaran, 2004), which already have established relationships with the construct of coping, it is worth examining the incremental predictive validity of EI to see if EI contributes anything additional over these two personality factors in explaining coping responses.

The earlier studies concerning the effect of EI on coping frequently used TMMS (Salovey et al., 1995), which identifies three intrapersonal EI dimensions: emotional attention, emotional clarity, and emotional repair. Salovey et al. (2002) created a series of laboratory stressors and assessed the relationships between TMMS and salivary cortisol secretion, blood pressure, negative affect, coping, rumination, and perceptions of threats from stressors. The results indicated that emotional clarity is associated with lower levels of cortisol release during repeated stress; emotional attention is related to lowered cortisol and blood pressure during laboratory challenges; and emotional repair is associated with less passive coping (e.g., denial, giving up, and movies to feel better), greater active coping (e.g., planning), perceptions of stressors as less threatening and lower levels of rumination. Although Salovey et al. (2002) showed all three domains of TMMS as feasible protectors against stress, other scholars reported differential effects of TMMS factors on stress and coping. Emotional clarity and repair were negatively related to behavioral and cognitive avoidance coping and led to less stress while emotional attention had a positive relationship with avoidance coping and increased stress (Augusto Landa et al., 2008; Montes-Berges & Augusto, 2007).

A couple of studies investigated the relationship between EI and coping with EI scales different from TMMS. Petrides et al.(2007) found that TEIQue (Petrides & Furnham, 2003) is a significant positive predictor of two adaptive coping styles (rational and detached coping) and a negative predictor of two maladaptive coping styles (emotional and avoidance coping). Gerits et al. (2004) reported EQ-i composite scales (Bar-On, 1997) are most strongly correlated with the following two coping methods in the reverse direction: a positive correlation with active dealing (part of adaptive coping) and a negative correlation with passive reactions (part of maladaptive coping). Although studies regarding EI and coping are not widely published, generally trait EI appears to be positively related to adaptive coping behaviors and negatively related to maladaptive coping responses. Therefore, it is predicted that in the hospitality work environment, high EI individuals are more likely than low EI individuals to be
active, task-oriented copers and use less emotion- and avoidance-oriented coping strategies. The following shows the proposed hypotheses regarding coping styles and selected psychological traits:

- **H5**: Task coping is associated with high extraversion (a), low neuroticism (b), and high trait EI (c).
- **H6**: Emotion coping is associated with low extraversion (a), high neuroticism (b), and low trait EI (c).
- **H7**: Avoidance coping is associated with low extraversion (a), high neuroticism (b), and low trait EI (c).
- **H8**: Trait EI has incremental validity over extraversion and neuroticism for predicting task coping (a), emotional coping (b), and avoidance coping (c).

**METHOD**

Participants and Instruments

Data were collected from seven hotels (full-service mid to upscale properties) and eight (full-service) restaurants, located in Waikiki, Hawaii. Out of 410 surveys collected, 385 were useable. About half of the responses came from hotels (n = 212) and the other half from restaurants (n = 173). The respondents consisted of 60% of females (n = 229) and 40% of males (n = 155). Respondents’ age ranged from 16 to 72 with a mean of 26 years. Their work experience varied from one month to 28 years with a mean of four years and two months. 21% of respondents held managerial or supervisory positions (n = 82) and the rest of them were non-managers (n = 301). As for participants’ level of education, 23% finished high schools (n = 87), 70% completed college education (n = 265), and 7% attended graduate schools (n = 29).

This study focuses on coping tendencies across hospitality work stressors rather than coping responses to a specific stressful event. The Multidimensional Coping Inventory (MCI) is a well-established dispositional coping measure (Endler and Parker, 1990) encompassing three different coping styles: (1) task-oriented (e.g., “I work to understand the situation”; \(\alpha = .80\)); (2) emotion-oriented (e.g., “I blame myself for procrastinating”; \(\alpha = .74\)); and (3) avoidance-oriented coping (e.g., “I visit a friend”; \(\alpha = .76\)). A total of 15 sample items (five items from each coping category), published in the article by Endler and Parker (1990), were utilized. Using a five-point scale (1=not at all to 5=very much), participants indicated how much they engage in the suggested coping activities when they encounter stressful situations at work. Among numerous trait EI measures, Wang and Law EI scale (WLEIS, Wang and Law, 2002) was selected due to its brevity and reputation as a psychologically sound measure that can be used in the management field. WLEIS comprises four sub-factors with four items in each dimension: (1) self emotion appraisal (e.g., “I have a good sense of why I have certain feelings most of the time”; \(\alpha = .84\)); (2) other’s emotion appraisal (e.g., “I am a good observer of others’ emotions”; \(\alpha = .82\)); (3) use of emotion (e.g., “I always set goals for myself and then try my best to achieve them”; \(\alpha = .86\)), and (4) regulation of emotion (e.g., “I can always calm down quickly when I am very angry”; \(\alpha = .81\)). All items were presented on a five-point scale: 1= totally disagree to 5= totally agree.

Participants completed two personality measures: extraversion (e.g., “I feel comfortable around people”; \(\alpha = .81\)) and neuroticism (e.g., “I am easily disturbed”; \(\alpha = .84\)). These two traits were assessed through the extraversion and neuroticism subscales of the International Personality Item Pool (IPIP; Goldberg, 2001). Each measure comprised 10 items with a five-point response scale: 1= very inaccurate to 5= very accurate. In addition, participants provided their own socio-demographic information. Gender, age, education level, job position, the department they work for, and the length of work experience were inquired.

**FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

The Effect of Socio-Demographic Variables on EI
To test hypotheses 1 through 4, ANOVA or t-tests were conducted. As seen in Table 1, Managers showed significantly higher total EI ratings than non-managers. Additionally, managers displayed the highest EI mean ratings across all subgroups: non-managers, managers, the older, the younger, males, females, the less experienced, and three education groups. Apparently, it suggests the high performers in the hospitality industry possess good emotional skills. Females showed significantly higher total EI ratings than males indicating female’s superior emotional skills. As expected, the existing amount of education did not contribute to the development of emotional skills. No relationship between EI and the level of education appears to reflect this phenomenon. Work experience was moderately significantly related to EI \((p = .07)\) and age was not significantly related to EI, leading to a weak support for the developmental criterion of EI. Even if the theory holds true, the experience effect alone seems to suggest that EI is something that people have to put an effort to develop. Old people may have received many opportunities to develop EI. However, EI is not likely to develop if the opportunities are not taken seriously. At work people are often compelled to learn about others (others’ feelings) and accommodate them. In a sense at work people have to take the opportunities seriously. According to the result of this study, it may be necessary to draw a line between learning opportunities to develop EI and actual learning (development). Among four sub-domains of EI (self-emotion appraisal, others’ emotion appraisal, use of emotion, regulation of emotion), it is interesting to observe others’ emotion appraisal as a shared component by all high-EI groups. In other words, females, managers, and the experienced perceived themselves as having a superior ability in others’ emotion appraisal. This result seems to suggest that the fundamental element of EI is perhaps to recognize and understand other people’s feelings.

### Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Work experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Manager</td>
<td>Non manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WLEIS 1</td>
<td>3.90</td>
<td>3.97</td>
<td>4.07</td>
<td>3.90 *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WLEIS 2</td>
<td>3.78</td>
<td>3.90 *</td>
<td>3.97</td>
<td>3.81 *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WLEIS 3</td>
<td>3.83</td>
<td>3.96 *</td>
<td>4.03</td>
<td>3.88 *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WLEIS 4</td>
<td>3.73</td>
<td>3.74</td>
<td>3.82</td>
<td>3.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WLEIS</td>
<td>3.81</td>
<td>3.90 *</td>
<td>3.97</td>
<td>3.83 **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task coping</td>
<td>3.97</td>
<td>4.10 *</td>
<td>4.20</td>
<td>4.00 **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotion coping</td>
<td>3.08</td>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>3.13</td>
<td>3.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoidance coping</td>
<td>3.48</td>
<td>3.69 *</td>
<td>3.54</td>
<td>3.62</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: For male, \(n = 155\); and for female, \(n = 229\). For managers, \(n = 82\); and for non-managers, \(n =301\). Age and experience were divided into two groups using a median value. WLEIS 1= Self-emotion appraisal; WLEIS 2 = Others’ emotion appraisal; WLEIS 3= Use of emotion; and WLEIS 4 = Regulation of emotion. \(^\dagger p < 0.10\); \(^* p \leq \) 0.05; \(** p < 0.01\).

### The Effect of Socio-Demographic Variables on Coping

This study is in line with the previous findings by demonstrating female respondents have a significantly higher amount of avoidance coping and a slightly higher mean rating for emotion coping (although not significant) (Table1). However, this study also reports female respondents engage in a significantly higher amount of task-oriented coping than males, which is a rare outcome contradicting the notion of women as maladaptive, passive copers (Billings & moos, 1981; Pearlin & Schooler, 1978). This puzzling result may be explained by using the information from regression results (Table 2 and Table 3). First, the significant industry effect was found in the regression with all participants (Table 2). The further t-test indicates hotel employees \((M = 4.10)\) rely on more task-oriented coping than restaurant employees \((M = 3.95)\) and this industry effect shows up only in females (Table 3). We speculate employees are being educated to perform task coping particularly in the hotel setting and this company...
intervention is working out for female workers. Moreover, women’s task coping behaviors significantly grow through age and work experience but men’s do not (Table 3). Although the reason behind the exclusive influence of industry, age, and work experience on women is not clear, the following scenario is possible. The conventional view that women are maladaptive copers may result from the traditional role women play by staying home taking care of family members. In the traditional role, women are not likely to be in need of problem solving skills and therefore they are likely geared towards emotion- or avoidance- oriented coping. Suppose women are initially poor problem-focused copers. For weak performers, educational effects via company intervention, work experience, or age may be substantial. Conversely, for men being already task copers, such educational effects may be minimal. Another feasible explanation is women’s EI. Table 2 displays EI is by far the most critical predictor of task coping. Because women have higher EI than men (Table1), the higher amount of task coping by women is quite natural, but perhaps is not realized in the old traditional role setting described earlier. The manager group’s task coping behavior can be explained in the same manner. Managers displayed the highest EI, thereby resulting in the highest task coping score among all subgroups. The disappearance of both gender and position effects after entry of EI in the regression analysis further supports this rationale, indicating EI as a likely mediator between these two socio-demographic variables (gender and position) and task coping.

The common effects of age and experience on coping styles are: increase in task coping for female workers and decrease in emotion-oriented coping for both genders. Overall, the results of this study indicate the adaptive function of age and work experience. In addition, old age appears to lower men’s avoidance coping behaviors, but not women’s. This result suggests women continue to rely on avoidance coping throughout their life. For example, the need for strong social support, which is part of the avoidance coping strategy in this study, by women in a stressful situation has been well documented (Cronkite & Moos, 1984).

**Incremental Validity of EI and the Association between Extraversion, Neuroticism, and EI and Coping**

A series of hierarchical regression analyses were performed to test hypotheses 5, 6, 7, and 8. In the regression model, because the data were collected from two different hospitality segments, it was deemed appropriate to use the type of industry as the first control variable (step 1). The four socio-demographic variables (gender, age, position, and experience), which showed the significant relationships with various coping strategies in the earlier t-tests, entered the regression as the second set of control variables (step 2). After controlling for the effects of industry and socio-demographic characteristics, extraversion and neuroticism entered the equation as a group of psychological resource variables (step 3). Trait EI, which was the focus of this study, entered the equation as the final psychological trait (step 4). The initial outcome of the regression analyses showed the weak effects of age and experience on three coping strategies. Often neither was significant in regression models, raising questions on the result of earlier t-tests. After discovering the high correlation (r = .69) between age and experience, the researchers thought it is reasonable to conduct the analysis with only one variable included at a time, thereby creating two regressions (model 1: age included; model 2: experience included) for each coping. This procedure was further justified by uncovering almost no change of the total $R^2$ values of task, emotion, and avoidance regressions between the two models. In other words, age and experience variables together do not increase explanatory power. The beta coefficients of other independent variables (industry, position, gender, extraversion, neuroticism, and EI) were also comparable between the two models. For the result of regression for each coping style (step 1 through step 4), see Table 2.

Additional regression analyses were carried out with two sub-samples: men and women (Table 3). These additional analyses were initiated to gain further insight into different coping behaviors found in the previous t-test between males and females. It is also one way to validate the earlier regression results that are based on all participants.
### Table 2

**Regression Results Predicting Task, Emotion, and Avoidance Coping: All Respondents**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent variables</th>
<th>Task coping (^a)</th>
<th>Emotion coping (^a)</th>
<th>Avoidance coping (^a)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(\beta)</td>
<td>(\beta)</td>
<td>(\beta)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industry category</td>
<td>Industry</td>
<td>0.09*</td>
<td>0.09*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socio-demographic info.</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>0.09*</td>
<td>0.11**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Position</td>
<td>0.11**</td>
<td>0.10*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.10*</td>
<td>0.10*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological resource I</td>
<td>Experience</td>
<td>0.10*</td>
<td>0.09*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological resource II</td>
<td>Extraversion</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Neuroticism</td>
<td>-0.17**</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>5.51**</td>
<td>7.03**</td>
<td>29.52**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (R^2)</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted (R^2)</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Industry: 0= restaurant, 1= hotel; Gender: 0= male, 1= female; Position: 0= non-managers, 1= managers; WLEIS= the Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale. \(^a\)Two regressions were carried out due to a substantially high correlation between age and experience: model 1 (age included) and model 2 (experience included). The reported beta coefficients of age and experience are from model 1 and model 2, respectively. The beta coefficients of other independent variables (industry, position, extraversion, neuroticism, and EI), \(F\) value, total \(R^2\) and adjusted \(R^2\) are comparable between the two models and the reported values are based on model 1.* \(p < 0.05; **p < 0.01.\)

### Table 3

**Regression Results Predicting Task, Emotion, and Avoidance Coping by Gender**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent variables</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(\beta)</td>
<td>(\beta)</td>
<td>(\beta)</td>
<td>(\beta)</td>
<td>(\beta)</td>
<td>(\beta)</td>
<td>(\beta)</td>
<td>(\beta)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industry category</td>
<td>Industry</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.13**</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>-0.00</td>
<td>-0.07</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socio-demographic info.</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Position</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.10*</td>
<td>-0.21**</td>
<td>-0.11*</td>
<td>-0.16**</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.11*</td>
<td>-0.17**</td>
<td>-0.08*</td>
<td>-0.08</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological resource I</td>
<td>Extraversion</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.16**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Neuroticism</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.54**</td>
<td>0.45**</td>
<td>0.15*</td>
<td>0.18**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological resource II</td>
<td>WLEIS</td>
<td>0.65**</td>
<td>0.46**</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
<td>0.23**</td>
<td>0.13**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>19.46**</td>
<td>16.10**</td>
<td>13.63**</td>
<td>13.51**</td>
<td>2.90*</td>
<td>3.61**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (R^2)</td>
<td>0.37</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted (R^2)</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: see Table 2. * \(p < 0.05; **p < 0.01.\)
The findings on the relationship between three psychological traits and task- and emotion-oriented coping are somewhat comparable with previous studies, but the findings on avoidance coping require some discretion. First, as for task coping (Table 2), EI is the most significant explanatory variable of all; extraversion does not have much influence on task coping; and neuroticism is negatively related to task coping. The negative effect of neuroticism becomes insignificant after entry of EI just as seen in gender and position. This can be interpreted in the similar way: EI may be a possible mediator. In other words, the reason why neurotic individuals are less likely to engage in task coping is perhaps because they lack emotional skills. To summarize, apart from the industry, age, and work experience effect (women only; see Table 3), it is basically EI that drive people to task-oriented coping behaviors. Using the intrapersonal EI scale of TMMS, Baker and Berenbaum (2007) report people who are clear and attentive about their emotions display higher levels of positive affect if they are engaged in problem-focused, active coping. The authors rationalize those who are clear about their emotions have the requisite information about the status of their goals and therefore have the ability to make sound decisions to solve their problem. Following the same line of thought, this study suggests individuals who perceive not only their emotions (intrapersonal EI) but also others’ emotions (interpersonal EI) clearly, are equipped with even more affluent information which helps them to move their resources swiftly to minimize the adverse impact of the problem.

Regarding emotion-oriented coping (Table 2 and Table 3), neuroticism is the most dominant determinant of emotion coping of all; extraversion is not related to emotion coping; and EI has no incremental predictive validity over these two personality traits. Although no significant (negative) effects of extraversion and EI contradict some previous findings (Petrides et al., 2007), the strong relationship between neuroticism and emotion coping has been well documented (Endler & Parker, 1990; McCrae & Costa, 1986). Contrary to our prediction, EI (men and women both) and extraversion (women only) are positively related to avoidance coping and as expected, neuroticism (men and women both) is positively associated with avoidance coping (Table 2 and Table 3). The avoidance scale of MCI consists of seeking social support and distraction. Further correlation analysis between five MCI avoidance coping items and three psychological traits reveals the following: neuroticism is mainly highly correlated with distraction items (“treat myself to a favorite food or snack”, “take time off and get away from the situation”); extraversion is predominantly correlated with social diversion (“visit a friend, “spend time with a special person”); and EI is significantly associated with both distraction and social diversion items (“take time off and get away from the situation”, “see a movie”, “visit a friend”, “spend time with a special person”).

Past studies that use more detailed subcategories of coping have shown the positive relationship between extraversion and seeking help (McCrae & Costa, 1986). Since EI and extraversion share similar characteristics such as strong social and interpersonal skills, high-EI individuals are also likely to go after social support. Previous findings regarding distraction have shown neurotic individuals use distraction as a coping mechanism (McCrae & Costa, 1986) and TMMS EI researchers at times report sub-domains of TMMS (emotional repair and emotional attention) are associated with greater use of distraction (Salovey et al., 2002) and avoidance coping (Montes-Berges & Augusto, 2007), respectively. Therefore, the positive associations of all three psychological resources (neuroticism, extraversion, and EI) with avoidance coping, which appear controversial at the first glance, become more sensible with the understanding that all three traits lead to avoidance coping, relying on the different medium. Lastly, the construct of EI has been questionable because of the high correlation with basic personality traits. Incremental validity of EI, found from two coping styles (task and avoidance) out of three (task, emotion, and avoidance), leads us to be fairly supportive of the independence and uniqueness of EI.

CONCLUSION AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

This study attempted to find coping strategies favored by high and low EI individuals using an adult, hospitality industry population. Among trait EI measures, no findings have been reported regarding the effect of WLEIS on coping styles. Trait EI scales often address different domains of emotional skills. Thus, it is worthwhile to investigate the similar research questions with various, available EI scales. This study reveals each coping disposition has its unique personality predictors: for task coping, EI; for emotion coping, neuroticism; and for
avoidance coping, EI, extraversion, and neuroticism. Compared to earlier studies (e.g., McCrae & Costa, 1986), adaptive coping behaviors by extraverts are weak. Hospitality literature shows a robust negative relationship between extraversion and burnout (Kim et al., 2007) and therefore adaptive coping behaviors are expected from extraverts. Additional research may be helpful to discover the true effect of extraversion on adaptive coping.

This study implies that people on both ends of the emotional and social skills spectrum, full or short of emotional and social abilities, resort to avoidance-oriented coping. It is well known neurotic individuals are inclined to maladaptive coping (emotion and avoidance), but it is less known extraverted or high-EI individuals may employ selective maladaptive coping methods such as social diversion and distraction. Most published EI studies tend to emphasize the brighter side of EI, but this study indicates a balanced view. Perhaps EI has both good and bad influences. Distraction is typically perceived as an ineffectve coping behavior although the role of social diversion is disputable (Carver & Scheier, 1989). For example, the stressful person may visit a friend to obtain advice (effective coping); the person may visit a friend for emotional support (ineffective coping); and the person may visit a friend to engage in activities to forget about the problem temporarily (ineffective coping). The coping measure used in this study (MCI) obviously focuses on the ineffective function of social support. As the concept of EI is becoming more popular, it is important to understand the nature of EI thoroughly and objectively. To have a complete picture on the association between EI and coping responses, in the future it may be helpful to consider a scale with a large number of specific coping mechanisms rather than a few broad categories. With more specific coping responses, for example, researchers can compare the impact of EI on effective and ineffective sides of social support and also learn how EI interacts with the missing coping behaviors in this study such as humor or turning to religion.

First and foremost, this study presents the significance of EI in the service work setting. In the hospitality industry, it is crucial not to take customers’ complaints personally and take actions quickly to resolve the issue. A hospitality employee often receives complaints about the error that he/she is not related to. Even though it is not his/her fault, the employee should be able to detach from his/her own possibly upsetting emotions, understand the unhappy customer, and find a solution. Most likely, emotionally intelligent or emotionally resilient employees would deal with such situations more properly. Because of the ongoing debate on EI, it seems difficult to select one superior EI scale. However, in the future when a consensus is established on a reliable EI measure, hospitality industry practitioners should consider assessing each job applicant’s emotional skills prior to hiring.

The industry effect indicates the importance of a company’s coping intervention particularly for female workers. According to this study, hotels are doing a better job than restaurants in coaching task-oriented coping behaviors. All participating hotel properties were part of large hotel chains while most restaurants were independently owned or managed. The large hotel chains have a more structured training program and the result of this study seems to speak for itself. Pizam (2008) notes the high rate of female hospitality employees’ depressive episodes and urges the industry to take all necessary actions to lower or alleviate these episodes. Even though emotionally intelligent female workers can develop task-oriented coping behaviors by themselves, the company intervention is likely to accelerate the learning of task coping skills. Therefore, the hospitality practitioners, particularly who run small independent operations, should consider allocating their financial resources to offer some kind of educational seminars or training on proper coping skills. This investment is likely to pay off by increasing the longevity and productivity of their workers.

The findings of this study with regard to females are promising for hospitality practitioners. As mentioned earlier, the hospitality industry heavily depends on female workers and therefore it is critical for female workers to be task-oriented copers. The result of this study indicates women can turn themselves into an effective task coper or at least learn to balance both active and passive coping behaviors through their EI, work experience, age, and industry intervention. It is worth noting that passive coping may not be necessarily harmful when people use active coping concurrently (Koeske, et al. 1993). Therefore, female hospitality workers with significantly higher reliance on avoidance coping appear to be the least problem as long as they can be a task coper. Men’s task coping behaviors
are driven mainly by EI. Considering industry intervention, experience, and age have minimal effects, hospitality recruiters should pay extra attention to male job applicants’ EI. Men with higher emotional skills should be considered for hospitality positions over men with lower emotional skills.

As a whole, the hospitality industry is facing the shrinkage of young workers because the population of the entire nation (U.S.) is maturing. It is interesting to find although age is not related to EI, people who are older appear to know how to cope with stressful or challenging events. In fact, age shows the broadest impact out of all predictor variables by having the significant associations with all three coping dimensions in a desirable way: less emotion coping by older women and men, less avoidance coping by older men, and more task-oriented coping by older women. Simply put, people who are older and have gained wisdom seem to be able to demonstrate what type of coping is useful. McCrae (1982) argues the possibility that as people get older, they eliminate coping responses that they find to be ineffective. Therefore, it may be reasonable for the hospitality industry to recruit mature workers more enthusiastically and take advantage of their coping skills especially in a time of scarcity of young workers.

SELECTED REFERENCES


