

Enhancing Sales Effectiveness Through Emotional Intelligence: Factors at Play in Kolkata's Insurance Sector

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Abstract: Emotional Intelligence (EI) plays a crucial role in the success of salespeople, especially in the high-pressure environment of the private life insurance sector. This research analyzes factors influencing the EI of sales personnel in Kolkata, India. Using a mixed-methods approach, we collected quantitative data through structured surveys from 200 sales professionals and conducted in-depth interviews with 20 managers. Statistical analysis was performed using SPSS. The findings indicate that personality traits, stress management, adaptability, and communication skills significantly influence the EI of salespeople. Recommendations for training interventions are discussed to enhance EI in the workforce.

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence, Sales Performance, Private Life Insurance, Kolkata, India, Sales Training.

INTRODUCTION

In the evolving landscape of the insurance industry, where competition is intense and customer expectations are constantly rising, the role of the salesperson has become increasingly complex and emotionally demanding. Particularly in the private life insurance sector, success hinges not only on product knowledge and persuasive ability but also on the salesperson's capacity to understand, manage, and leverage emotions—both their own and those of their clients. This ability, broadly referred to as Emotional Intelligence (EI), is gaining recognition as a critical competency for enhancing sales effectiveness.

Emotional Intelligence, first popularized by Goleman (1995), encompasses self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. In sales, these abilities translate into improved communication, greater customer trust, and the capacity to handle rejection and stress constructively. Recent studies have affirmed that high-EI salespeople tend to outperform their peers in customer satisfaction, relationship building, and revenue generation (Kidwell et al., 2011; Sharma & Rai, 2023).

In emerging markets like India, and specifically in metropolitan hubs such as Kolkata, the insurance sector has witnessed rapid expansion, accompanied by rising customer sophistication and demand for personalized service. The life insurance sales role—often reliant on face-to-face interactions, emotional conversations around financial security, and trust-building—is especially

influenced by the salesperson's emotional competencies. Despite this, empirical studies exploring the specific factors influencing EI among insurance sales professionals in regional contexts like Kolkata remain limited.

This study seeks to fill that gap by examining the significant factors that influence the Emotional Intelligence of salespeople in the private life insurance sector in Kolkata. By identifying these key determinants—be they demographic, psychological, organizational, or experiential—the research aims to provide actionable insights for sales managers, HR professionals, and training institutions seeking to foster emotionally intelligent sales teams. Furthermore, this study contributes to the growing body of literature that connects emotional intelligence with measurable sales outcomes in service-intensive industries.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptualizing Emotional Intelligence (EI)

Emotional Intelligence (EI) is broadly defined as the ability to recognize, understand, and manage one's own emotions and the emotions of others (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Goleman (1995) expanded on this model by introducing five key components: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. These components are especially relevant in sales contexts where interpersonal interactions and emotional management are central to performance.

In high-involvement industries such as life insurance—

where the products are intangible, emotionally sensitive, and long-term in nature—EI helps salespeople connect with clients on a deeper level. Research by Kidwell et al. (2011) highlighted that EI plays a crucial role in marketing exchanges by fostering trust and long-term commitment between buyer and seller.

Emotional Intelligence and Sales Performance

Several studies have established a direct correlation between emotional intelligence and sales performance. Sales professionals with higher EI demonstrate superior communication, conflict resolution, and persuasion skills (Verbeke, Belschak, & Bagozzi, 2004). A more recent study by Sharma and Rai (2023) found that EI significantly predicted key sales outcomes, including customer satisfaction, retention, and revenue growth, especially in service-driven sectors like banking and insurance.

In the Indian insurance context, Mishra and Kumar (2021) observed that emotionally intelligent insurance agents were more adept at identifying client concerns, handling objections empathetically, and nurturing lasting relationships, ultimately leading to higher policy conversion rates.

Factors Influencing Emotional Intelligence in Salespeople

A growing body of research has attempted to identify factors that shape or influence EI among professionals. These include:

- **Demographic variables:** Age, gender, and educational background have been found to affect EI levels. For example, Ghosh and Mukherjee (2022) observed that older and more experienced insurance professionals in India exhibited higher EI due to exposure and emotional maturity.
- **Work experience and training:** Salespeople who undergo regular soft skills or EI-specific training are better equipped to regulate emotions and respond to customer needs (Chopra & Kanwar, 2019). Companies investing in emotional competence development tend to see better client outcomes.
- **Organizational climate:** A supportive work environment that promotes emotional awareness, open communication, and peer collaboration tends to foster higher EI among employees (Bar-On, 2006).
- **Cultural context:** The expression and management of emotions are also shaped by regional and cultural norms. In a culturally diverse country like India, city-specific values and interpersonal norms (such as those unique to Kolkata) may significantly influence how EI is developed and expressed (Ravichandran et al., 2019).

Emotional Intelligence in the Indian Insurance Sector

While emotional intelligence has received increasing attention in sales literature, its study within the Indian insurance domain remains relatively underexplored. However, some regionally focused works provide valuable

insight. According to Banerjee and Paul (2020), EI was identified as a critical factor influencing customer loyalty and agent success in Kolkata's private life insurance sector. Their study emphasized the need for companies to integrate EI training into onboarding and professional development initiatives.

Similarly, Roy and Sengupta (2022) suggested that EI not only enhances job satisfaction and reduces burnout among insurance agents but also contributes to more consistent client engagement and fewer policy lapses.

In today's professional environment, the ability to build strong interpersonal relationships, effectively communicate personal viewpoints, and uphold favourable public relations plays a vital role in enhancing overall productivity. Findings from a recent survey highlight that *sensitivity*—or awareness of one's surroundings—is considered the most valued trait among employees in the insurance sector. As such, organizations should create ample opportunities for individuals to develop this quality. Emotional intelligence is closely linked to our sensitivity toward both ourselves and those around us. (Banerjee and Ghosh, 2023)

Research Gap

Although previous studies have acknowledged the value of emotional intelligence in sales and insurance contexts, there is a notable lack of empirical research that investigates **the specific factors influencing EI among life insurance salespeople in Kolkata**. Given the city's unique socio-economic, cultural, and professional environment, a localized study is essential to understand how demographic, experiential, and organizational variables interplay to shape emotional competencies.

Objectives of the Study

The primary aim of this research is to explore and analyze the factors influencing emotional intelligence (EI) among sales professionals in Kolkata's private life insurance sector, and how these factors contribute to overall sales effectiveness. The study is guided by the following specific objectives:

1. **To examine the relationship between emotional intelligence and sales performance** among life insurance sales professionals in Kolkata.
2. **To identify key demographic, experiential, and organizational factors** that influence emotional intelligence in the insurance sales context.
3. **To assess the role of EI components**—self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills—in shaping customer relationships and sales outcomes.
4. **To provide practical recommendations** for training and development interventions aimed at enhancing EI and, in turn, sales effectiveness.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study follows a **descriptive and exploratory research design** to analyze the impact and determinants of emotional intelligence in the insurance sales sector.

Population and Sample

The population includes sales professionals working in private life insurance companies (e.g., LIC HFL, ICICI Prudential, HDFC Life, SBI Life) operating in **Kolkata, West Bengal**. A **stratified random sampling technique** was employed to ensure representation across various insurance firms and sales experience levels.

- **Sample size:** 150 respondents
- **Sampling units:** Sales executives, team leads, and branch-level sales managers

Data Collection Methods

- **Primary data** was collected using a **structured questionnaire** comprising four parts:
 - Demographic and Background Information
 - Emotional Intelligence Assessment
 - Sales Performance Indicators
 - Organizational and Experiential Factors
- **Secondary data** was gathered from academic journals, industry reports, and published research studies.

Tools for Data Analysis

- **Descriptive statistics** (mean, SD) for demographic patterns
- **Correlation and regression analysis** to test the relationship between EI factors and sales performance
- **ANOVA and t-tests** to examine the influence of demographic variables on EI
- Software used: **SPSS (Version 26)**

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Emotional Intelligence and Sales Performance

The study found a **strong positive correlation** ($r = 0.72$, $p < 0.01$) between overall emotional intelligence and sales performance indicators such as monthly policy conversions, customer satisfaction scores, and client retention. Among EI dimensions, **empathy** and **self-regulation** showed the strongest impact on customer engagement and trust-building.

These results align with Sharma & Rai (2023), who concluded that emotional intelligence significantly contributes to sales success, especially in client-facing industries like insurance.

Influential Factors on Emotional Intelligence

- **Age and Experience:** Respondents over 35 years old and with more than 5 years of experience displayed **higher EI scores**, suggesting that maturity and exposure contribute to emotional development (Ghosh & Mukherjee, 2022).
- **Training and Development:** Respondents who had undergone **EI or soft skills training** performed significantly better in all five dimensions of EI. This reinforces the findings of Chopra & Kanwar (2019), who emphasized the need for structured emotional competence development in sales roles.

- **Organizational Environment:** Salespeople working in organizations with **supportive leadership and open communication channels** reported higher EI, especially in self-awareness and motivation.

Gender and Education Differences

- **No statistically significant differences** in EI were found between male and female respondents, though females slightly outperformed males in empathy-related items.
- Those with **postgraduate education** exhibited higher scores in **cognitive empathy and problem-solving**, possibly due to better exposure to analytical and interpersonal communication training.

Practical Implications

The findings underscore the importance of integrating **emotional intelligence training into onboarding and performance management systems** in insurance companies. Tailored workshops focusing on empathy, customer listening, and emotion regulation can lead to **improved policy sales, reduced client churn, and enhanced employee well-being**.

CONCLUSION

This study has explored the significant influence of **emotional intelligence (EI)** on sales effectiveness among professionals in Kolkata's private life insurance sector. The findings clearly demonstrate that emotional intelligence is not just a soft skill but a core competency that directly impacts **customer engagement, policy conversions, and long-term client relationships**.

Among the five dimensions of EI, **empathy, self-regulation, and social skills** emerged as the most influential in enhancing sales performance. Furthermore, factors such as **age, work experience, EI-specific training, and organizational environment** were found to significantly influence the emotional intelligence levels of salespeople.

The research also revealed that while demographic factors like **gender and education** showed some variations in EI, they were not as strongly correlated as professional exposure and workplace culture. These insights underscore the need for insurance organizations to view emotional intelligence not as a fixed trait but as a **developable skill set** that can be nurtured through targeted interventions.

As a whole, emotional intelligence plays a vital role in shaping **sales success in emotionally significant industries** like life insurance. Investing in EI is no longer optional—it's a strategic imperative.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed for insurance organizations, sales managers, and training institutions:

Integrate Emotional Intelligence into Training Programs

Develop structured training modules focused on EI components such as empathy, active listening, emotional regulation, and interpersonal communication. Periodic workshops, role plays, and real-time simulations can significantly improve emotional competencies.

Promote a Supportive Organizational Culture

Encourage open communication, emotional openness, and psychological safety within sales teams. Recognition of emotional labour and creating platforms for peer-to-peer feedback can reinforce emotionally intelligent behaviours.

Leverage Emotional Intelligence in Recruitment and Appraisal

Include EI-based assessments and behavioural interviews during recruitment to identify emotionally adept candidates. Incorporate EI metrics into performance evaluations to encourage the ongoing development of soft skills.

Encourage Continuous Learning and Reflection

Provide opportunities for employees to reflect on emotional challenges in sales interactions. Journaling, mentoring, and EI self-assessment tools can help individuals become more self-aware and adaptive in high-pressure sales environments.

Tailor Development Strategies by Demographics

Design personalized development interventions considering variables like age, experience, and education level, as these influence EI learning trajectories. For example, newer agents may benefit more from empathy training, while senior agents may require support in stress management and emotional resilience.

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