An Emotional Intelligence Training Program in the Tourism Sector

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Abstract: In a competitive and continually changing tourism and hospitality sector the need for high qualified and motivated human resources, which meet the current and future business demands is more than ever imperative. As tourism is expected to thrive in the coming years, it is essential for tourism employees to have intrapersonal and interpersonal abilities that lead to positive interactions with customers, contributing to their memorable emotional experiences and delivering at the same time benefits to the tourism industry. On the other hand, putting emphasis on Emotional Intelligence development, through innovative training programs and educational methods, can lead to qualified personnel, which apart from cognitive abilities can also develop emotional abilities, significant for the tourism sector. In this framework, an education and training program that implements Transformative Learning theory, based on critical reflection, rational discourse, and experience, can motivate tourism employees to get outside of their comfort zones and change their assumptions, their dysfunctional beliefs, their values, and the way of being in the world. In a multicultural environment, such as the tourism field, the implementation of Transformative Learning can lead individuals to be more inclusive, open to new cultures and ideas, re-establishing their perspectives and behaviors to be more functional. Additionally, the utilization of digital learning environments, which are extremely popular in the recent years and characterized by flexibility and ubiquity, can contribute to the effectiveness of the learning process and the improvement of Emotional Intelligence. This research presents a training program that embraces the advantages of digital learning environments utilizing Transformative Learning as a pedagogical tool for the development of Emotional Intelligence in the tourism sector.

Keywords: emotional intelligence, transformative learning, training program, tourism, online education

1. Introduction

Emotional Intelligence (EI) as a relevant topic in psychology and organizational behaviour which attracts the interest of the business field was conceptualized as a combination of abilities which allows individuals to be aware of one's own and others' emotions, and to manage them to achieve positive outcomes that lead to personal development and excellence (Goleman, 1998; Kalogiannakis & Touvlatzis, 2015). Furthermore, the development of EI in the working environment is overly critical as it is linked to leadership, job satisfaction, performance, organizational engagement, teamwork, motivation, low counterproductive work behaviour, healthy relationships, and reduced stress (Samanta & Kallou, 2019; Wang et al., 2017).

On the other hand, as the tourism sector is expected to thrive in the coming years, a tourism employee with high EI is a decisive competitive advantage for the tourism sector business and its reputation. To embrace the new challenges that arise, tourism sector businesses focus on employees who can communicate and interact with guests in an efficient manner (Koc, 2019). Interacting authentically with guests, understanding their thoughts and feelings and empathise them leads to their satisfaction and loyalty while delivering benefits to the tourism industry (Kallou & Kikilia, 2021; Koc, 2019). This interaction and communication as well as emotionally charged experiences between guests and tourism employees add value to the tourism sector leading to a higher quality of tourism services and a greater productivity (Kallou & Kikilia, 2021; Chang, 2014). Research has shown that unlike intelligence (IQ), EI can be developed and improved through training and experience (Salovey, Mayer & Caruso, 2002). Consequently, emphasizing on EI development, through innovative training programs and educational methods, can lead to qualified tourism employees, who can satisfy customers and accomplish organizational goals and profits (Kallou, Kikilia & Kalogiannakis, 2022).

The theory of Transformative Learning (TL), introduced by Jack Mezirow, is a popular area of research and the most integrated adult learning theory which continues to evolve during the last decades (Raikou, Karalis & Ravanis, 2017). TL concerns experiencing a fundamental shift in habits of mind, beliefs and values through integration of new perspectives based on critical reflection and rational dialogue. More specifically, TL

implementation leads individuals to transform past assumptions, dysfunctional beliefs and values to new perspectives and attitudes shifting their worldview (Mezirow & Associates, 1990; Brookfield, 2005).Equally, individuals learn and change through constructive dialogue based on their experiences in a way that is serving their growth and the society (Rodgers, 2002).

Concerning the tourism sector, the implementation of TL in tourism education and training is essential since the students can reconstruct their past perspectives and assumptions through critical reflection and discourse and become more open minded in a multicultural environment such as the tourism sector (Kallou & Kikilia, 2021; Stone & Duffy, 2015,). Particularly important in the TL process are trustful relationships among the learners and the educator, as they feel comfortable to share information, engaging in discussions, and achieving mutual understanding (Taylor, 2008). Furthermore, studies have shown that implementing TL theory in tourism education and training can increase retention and provide better educational outcomes than the lecture method (Uyanic, 2016; Feinstein, 2004).

On the other hand, the integration and the utilization of digital technologies change the landscape of the educational and training programs. The emerging digital learning environments claim new teaching and learning methodologies, educational means, and techniques endorsing the educational procedure (Kikilia & Barbounaki, 2011; Kalogiannakis & Papadakis, 2007; 2008; Kalogiannakis, 2010; Papachristos et al., 2010). Digital educational technologies and online environments are flexible learning environments whicharecharacterized by ubiquity and autonomy enhancing the learning process and providing interactivity and engagement (Kallou & Kikilia, 2021; Mackness, 2020). Research shows that digital educational technologies and online learning are as effective as in person education, assisting the learning process while emphasizing in communication, interaction, and relationships development (Quiu, Li, & Li, 2020; Estelami, 2016). Additionally, digital learning environments are also characterized by immediate feedback, exchange of emotions, and social presence (Kalogiannakis, Papadakis & Zourmpakis, 2021).Considering the tourism sector, researchers conclude that tourism students are satisfied and enjoy the learning procedure in digital learning environments (Annaraud, & Singh,2017).

While EI has been acknowledged as very crucial for professional effectiveness and success, there is limited literature available describing the development and implementation of an EI training program focused on the tourism sector. The purpose of this paper is to design an EI training and development program implementing TL as a pedagogical tool, utilizing digital technologies in the tourism sector.

2. Methods

2.1 Participant recruitment

The participants who will attend this training program in EI must fulfil some requirements: they must be graduate and post-graduate students with working experience in the tourism sector or interested to work in the tourism industry and of course with openness, and willingness to learn EI competencies and work in teams.

2.2 EI training program description

This training program concentrates on the development and improvement of EI in the tourism sector through web conferencing technologies. The program sessions will be 8 (90' each) and will include:

- (1) Introduction to EI and its components, its importance in the tourism sector, the benefits of EI in the tourism sector and the characteristics of tourism employees with high and low emotional intelligent. The role of emotions in decision making, in building healthy relationships, in performance and in one's health.

- (2) Identification and understanding one's own emotions, perceiving others' emotions, identification of the mood, effective control of the mood and emotional expression.

- (3) Control of emotions, emotional regulation, anger management and practices for improvement.

- (4) How stress affects one's health, one's relationships and decisions, stress management.

- (5) Social awareness and communication, empathy, influencing others' feelings.

- (6) Relationship management, conflict management, communication techniques.

- (7) Wellbeing, learning optimism and trait happiness.

- (8) Self-Motivation and adaptability in the tourism working environment.

2.2.1 Aims and objectives

The basic goal of this training program is to develop each facet of EI, improving emotional and social skills for graduate and postgraduate tourism employees or graduate and postgraduate employees, interested in working in the tourism industry. Specifically, the primary aims of this training program are:

- to introduce students to the topic of EI in the tourism sector

- to introduce students to practices used in developing self-awareness, and self-regulation,

- to introduce students to practices used in developing social awareness, social skills, and communication

- to enable students to implement practices that manage stress and improve their well-being

- to enable students to cooperate and develop critical thinking in emotional and social situations that arise in the tourism sector.

According to the objectives of this program, learners will be able to:

- Demonstrate a sound understanding of the principal areas of EI

- Clearly describe the concept of EI and its impact on the tourism sector

- Identify their emotional state and manage stress

- Use their emotions in a constructive way

- Apply essential concepts, principles, and practices of EI

- Apply strategies for the utilization of emotions to achieve goals, to make better decisions, and reduce stress

- Develop strategies for communicative skills, and abilities to work with others

- Develop critical thinking skills and

- Reflect and evaluate EI facets using critical thinking, dialogue, and experiences, through collaboration in virtual teams

2.2.2 Educational design in EI training program in the tourism sector

The training program will be conducted in groups consisting of 20 participants each (Fig.1). The size of the groups is due to the nature of the course and the aims of the study which requires a limited number of learners to be able to collaborate in teams. The training program will be consisted of 8 sessions (90' each).

2.2.3 Teaching methods inEI training program in the tourism sector

Development of EI is promoted through the following teaching methods:

- The learners attend the course presentations and participate in the discussion forums through a web conferencing platform

- The learners join the related virtual team and participate in discussions through critical reflection and dialogue

- The learners, based on their experiences, confront a disorienting dilemma

- The learners present their collaborative work in the virtual class

- The learners study the reference material, including worksheets, quizzes, exercise activities and videos

2.2.4 Implementation of TL theory in EI training program in the tourism sector

In this training program, TL which is characterized as a learner centred adult theory, will be implemented. Learners will be able to develop cognitive abilities and critical thinking, to become more aware of their working environment in conjunction with their experiences and constructive dialogue (Cranton & Taylor, 2012). Furthermore, TL will enable learners to re-establish their dysfunctional perspectives and behaviors and change them to be more open in new cultures and thrive in the challenging tourism sector (Kallou & Kikilia, 2021).

Figure1: Educational design of EI training program in the tourism sector

The adaptation of the ten phases of Mezirow's theory will be implemented individuals to change the problematic sets of references into more inclusive, open, and reflective ones (O'Sullivan's, 2002; Mezirow & Associates, 1990). More specifically, individuals, in this transformational process, pass through separate phases which begin with a disorienting dilemma. The disorienting dilemma is a crisis which has been experienced or a trigger incident that is demanding, for further inspection of past experiences (Mezirow, Taylor, & associates, 2009). When describing this process, Mezirow (2000) referred to ten (10) phases of perspective transformation: (1) a disorienting dilemma, (2) self-examination, (3) conduct of a critical reflection of internalized assumptions, (4) acknowledgment of resources that cause these assumptions through other people's experiences, (5) exploration of options for new roles, relationships and actions, (6) development of a plan of action, (7) acquirement of knowledge and skills for implementing the plan of action, (8) trying new roles, (9) building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships, (10) reintegration of new perspectives into one's life.

2.2.5 Educational technology in EI training program in the tourism sector

Web conferencing technologies, as synchronous tools, are recommended for this program (Teams, Zoom, etc). These digital platforms provide immediate feedback, ubiquity learning, flexibility, and enhance interactions between educators and learners, (Kallou & Kikilia, 2021; Matzakos & Kalogiannakis, 2018; Vlassopoulou et al., 2021). The educators, through these digital platforms, can share content, upload educational quizzes, videos, and assessments (Pokhrel et al, 2021).Furthermore, digital learning environments are considered beneficial in TL for facilitating discussions since learners feel more comfortable participating online (Henderson, 2010).

2.2.6 Educational tools in EI training program in the tourism sector

Interactive educational tools will be used to support digital learning andfacilitate the learning procedure, helping learners to be involved in critical thinking (Djamas et al., 2018). Contributing to the learning procedure and enabling learners to work and engage on group projects, the educational tools will consist of presentations, virtual workshops, quizzes, educational videos, eBooks, digital whiteboards, charting, mapping tools, and chat. Homework assessments will include additional articles and resources and video recording of a teaching session followed by a feedback review.

2.2.7 Educational techniques in EI training program in the tourism sector

According to Jarvis (2004), teaching techniques are not educational methods, but they define a unique perspective in education. In this EI training program educational techniques, used in adult education, will be implemented.Many of the techniques which will be used are participatory and learner centred. These techniques have been chosen according to the subject of the teaching unit, the educational level of the participants and in comparison, with the objectives of the teaching unit (Jarvis, 2004). More specifically, these techniques include case studies, brainstorming, role-play, teamwork, questions, and answers (using quizzes and worksheets), lectures, and exercise activities.

After an introduction of the session's objectives, the session starts usually, with a lecture. The aim of the lecture, which has limited time in adult education, is to introduce and motivate the learners to acquire the new knowledge which will be processed. Another technique proposed at the start of the session is brainstorming by posing a question or by introducing the topic. The learners answer the questions and express their ideas which are then examined. Exercise activities, case studies, questions, and answers (using worksheets and quizzes) are used to complete the learning procedure. Role-play is used to help the learners to experience a situation in depth and understand it better (Kokkos, 2006; Jarvis, 2004; Eitington, 2002).

During the session, the learners will be divided into virtual teams processing a disorienting dilemma. Their working experience in the tourism sector will help them confront the dilemma. Working in teams motivates the learners to interact with each other and develop a cooperative spirit. Within each virtual team, there will be a leader who will be selected by the learners and who will collect the main opinions. Instructions will be given by the educator so that the steps of TL theory are followed. The opinions and the conclusions from all the teams will be represented by each leader and discussed in front of all the learners and the educator. The educator will periodically change the composition of the teams so that the participants may interact and cooperate with other individuals. At the end of the session, a review lecture will be given from the educator (Kokkos, 2006; Jarvis, 2004) (Table 1).

Table 1: Curriculum design and teaching techniques in EI training program in the tourism sector through digital technologies

Sessions (90')	Topic	Teaching Techniques
1st session	-Introduction to EI	Brainstorming (10')
	-The role of emotions	Lecture (20')
	-Benefits of EI in the tourism sector	Quiz (10')
	-Characteristics of employees with high EI -Summary	Teamwork- Discussion (40')
		Lecture (10')
2nd session	- Perceiving one's own emotions	Lecture (15')
	-Perceiving others' emotions	Exercise Activity (10')
	-Identifying our mood	Case study (20')
	-Emotional expression	Teamwork-Discussion (40')
	-Summary	Lecture (5')
3rd session	-Control of emotions and impulses	Lecture (15')
	-Emotional regulation	Quiz (10')
	-Strategies of emotional management	Case study (20')
	-Anger management in the tourism sector	Teamwork-Discussion (40')

Sessions (90')	Topic	Teaching Techniques
	-Summary	Lecture (5')
4th session	-Stress - how affect us	Lecture (15')
	-Stress in the tourism sector	Quiz (5')
	-Stress patterns	Worksheet (5')
	- Tips for stress management	Case study (25')
	- Stress management strategies	Teamwork –Discussion (35')
	-Summary	Lecture (5')
5th session	-Social awareness	Brainstorming (10')
	- Influencing others	Lecture (15')
	-Empathy in the tourism sector	Case study (20')
	-Body language in the tourism sector	Exercise Activity (10')
	-Tone of voice	Teamwork-Discussion (30')
	-Summary	Lecture (5')
6th session	-Relationship management	Lecture (15')
	- Influencing others	Quiz (10')
	-Communication techniques	Exercise Activity (5')
	- Active constructive responding	Role play (25')
	-Conflict Management	Teamwork-Discussion (30')
	-Summary	Lecture (5')
7th session	-Beneficial application of emotions	Brainstorming (10')
	-Team building in the tourism sector	Lecture (20')
	- Assertiveness	Quiz (10')
	- Self esteem	Worksheet (10')
	-Wellbeing	Teamwork -Discussion (35')
	-Summary	Lecture (5')
8th session	-Motivation	Lecture (20')
	-Adaptability	Case study (20')
	-Happiness	Exercise Activity (10')
	-Optimism	Teamwork-Discussion (35')
	-Summary	Lecture (5')

2.3 Training program evaluation and satisfaction

Upon the accomplishment of the training program, learners will have been measured in three (3) domains (Figure2):
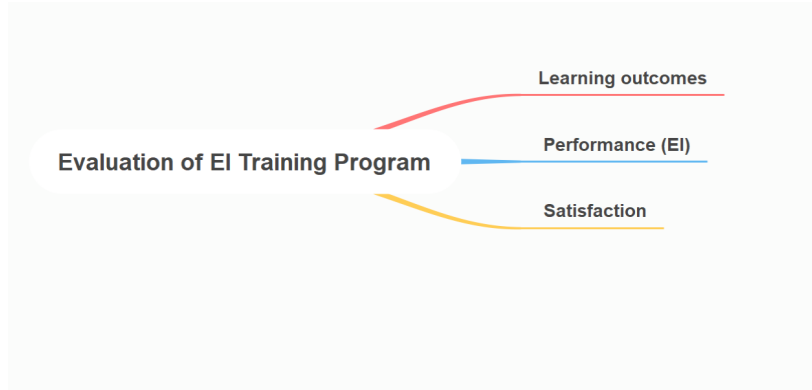

Figure 2: The evaluation of EI Training program in the tourism sector

Considering the extent of the learning outcomes, the learners must successfully complete and submit questionnaires, quizzes, exercise activities and homework assignments in each unitfollowing the schedule given by the educator. The rating scale of these assessment exercises will be ranged from 0 to 100%. Overall, the score of these exercises should be 60% at least for the successful completion of the program.

Furthermore, considering the learners performance, learners will complete a self-assessment survey which measures EI at the start and at the end of the program to reveal changes in participants' competence. The TEIQue measurement will be used, as it has shown advanced psychometric properties and it is linked to real life results (Petrides, 2009). TEIQue measures EI as a personality trait, referring to the learner's self-perception of the capabilities of their emotions (Petrides, & Furnham, 2001), and it is appropriate especially in EI training programs (O'Connor et al, 2019).

The version used will be the TEIQue-SF (Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire Short Form). It was developed by Petrides & Furnham, (2006), it contains 30 questions (Petrides, & Furnham, 2001), and is characterized by high validity and reliability (Siegling et al, 2015). TEIQue consists of 4 dimensions: emotionality (recognition and expression of emotions), self-control (control of emotions and impulses), sociability (relationships and emotional management), and wellbeing (beneficial application of emotions). There are also two autonomous dimensions, adaptability, and motivation. A 7-point Likert scale will be used, ranging from 1 (I strongly disagree) to 7 (I strongly agree) (Siegling, et al; 2015; Petrides, Pita & Kokkinaki, 2007).

To evaluate the rate of participants' satisfaction within the training program of EI, the learners will be asked to answer a questionnaire after the 4th session and after completing the program. Through a satisfaction questionnaire, the participants will be asked to answer8 questions through a 5-point Likert-scale item (1 =totally disagree to 5 = totally agree) (Table 2). Finally, participants will be asked to note any suggestions for improvement, through an open question.

Table 2: Evaluation of the learners' satisfaction in EI training program in the tourism sector

	Evaluation of learners' satisfaction
1	The training program has satisfied my expectations
2	The program was useful for my development in the tourism sector
3	After the completion of the course, I would implement the acquired knowledge about EI
4	I believe that tourism employees should be trained in EI
5	I'm satisfied with the educational methodology of this program
6	I'm satisfied with the training material
7	I'm satisfied with the overallclimate of the training program
8	The educator managed to stimulate my interest during the training program
*	Please note any other comments and suggestions for improvement

3. Discussion- conclusions

Having empathy and communicating effectively with customers in the tourism sector is more than ever relevant. Tourism employees with high EI are an asset for the tourism industry providing meaningful experiences to customers. Emotional intelligent employees focus on customers' needs, resulting in customers' satisfaction and loyalty while delivering benefits to the tourism sector. The implementation of best practices in EI training can benefit tourism employees in the development and improvement of emotional and social capabilities. This can lead to a higher quality of the provided services in the tourism sector.

Particularly, the utilization of TL in this EI training program enables learners to reinterpret and re-evaluate their past assumptions and beliefs and shift their perspectives and the way they perceive the world. Within teamwork sessions through digital learning environments, learners critically reflect with their peers and the educator, challenge their beliefs and values, and change them to be more functional. Digital learning environments are ideal for implementing TL, since they can foster collaboration and engagement, leading learners to express their opinions without being interrupted. Implementing TL to facilitate the learning process for the development and improvement of EI capabilities, through digital learning environments, is a concept that can provide valuable outcomes, useful for further implementation and research in the future. On a final note, this training program is a major step for improving EI aspects in the tourism sector.

This program is in an implementation phase in cooperation with University of West Attica, in Greece and we expect the learning outcomes for the evaluation of this training program.

This paper proposes an EI training program in the tourism sector based on practical implications, communication, and interactivity. Therefore, this paper makes a significant contribution to the growing body of EI development providing a valuable insight in the tourism sector, conceptualising TL, and digital learning environments.

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