

Being Creative and Choosing The Best Coping Strategies Based On Emotional Intelligence

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ABSTRACT

The world is facing its greatest enemy, a pandemic. Almost all sectors affected by this situation including SMEs or Small and Medium Enterprises. This situation forces SME owners to show their creativity such as creating a new way to adapt so they not only survive in this situation but also for their business sustainability. This research aims to investigate the individual's internal factors that can influence their creativity, based on the Theory of Humanistic by Carl Rogers, the tendency of self-actualization. The inconsistency of the relationship between EI and Creativity, and the limited research about the relationship between Emotional Intelligence, Coping Strategies, and Creativity in the economic sphere encourage us to do this research. We assume individuals with high levels of EI will choose strategies that lead to problem-solving action and showing a high level of creativity. This research conducted by giving questionnaires to SME owners and using SEM PLS to analyze the data. Results have shown that EI has a significantly positive relationship with Creativity and Coping Strategies, but there's no relationship between Coping Strategies and Creativity. It is also shown that Coping Strategies couldn't mediate the relationship between EI and Creativity. The result would help us know how the owners act over the problem and what they need to do during the pandemic.

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence, Coping Strategies, Creativity, SME.

1. Introduction

The situation keeps changing either quickly or slowly. We might be able to travel around the world without any worry but now we can't even go to groceries store without our masks on. It was one of example how COVID-19 affects our lives. COVID-19 gives us a drastic impact on social and economic life around the world (Mubashir, 2020) such as the new policies implemented. The virus can spread quickly and is very dangerous because there is still no specific drug yet also poses a threat that has an impact on individual emotional responses (Xu and Liu, 2020). Those situations encourage not only individuals but also organizations, companies, government, and any other parties adapting to "new normal" to survive. The impact of the pandemic happened in various

fields, including the economic sector, especially small and medium-sized companies (SMEs) and start-up companies. It can be seen from the Katadata Insight Center (KIC) survey of 139 digital start-up executives in May-June 2020 before the pandemic. At the end of 2019, there were 74.8% of start-ups in good shape and very good. But now, only 33% of start-ups are in good condition and 42.5% admit that they are in bad condition. A survey conducted, stated this condition is also caused by government policies in dealing with COVID-19, such as the large-scale social restrictions (PSBB).

Presidential staff, Putri Tanjung in the event "Mandiri Market Outlook 2021" said that many sectors were affected by the pandemic but the MSME sector was the hardest hit. It could be seen in 2020, almost 48% of MSMEs can only survive a maximum of three months and if they continue, 80% of micro-businesses will not have money or savings of more than 60% (CNBNINDONESIA, 2020). However, that does not mean the impact of the pandemic will completely cripple the business. As stated by the Head of the MSME Development and Consumer Protection Department, BI Sari (2020) in an online seminar entitled "Restoring the Economy by Saving MSMEs From Crisis, Is it Effective?" there are several businesses that have increased by using new strategies such as selling online or adding product variations. Therefore, it all depends on how the company deals with the pandemic. One effort that the owner can do is how to think and act creatively. Companies need to encourage innovation and creativity within the company to be able to face the pandemic and compete in an increasingly complex market. This statement is also supported by research conducted by De Fretes (2020) where it is stated that the creativity and innovation of MSMEs, especially in Indonesia, is still low, so it needs to be improved so that they can compete and survive, especially in this pandemic situation.

During a pandemic, creativity is key. Creativity according to Barron (1995) is producing ideas or products both new and useful in general is the main characteristic of creativity. Acting creatively that is driven by creativity can be helped by the abilities and traits that exist in individuals such as Emotional Intelligence. Emotional Intelligence according to Goleman (1995) is the ability to recognize one's feelings and the feelings of others to motivate oneself and manage emotions contained in oneself and others effectively. Emotional intelligence helps individuals to control the complexity of emotions (Mubashir, 2020) which is expected to help individuals to adapt by acting and thinking creatively. However, research on the relationship of how emotional intelligence can affect creativity is inconsistent (Xu et al., 2019). Thinking and acting creatively in the current situation is important to be able to adapt to new, uncertain situations. High EI in individuals will help them use their positive and negative affections more effectively to think so it leads to higher creative outputs possibilities (Jafri, 2018; Mayer and Salovey, 1997).

The direct relationship between EI and creativity is still limited and inconsistent, indicating that moderation and mediation are needed to see the relationship between the two variables (Carmeli et al., 2014; Awwad and Ali, 2012; Lee et al., 2012). To study the relationship between EI and creativity induced by the effects of the phenomenon (particularly the impact of the pandemic), the authors included the mediating role of coping strategies. Coping strategies can be applied to this situation because it gives the individual choices to act and think as Lazarus and Folkman (1984) stated that coping strategies are divided into two: problem-focused coping and emotional-focused coping. Endler and Parker (1990) also add avoidance coping as a coping strategy. For example, research by Angela and Caterina (2020) suggests that the blunting style can be useful in short-term situations that test the individual's resources and can be considered adaptive when it is not possible to change the situation or event that provokes an emotional impact (particularly shown to be

associated with unintended threats such as job loss or illness). The level of emotional intelligence can affect how individuals choose coping strategies such as individuals with high levels of EI will choose strategies to adapt and vice versa (Furnham, 2010).

Research that studies the relationship between emotional intelligence, coping strategies, and creativity is still limited. Some studies have discussed those variables, tend to focus on the psychological side of individuals such as gifted adults (Angela and Caterina, 2020), the relationship between creativity and coping strategies in gamblers (Alessia et al., 2020), the relationship between coping strategies and emotional intelligence (Moradi et al., 2011) than economic context which is as the owner of a business. Therefore, the author will examine the relationship between emotional intelligence, coping strategies, and creativity in individuals as an owner of a business so we can see how the owner act over the recent situation.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Emotional Intelligence

The first theory of Emotional Intelligence was explained by Salovey and Mayer back in 1990. They explained that EI (Emotional Intelligence) is one component of Social Intelligence from Gardner's point of view which includes the ability to monitor the feelings and emotions of oneself and others (Mayer and Salovey, 1990). In the development of the theory of emotional intelligence by Mayer et al., in 2016 they included problem-solving in addition to the "four branches of emotional intelligence". The four branches of the emotional intelligence model are Perceiving Emotion, Facilitating thinking using emotions, understanding emotions, and Managing emotions.

The theory proposed by Mayer and Salovey considers that EI is an ability or ability, especially the ability in cognitive processes to absorb information and a knowledge or maximum performance consisting of intellectual ability to reason emotions (Ability EI; Mayer et al., 2016).

Another understanding of emotional intelligence is the understanding of Bar-On (2006). He argues that EI is a system of interconnected behavior that arises from emotional and social competence. He argues that these two competencies influence performance and behavior. In this model, it is assumed that there are five emotional intelligence scales, self-perception, self-expression, interpersonal, decision-making, and stress management.

2.1.1 Emotional Intelligence and Creativity

Research on the relationship between emotional intelligence and creativity is still limited, although several previous studies have realized the importance of considering a person's EI to see that person's creativity. Several studies such as Mayer, Salovey, and Caruso (2004), Zhou and George (2003) state that emotional intelligence contributes to creativity where emotional intelligence allows individuals to distinguish emotions and make the right choices in thinking and acting. However, the relationship between the two variables is not consistent in every study (Xu et al., 2019).

As stated by Xu et al. (2019) in his meta-analysis of the relationship between emotional intelligence and creativity from previous studies was inconsistent. Some of the results stated that there was a relationship and some of the results didn't. Research by Battacharjee, S and Rahman (2016), Tsai and Lee (2014), Noorafshan and Jowkar (2013), Parke et al. (2015), and Lea et al. (2018) states that EI can stimulate creativity. While research by Ivcevic et al. (2007), Gustello et al. (2004), Mishra (2015), Pavlova et al. (2013), Sanchez et al. (2011), Neubauer et al. (2018), Furnham (2016), Tu et

al. (2020), Awwad and Ali (2012) state that there is no relationship between EI and creativity or there is an insignificant relationship.

In this case, the authors want to examine the relationship between emotional intelligence and creativity by assuming both are related and have a positive relationship. So, we develop a hypothesis:

H1: Emotional Intelligence has a significant and positive relationship with Creativity.

2.2 Coping Strategies

According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), coping is a cognitive and behavioral effort that constantly changing to deal with certain external and internal problems that are judged to be excessive or exceeding the person's resources. Actions are taken by individuals to deal with problems called coping strategies. Coping strategies according to Lazarus and Folkman are often influenced by several factors such as experience, culture, environment, personality, social factors, and others. Lazarus and Folkman divide coping strategies into two, namely strategies that focus on problems and emotions.

In addition, other researchers identify avoidance coping as a basic coping dimension (Endler and Paker, 1990; Feifer and Strack, 1989 in Hyunjeong and Jerome, 2011). According to Endler (1997) in Hyunjeong and Jerome (2011), avoidance coping is an attempt to avoid a stressful situation by being attached to a substitute task or looking for someone else. The relationship between emotional intelligence and coping is usually related to how emotional intelligence controls the pressure felt by individuals to be able to think about solving problems. How to have high emotional intelligence, will help individuals recognize the emotions of self and others and then use them (Mayer and Salovey, 1997) in the coping process where according to Folkman and Lazarus (1980) the coping process includes one's procedures can manage their emotions by applying them, thinking in an organized manner, performing and managing behavior, controlling their arousal and acting in social and non-social environments to change or reduce stressors. Mayer and Sullivan (1997) proved the relationship between emotional intelligence and coping strategies, especially emotion-focused coping strategies through their studies.

2.2.1 Coping Strategies and Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence is related to coping as stated by Furnham (2002) that individuals with high levels of emotional intelligence tend to adapt by thinking rationally and not acting emotionally or avoiding it as a coping strategy when dealing with stress. This statement supports the authors who think that emotional intelligence has a relationship with coping strategies, especially for problem-focused coping strategies because emotional intelligence focuses on how emotional intelligence predicts individual behavior where when individuals have high emotional intelligence it will encourage adaptive behavior and think more rationally to deal with problems. Thus, the hypothesis can be drawn:

H2: Emotional Intelligence has a significant and positive relationship with Coping Strategies

2.3 Creativity

Human is full with needs and values they want to achieve. Humans tend to look for ways to show their actualization as people with complex needs and a desire for meaningful and varied daily tasks. This humanistic theory has also been told by Carl Rogers which is Carl Rogers' humanistic

personality theory that emphasizes the importance of the self-actualizing tendency in forming a self-concept. This statement could be seen in the current situation where people tend to act more creatively in dealing with problems so they can upgrade their values and keep running their businesses. For example, an owner whom fond self-actualization would behave creatively in dealing with the situation. She would find a new way to survive like upgrading her services or products so she could differentiate herself from other competitors or even just some ways to adapt to the new situation. *"My definition then of the creative process is that it is the emergence in an action of a novel relational product, growing out of the uniqueness of the individual on the one hand, and the materials, events, people, or circumstances of his life on the other."* So, according to Carl Rogers (1954), the creative process is the emergence of new relational products that arise from the uniqueness of individuals and materials, events, other people, and their environment. Rogers mentions several factors that can affect creativity:

- Openness to Experience: Extensionality
- An Internal Locus of Evaluation
- The Ability to Toy with Elements and Concepts

2.3.1 Emotional Intelligence, Coping Strategies and Creativity

Research that links coping strategies with creativity is still relatively small. Coping strategies according to Lazarus and Folkman (1984) are divided into two, namely problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping. However, not all strategies increase creativity. Shally and Zhou (2008) state that organizational creativity includes "finding and solving problems on an ongoing basis and implementing new solutions. This statement is also supported by Leunng et al. (2014) who agree that problem-solving is very important in facilitating creativity, especially in an organizational context. Meanwhile, Anderson (1977) indicated that focusing too much on emotional and defensive coping behavior while ignoring problem-solving coping could reduce performance levels.

There are still limited researches about how emotional intelligence could affect the owner of a small business to choose their coping strategies and how the strategies they have chosen define or lead them to creativity. So, the author wants to examine the relationship between those three variables in the owner of small businesses so we can see what happened and what the owner thinks also behaves over the pandemic situation to survive or just give up. Hypotheses have been developed:

H3: Chosen Coping Strategies positively related to Creativity.

H4: Emotional Intelligence positively related to Creativity through Coping Strategies that have been chosen.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Sample and Data Collection

The research was conducted in Purwokerto. Purposive sampling was used to obtain only the owner of small businesses with one owner without more than five employees or alone and judgmental sampling because authors assuming small businesses are the ones who affected the most by this pandemic and they don't have many sources and help to lean on. This technique enables authors to select a presentative population that suits the criteria (Babakus et al., 2017). Authors contacted the owners through social media Instagram and directly came also made a call for some owners who don't have any social media. A questionnaire was given through Google Form with no right and

wrong questions also participants could fill it anonymously. Some owners who don't understand how to use the platform were helped by the authors to fill it easier.

Out of 40 questionnaires were given, only 36 questionnaires collected, and only 34 questionnaires valid and used in this research. Demographic information indicated that 76% (n=26) participants were woman and 24% were man (n=8). In terms of education, 15% (n=5) were graduated from high school, 0.9% (n=3) were diplomas, 6% (n=21) were bachelor degrees and 0.9% (n=3) were holding master degrees. Regarding ages, 21% (n=7) were in ages 20-25 years old, 26% (n=9) were in range 26-30 years old and 53% (n=18) were above 30 years old. 86% (n=29) were in culinary field and 14% (n=5) were in non culinary field. Regarding how long the business was established, 30% (n=10) less than a year and 70% (n=24) were more than a year.

3.2 Measurement

Emotional intelligence was tested using The Bar-On model of emotional-social intelligence (ESI) (Bar-On, R, 2006) that was already adapted and 15 items were chosen to represent each dimension. Coping strategies were measured by 12 items chosen from COPE by Carver (1989) and Creativity using 7 items from Zhou and George (2001). Each question was using a 5-point Likert.

All of the items were adjusted and developed to adapt to the culture and participant's behavior, also translated into Indonesian. One of the dimensions from coping strategies (Alcohol-Drug Disengagement) wasn't included because it is not following the general culture in Indonesia.

3.3 Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using Partial Least Square (PLS) since the model is still predictive and the authors want to confirm a theory from the model. PLS can be used to explain whether or not there is a relationship between latent variables and analyze constructs formed with reflective and formative indicators (Ghozali, 2006).

4. Results

4.1 Measurement Results

As table.1 has shown, research assuming that the measurement of constructs for each variable is reliable and valid. Before the result was calculated, there are some indicators deleted due didn't meet the requirements which having factor loadings less than 0.7. Some indicators that have less than 0.7 but more than 0.5 still can be tolerated. For the reliability, Cronbach's alpha from each variable was >0.6 and composite reliability >0.7 which means the constructs were consistently reliable. The validity of each construct was shown by AVE that >0.5 (=0.687, 0.514, and 0.506). In terms to know the model fit, authors using predictive relevance (Q^2).

$$\begin{aligned}
 Q^2 &= 1 - (1 - R^2_1)(1 - R^2_2) && (1) \\
 &= 1 - (1 - 0.680)(1 - 0.527) \\
 &= 1 - (0.32)(0.473) \\
 &= 1 - 0.151 \\
 &= 0.8
 \end{aligned}$$

Q-Square can measure how well the observation values are generated by the model and also the estimated parameters (Ghozali, 2016). When the Q-Square value is greater than 0 (zero) indicating

that the model has predictive relevance (Chin, 1998) so does the result for the model that is being used in this research with 0.8 as closer to 1 it means the model is relevant in predicting.

Table 1. Construct Reliability and Validity

	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Coping Strategies	0.885	0.886	0.916	0.687
Creativity	0.752	0.759	0.837	0.514
Emotional Intelligence	0.889	0.901	0.910	0.506

4.2 Hypothesis Results

The hypothesis was also analyzed using SmartPLS 3 and the result can be seen in table 2. From the table, we can assume that H1 was supported by the result of t-statistic that >1.96 ($=2.353$) and p-value 0.019 (<0.05) which means that emotional intelligence and creativity were related positively significant. As mentioned before, H2 proposed that there is a relationship between emotional intelligence coping strategies. It is supported by the result shown in the table.2 ($t = 19.24$ and $p = 0.000 < 0.05$). But another hypothesis wasn't supported. H3 assumed that coping strategies affect creativity while the result showed that they weren't related ($t = 1.233$; $p = 0.218$). For the last hypothesis, the authors found that coping strategies couldn't mediate the relationship between emotional intelligence and creativity from indirect effects ($= 0.234 > 0.05$).

Table 2. Path Coefficients

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation	T Statistics	P Values
Coping Strategies -> Creativity	0.284	0.266	0.230	1.233	0.218
Emotional Intelligence -> Coping Strategies	0.825	0.838	0.043	19.24	0.000
Emotional Intelligence -> Creativity	0.474	0.513	0.201	2.353	0.019

Table 3. Indirect Effects

	Coping Strategies	Creativity	Emotional Intelligence
Coping Strategies			
Creativity			
Emotional Intelligence		0.234	

5. Discussion

As we have mentioned before, MSMEs in Indonesia still lacking creativity and innovation (De Fretes, 2020) meanwhile in this situation the owner must be creative to overcome new problems

that acquired new ways to handle with a state of emotional intelligence in mind. Emotional intelligence might have a big role in the way the owner behaves like choosing their coping strategies and being creative. This study has examined how emotional intelligence affects the owner's creative behavior through the coping strategies that they have chosen.

H1 suggests that emotional intelligence positively and significantly affects creativity. The result shows that when someone has high EI states, it would influence them to act creatively. This result is also consistent with other researches by Battacharjee, S, and Rahman (2016), Tsai and Lee (2014), Noorafshan and Jowkar (2013), Parke et al. (2015), and Lea et al. (2018) which states that EI can stimulate creativity. Parke et al. (2015) stated that when individuals' differences in EI influence each stage of the one emotional experience which also influence their creativity.

Furnham (2002) stated that individuals with high levels of emotional intelligence tend to adapt by thinking rationally and not acting emotionally or avoiding it as a coping strategy when dealing with stress. This statement supporting H2 that suggests emotional intelligence affecting positively and significantly on how choosing coping strategies. But, we couldn't find any relation between coping strategies and creativity even though some theories explained the relation between them like Shally and Zhou (2008) also Leunng et al. (2014). Furthermore, our study couldn't explain the relationship between emotional intelligence and creativity with coping strategies as mediators. Our H4 assumes when the owner who has a good state of emotional intelligence would be able to choose coping strategies that influence their creativities but the hypotheses weren't supported as well.

6. Conclusion

The current situation is like a survival game to the owner of the business. They got choices whether to give up, just let it flow, or doing their best to survive this pandemic. Every person has their unique ways to think, react and behave so do their coping ways or strategies. However, based on the humanistic personality theory by Carl Rogers (1954), that people tend to find a way to prove their self-actualization and forming a self-concept. In this case, they can do it through creativity. This study was conducted to evaluate the relationship between emotional intelligence and creativity that still inconsistent in previous studies; to examine how emotional intelligence influence the owner to choose coping strategies; to examine how emotional intelligence taking control of how the owner choose their coping strategies and does it raise or stimulate their creativities.

The result of this study contributes to theories about how important the owner of a business is emotional intelligence and creativity especially in such stressful events that couldn't be controlled. Several studies have shown some mediating roles in the relationship between EI and creativity yet using coping strategies as mediators is still limited. Contribution in theory also can be seen in this model which is using coping strategies as the mediator in the relationship between EI and creativity in the business field when this model was found in the context of gifted adults psychology. This research could be an entrance gate for the next research in how coping strategies works in business and economic fields.

From the practical point of view, we can see that this study contributes to how we can see emotional intelligence states decide the business owner coping strategies to deal with a stressful event (pandemic). The owner who accepts, understands, and controls their emotions, understands and having a good relationship with other people, and wants to optimize their potential tends to choose problem-solving-based coping strategies. They choose to deal with the situation with accept the situation positively and trying their best to find ways to overcome the problems. Be able to control

the emotions also help the owner think rationally and come out with creative solutions like new ways to enhance productivity or quality, new products, and taking risks.

Understanding what happened with MSME's owner in dealing with the situation, we would like to encourage people who are experts or skilled in the business field to help the owner by providing solutions or guide them. For example, from this study, we know that the owner tends to try solving the problems, so the expert could help by guiding them and giving solutions so they can work more efficiently and creatively. On the opposite, if the owner tends to avoid the problem, we need to emotionally reach them to help them over stressful events.

Even though our finding showed that the owner tends to face the situation based on problem-solving strategies which support Shally and Zhou (2008) theory that organizational creativity includes “finding and solving problems on an ongoing basis and implementing new solutions and Leunng et al. (2014) who agree that problem solving is very important in facilitating creativity, but the result of this study showed that problem-solving based strategies have no relation with creativity. Future studies should evaluate more about this model with the same context to prove how this model could be used properly. We suggest further examination for this model with an expanded sample but in the same field.

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