

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE: IT'S INFLUENCE IN REDUCING WORK STRESS

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Abstract

In the recent situation there is an increased level of stress that is creeping into all areas of the human life. Coping with these strenuous situations and striving to maintain a work – life balance is often a challenging task. There is however, an imminent requirement for an individual to possess emotional stability in order to battle the various work and life stressors. This emotional stability is determined by the individual's emotional intelligence. Emotional Intelligence (EI) is the ability to control one's emotions and to handle interrelationships with regard and empathy. This competency complements professional success and mainstream IQ in general. EI focusses on improving the well – being of an individual. This entails the complete mental, physical, emotional and spiritual state, leading to becoming a very eminent forecaster of psychological happiness. The purpose of this paper is to find the influence that emotional intelligence has on job stress. It will also address the dimension of work – life balance and the need for organizations to incorporate work friendly policies to increase employees' efficiency and performance by building a suitable work culture and climate.

Keywords:

Emotional Intelligence,
Stress, Wellbeing,
Work – life Balance

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INTRODUCTION

Stress has been interpreted in numerous ways over the past years. It was mainly perceived as pressure from the environment and then the strain within an individual. Today however, it can be reflected as the interaction between an event and individual. Stress is often displayed when an individual's psychological and physical state is not enough to cope with the pressure of the situation, leading to the undermining of goal achievement of both individual and organization.

There is a high level of stress faced by employees in this century that is driven by technology, fast paced career demands and continuous innovation. The main contributors to this aspect are the ever-changing corporate world as organizations restructure their strategies, systems, processes and technologies for more improved and efficient results. These ceaseless changes often tend to impose new responsibilities and duties on the employees working there. This further leads to a work-life imbalance as the employee struggles to explore and adapt to the new roles assigned. For an individual to conform well to these challenges he/she must have efficiency in both the intelligence quotient (IQ) as well as the emotional quotient (EQ) to enable quick decision making and problem-solving abilities. A total stress-free life is highly impossible as stress is stitched into the very fabric of human existence. Individuals over a period of time have utilized various strategies to cope with stress, especially utilizing their emotional intelligence competencies (Siren, 2007).

1. EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Emotional Intelligence is the ability that an individual has to understand their own emotions and emotions of others too. It also enables them to properly choose between each emotion when taking action (Cooper and Sawaf, 1997; Mayer and Salovey, 1993). Emotional intelligence is an intelligence that can be studied, improved and developed as it's an ability to control and evaluate emotions (Perkins, 1994; Sternberg, 1996). Many of the researchers have suggested that emotional intelligence be strengthened over a period of years while some researchers claim it to be an inborn inherent trait. It is also said to be the capacity to utilize awareness and sensitivity to notice the emotions unaided in interpersonal communication by avoiding impulsive and thoughtless behaviour, but instead reacting from willingness, authenticity and candour (Ryback, 1998). Peter Salovey and John D. Mayer (1990) in their article "Emotional Intelligence," stated emotional intelligence as, "the subset of social intelligence that involves 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 actions".

Emotionally intelligent people can be defined as those who can regulate their present emotions according to logic and proper reasoning. It enables employees to act more innovatively. Daniel Goleman (1998) firmly believes that emotional intelligence is the fundamental element of psychological capabilities that strongly correlates with maintaining work-life balance and life

success. It is also empathy and relationship management that are the central aspect to striking balance and reducing stress in the process as handling work stressors is a crucial aspect found in emotional intelligence. It is all about understanding an emotion and controlling it. Emotional intelligence – An aspect of social intelligence that comprises the ability to evaluate one's own emotions, distinguish between them and use this knowledge to guide future decisions.

2. STRESS

Stress is found to be a major obstacle to an employee's health and well-being. Stress can have a negative effect on an organization on whole. It is arising from numerous pressures that crop up at work on a daily basis. It can be a serious threat to the organizations and their employees' in the long run. There are vast mental ailments such as depression, suicidal tendencies, headaches, allergic reactions, irritation, sleeplessness, anxiety (Arroba & James, 1990). Prolonged stress could also lead to wrong life decisions such as increased consumption of drugs, alcohol (Quick, Nelson & Quick, 1990). Chronic stress over a long period can cause life threatening sickness such as heart failure, respiratory problems, cancer, high blood pressure, strokes, ulcers (Cooper, Cooper & Eaker, 1988).

3. PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL- BEING

This is essential for human beings to live a healthy happy life, making it a crucial element (Molina, García, Castillo, & Queralt, 2011). It refers to a person's abilities, interests and improved quality of life (Salsman & Carlson, 2009). The World Health Organization defined health as not only the absence of illness but a complete state of mental, physical and social well-being (World Health Organization 1946). This created a dramatic change in the overall importance of development of a public health model (Conway & Macleod 2002). There are numerous aspects that aid to the understanding of psychological well-being of an individual. These are: Freedom, self – acceptance, right attitude and balanced social life. Freedom is the autonomy to be in control. Self – acceptance looks into the accepting one self for whatever it is. Social life is linked to the aspect that man is a social animal, hence it's important to maintain sound relationships with the right blend of attitude.

4. CONNECT BETWEEN EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE & WORK STRESS

Many recent studies have depicted a vivid connection between emotional intelligence and job stress in the view of a company's performance and have reported a positive impact (Gardner, 2005, Spector and Goh, 2001, Ciarrochi, Chan, & Bajgar, 2001). The emotional dimensions play a crucial role in enabling an individual to have control over the stressors at the work place. The emotional dimensions help tackle stress in a positive way as it enables an individual to handle stressful situations with a positive outlook by controlling a problem without collapsing (Slaski and Cartwright, 2002).

An individual possessing emotional intelligence are able to manage their negative actions and emotions with job satisfaction a lesser amount of mental problems, increased levels of commitment (Gardner, 2005). Individuals sometimes react with different emotional responses to events at the work place. These responses are sometimes positive and sometimes negative with depression, hate and anxiety. With the knowledge of emotional intelligence, employees can react to stressful situations at work in a more positive way. It can also be found that emotional intelligent employees are more committed to their respective careers.

It is found that stress in jobs enhances organizational pressures, reduces performance levels and contributes to higher attrition and low employee retention. It also impacts the work functions, contribution ability and learning abilities. Organizational stress also negatively impacts a work place by leading to a bad name, loss of reputation and low brand identity. It is emotional intelligence that helps us control these different work stressors. Emotional intelligence enables to cope with the stressful environment and organizations demands. So, it can be said that an emotionally intelligent individual can strike a reasonable emotional balance between a stressful situation and one's reaction to that given situation. In the theoretical paper (Spector and Goh, 2001), discussed the part of occupational stress and its impact on performance. They have defined stress as- any condition that provokes a negative response such as frustration/rage/anger/ tension. The authors recommended that emotions indicate how the work environment is viewed, if at all a specific element is referred as a job stressor or no. They continue to explain that these appraising emotions may reflect psychological and physical strains in the future which in return leads to decreased job satisfaction and low productivity.

Emotionally intelligent people are in a position to recognize and manage themselves in the right way by not allowing their impulsive aggressive side that control in stressful events (Darolia, 2005).

5. FACTORS CAUSING WORK PLACE STRESS

Occupational and Environmental Medicine (OEM)international journal (2002) has stated the causes and management of stress at work. The work place is where demands and pressures cause great amounts of stress to employees. These factors can be related to the job responsibilities or the social environment of the organization. These are strenuous long hours of work, over time, work overload, lack of incentives, poor working conditions.

A suggestive way for an individual to handle stress can be as follows:

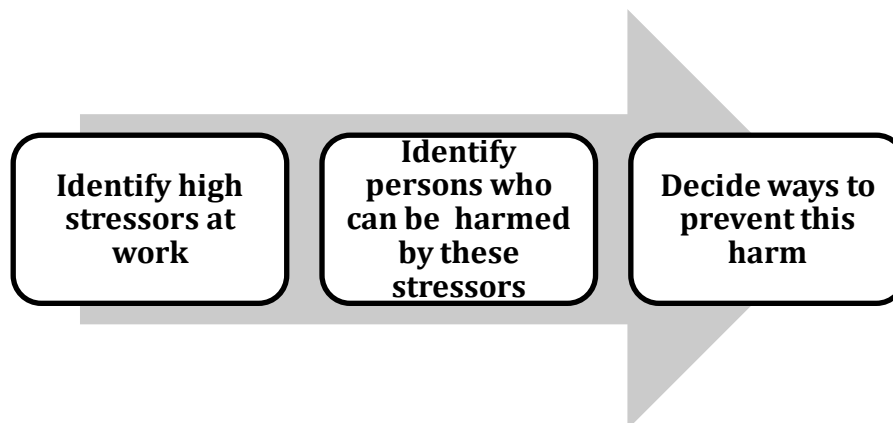


Fig. 1 Stress Handler Model

The degree of stress demonstrated depends on the two reaction mechanisms:

1. **Alarm** - When we are first put in direct contact with a potential threat the psychological reaction is to either **“Flee or Fight”**. The latter response requires physical energy which includes muscles tensing, fast breathing and heart beat becomes more rapid.
2. **Adaptation** –This second reaction is adaptative in nature and an individual cease to respond and learns that the stimuli faced is no longer a threat to survival. The reaction here is **“Conform and Adapt”**.

Main Contributors to stress are:

- Long working hours
- Unpaid overtime
- Work overload
- Role conflicts
- Lack of work variety
- Poor working conditions
- Autocratic leadership
- Lack of work – life balance
- No involvement in management decision making
- Organization change: Mergers/acquisition/downsizing/restructuring/relocation

6. DISCUSSION

It has been explored that high levels of stress are likely to appear then the job demands exceed the employee's capacity to deliver accompanied with low dominance over work. However, when there are high demands for work accompanied with high dominance over work there is great success. Each individual is different in the way they cope and experience stress. It has been discussed that various factors are present at work that contribute to the work stressors. These stressors include but not restricted to – Lack of coping abilities, self-esteem, financial support, resources just to name few.

With the increasing demand of work, employees end to spill over their assigned tasks to their homes and into the lives of their families. This is a serious disruption that undermines the quality of work life which is an important buffer to manage stress. Added to all this the domestic responsibilities, financial instability and personal issues impact the overall quality of work.

Emotional Intelligence can help can employee in the following ways:

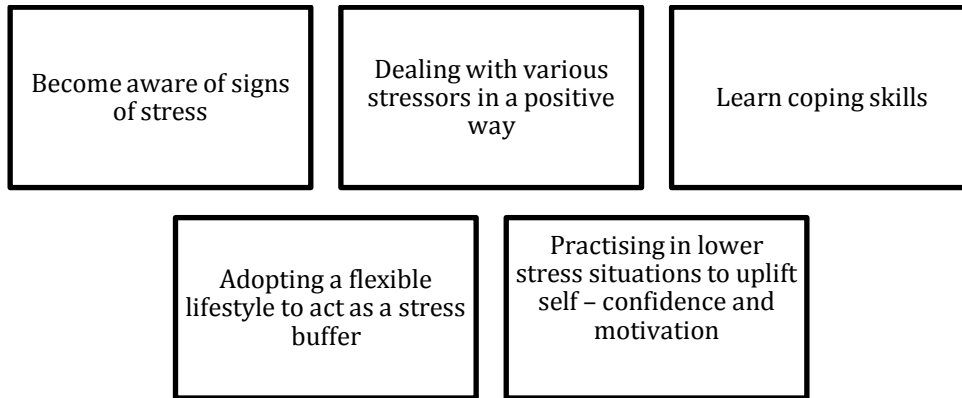


Fig 2. EI Coping Model

7. CONCLUSION

The main purpose of this paper was to explore the impact of emotional intelligence plays in reducing stress, leading to better quality of work and stable work – life balance. It also focusses on the various contributors of stress in relation to occupational stress among employees. The past literature also highlighted about the prevention of stress can be successfully dealt with required organizational interventions and training. This study has also made efforts to understand how emotional intelligent people can develop various abilities to handle stressful situations with calmness and tack as Organizations have also concluded that Intelligence quotient (IQ) cannot independently predict the success of an individual as emotional quotient (EQ) plays a vital role in the overall success of an individual both in a professionally aspect as well as personal aspect.

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