

CONQUERING WORKPLACE STRESS THROUGH EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE: STRATEGIES AND POSSIBILITIES

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ABSTRACT

Stress is an unavoidable part of life. It is a state, which reflects certain biochemical reactions in the human body. The stressed mind produces a mental and emotional pressure. Stress is not always bad. At a reasonable level, it can help infuse one with the energy to accomplish his/her goals. But its prolongation causes worry, loss of confidence and determination in life and decline in interest to do work. Workplace stress is the growing problem of most of the organization. Work stress factors such as work overloads, downsizing, overtime, shift work and an unhealthy work environment cause great impact on employees as well as organisational well-being, which decrease productivity and increase the health care cost of the organisation. While on the one hand Emotional intelligence is the ability of a person to understand one's own feelings and the feelings of others. On the other hand, timely and appropriately responding those feelings through empathic actions. However, effective management through EI is emerging as valuable competence for personal as well as professional life. This paper made an attempt to find out the causes of stress and its consequences and how emotional intelligence can help a better strategy to manage stress at workplace.

Keywords: *Stress, Emotional Intelligence, Stressors, Strains, Gender.*

Introduction:

Stress in the workplace is an extensive problem and safety risk throughout the world. Thus in modern times stress in general and workplace stress, in particular, has become the concern in the life of each individual. Work stress is usually conceptualised as work-role conflict, work-role overload, and work-role ambiguity. Work stress factors such as work-overloads, downsizing, overtime, and an unhealthy work environment have the negative impact on employees as well as organisational well-being. Stressed workers increase their risk of serious physical and mental problems like a headache, backache, anxiety, depression, heart disease, stroke etc. When the workers overwhelmed at work, they can lose the confidence and it becomes irritable or withdrawn and they are unable to pay more attention towards their work. Obviously, stress at workplace leads to fatigue,

irritability, and poor communication which challenge an individual's intellectual, emotional and interpersonal functioning abilities. Furthermore, it is well-known fact that stressed workers cannot remain in the continual state of tension for long, he/she needs to be equipped with specific knowledge and skills that will help them deal with stress in the workplace. Effective management of stress through emotional intelligence helps to reduce or reappraising the pressures and enhancing an employee's coping ability and resources to face the complex and demanding situation.

Methodology:

The present research paper made an attempt to gather information from reviewing published books, articles in various journals, periodicals, and collecting relevant data from published dissertations.

Conceptual Framework:

The term “stress” is derived from the Latin word *strictus*, which means “to injure, molest, constrain, molest, hardships or affliction. Hans Selye (one of the early pioneer of modern stress theory) first employed the term stress in the biological context in the 1930’s. He referred to stress as an upset in the body’s balance due to physical, mental or emotional stimuli.

Definition:

(Williams & Huber, 1986), defined stress as “psychological and physical reaction to prolonged internal and/or environmental conditions in which an individual’s adaptive capabilities are overextended” (p.243). Similarly, Sager (1991) defined “job stress as a psychological state perceived by individuals when faced with demands, constraints, and opportunities that have important but uncertain outcomes.” (Pp. 21-34)

Stress, Stressors and Strains:**Stress:**

Stress *per se* is neither good nor bad by itself. In fact, there are two basic types of stress: eustress (positive) and distress (negative). Eustress will create positive or creative tension in a person which results in improved performance. On the contrary, distress caused by over or hyper stress resulting in sub-optimal performance and reduced satisfaction. Eustress demands proper and adequate level of stress (neither overstress nor under-stress) because under stress (hypo stress) will not generate a required amount of pressures to rise to the occasion with a sense of purpose, focus, priority and urgency. Stress is the psychological and physical state that results when the resources of the individual are not sufficient to cope with the demands and pressures of the situation (Michie, 2002, pp. 67-72). In other words, work stress is a generic term that refers to work-related stimuli/job stressors that may lead to physical, behavioural, or psychological consequences (i.e. Strains) that affect both the health and well-being of the employee and the organization. Furthermore, (Jamal, 1998)described job stress as different from stress, in that, it is work-related psychological stress. Job stress may occur when an individual is not given adequate training or is not provided with the necessary resources to perform the job, or is confronted with conflicting job demands (Pp. 727-738).

Stressors/ Causes of Stress:

Stimuli or situations that can result in the experience of stress are termed as ‘stressor.’ Usually, stressors combine to put pressure on an individual in a variety of ways until stress develops. Likewise, job stress is a set of stressors, which resulted from the interaction between the worker and his/her working conditions. However, work stress refers to the process of job stressors which include excessive workload,

inconvenient work schedules, job insecurity, and target-oriented job characteristics.

Strains/Consequences of stress:

A consequence of stress is an interaction between the individual responses to the environment, which can be differentiated on the basis of four main aspects such as: physiological, cognitive, emotional and behavioural.

Cognitive aspects: Cognitive signs of the emergency stress response involve increased concentration and decreased attention span, increased distractibility and deterioration in both short-term and long-term memory.

Emotional aspects: Emotions may be connected with stress in its early stages, including frustration, anger, anxiety, fear, apprehension and irritability. If the stress persists, these emotions may become confounded with others such as tension, hypochondria, depression, demoralization and helplessness.

Behavioural aspects: Stress can affect behaviour in many different ways such as eating more or less, sleeping too much or too little, overeating or under eating, angry, outbursts drug or alcohol abuse, tobacco use social, withdrawal exercising less often are the common behavioural symptoms of stress.

Psychological aspects: In psychology, stress is defined as being under psychological pressure. Stress is the physical, mental and chemical response of the human body to the events causing feelings of fear, excitement, anxiety, danger or anger in the individual. The source of the stress is extraneous, so that the effects of physical debility, accident or interpersonal difficulties will have similar effects, which results in a variety of stressors, such as high pressure, barriers to task accomplishment, or social conflict, as well as to a lack of resources, control, social support, or recognition, and other rewards, and negative outcomes like depression, psychosomatic complaints, back pain, and cardiovascular disease. Which leads to negative impact on jobs like accidents, psychiatric disorders, the use of alcohol and drugs, and increase the suicide rates, turnover, absenteeism, higher attrition and decreased productivity.

Emotional Intelligence:

EQ is a measure of a person’s emotional intelligence and tells the ability of a person to use both his/her emotions as well as cognitive abilities. The attributes that are measured in this quotient include but are not limited to empathy, intuition, integrity, authenticity, intrapersonal skills and interpersonal skills.

Concept of Emotional Intelligence:

The concept of EI was first coined by Yale University psychologists (Salovey & Mayer, 1990), who defined it as-a form 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 action. Furthermore, they

also defined EI in 5 domains, namely, (1) knowing one's emotions, (2) managing emotions, (3) motivating oneself, (4) recognizing emotions in others and (5) handling relationships. Moreover, the ability model of EI proposed by (Mayer & Salovey, 1997), consisted of four dimensions: (1) the ability to perceive, appraise and express emotion; (2) the ability to generate feelings when they facilitate thought; (3) the ability to understand emotion; and (4) the ability to regulate emotion. Besides that, the landmark work of Salovey and Mayer defined emotional intelligence as:

- the ability to accurately appraise emotions in the self and others, through both verbal and non-verbal channels;
- the ability to regulate or control emotion in the self and others;
- the ability to use emotion to regulate and direct thought.

Meanwhile, (Goleman, 1998), described that emotionally intelligent individual can be more motivated, self-aware, self-confident, satisfied and socially adept. Therefore, emotional intelligence is the name of a field of inquiry that explores how human beings apply their subjective, non-cognitive behavioural skills to successfully manage and improve their relationships and life conditions. (Terrell & Hughes, 2008)

Definition of EI:

Emotional Intelligence (EI) is defined as one's ability to recognize one's own feeling and others' feeling, to differentiate among them, and to use the information to manage one's thinking and behaviour (Salovey & Mayer, 1990, p.189). Moreover, Emotional Intelligence refers to the capacity for recognizing one's own feelings and those of others, for motivating themselves, and for managing well in ourselves and our relationships (Goleman, 1998).

Basic components of EI:

Components of Emotional Intelligence are self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy and social skills. **Self-awareness:** Self-awareness is not an attention that gets carried away by emotions, overacting, and amplifying what is perceived. Rather it is a neutral mode that maintains self-reflectiveness even amidst turbulent emotions. Self-awareness means being "aware of both one's mood and his/ her thoughts about that mood" It can be a non-reactive and non-judgemental attention to inner states. It involves being able to understand how other people are feeling and validating those feelings. **Self-regulation** refers to "the processes by which individuals influence which emotions they have, when they have them, and how they experience and express these emotions" (Gross, 1998, p. 275). Self-regulation helps individuals to make thoughtful decisions, which stay in control of their feelings. **Motivation:** it is a process of stimulating people to action to accomplish desired goals. Self-motivated people march faster and

more enthusiastically towards their goals than the ones who lack self-motivation. (Bahman, S. et.al. 2008, p-11), Individuals who are high in emotional intelligence want to achieve beyond his/her and everyone else's expectations. Stress or frustration doesn't overwhelm them. **Empathy:** which means to be considerate and awareness of other's feelings, needs, and concerns. (Ahmad, S. et.al 2009, p-127). **Social skills:** Adeptness and inducing desirable responses in others. It involves influence, communication, conflict management, and leadership, change catalyst, building bonds, collaboration and cooperation, and team capabilities.

Emotional intelligence and Stress:

Perception of stress and its management depend upon a variety of factors such as antecedents (individual, team, organisational and situational characteristics), nature of stressors (causes), nature of strains (consequences), coping style and strategies to effectively handle stress under various conditions. Inability to handle excessive stress would eventually lead to 'burnout' making the person almost useless vegetable. Hence, no person can afford to neglect stress and its consequences because stress and strain would adversely affect the physical, mental, intellectual, social and spiritual well-being of a person. It is generally acknowledged that the physical, social, and psychological conditions present in the workplace may have either stress-relieving or stress-inducing potential. In this context, emotional intelligence (EI) quotient of a person holds brilliant promise to successfully manage stress. (Yvonne Birks et.al 2009) found that as people get more stressed, their EI scores decrease, or that as EI scores decrease for whatever reason, stress increases. If an individual's emotional intelligence increases, his/her ability to cope with stress increases as well. Therefore, the individual who has higher emotional intelligence also has the ability to withstand stressful events and situations. Wons, A. et.al. (2011), reported in their study that the persons with high emotional intelligence could better recognise potential stressors, could use emotions in coping with the problem, as far as they cope in a better way with negative emotions evoking in the stressful situation. (Shukla & Srivastava, 2016), generalised that the ability of employees to properly manage their emotions and other employee's emotions could increase their capabilities to cope with psychological stress in the job. (Van Rooy & Viswesvaran, 2004), observed that EI is "the set of abilities (verbal and nonverbal) that enable a person to generate, recognize, express, understand, and evaluate their own, and others, emotions in order to guide thinking and action that successfully cope with environmental demands and pressures." Oginska-bulik (2005), confirmed that employees having higher emotional intelligence perceived a lower organisational stress and suffered less from negative health consequences. The findings also

revealed that emotional intelligence plays a moderating role in preventing executives/employees from negative health outcomes, especially from depression symptoms.

Gender, Stress, and Emotional Intelligence:

The concept of gender consists of the ways men and women are defined and described through cultural processes, which are a socially constructed state, and closely associate specific behaviours and attitudes with each gender. Masculinity means technical, competence, competitiveness, aggressiveness, and rationality. Femininity, meanwhile, involves emotionality, nurturance and passivity, and relationships. Gender differences in work stress concern men and women experience some different rates of stressors at the workplace such as long working hours, considerable travel, little time for developing a relationship with children etc. Women tend to report more workload, which includes vocational and domestic, paid and unpaid work. However, increased workloads make difficult for women to wind down and suffer more psychological and somatic disorders, which threaten their physical as well as mental health. Women consistently experience more symptoms of mental ill-health, higher rates of acute illness and more chronic conditions than do men. Likewise, men tend to experience a higher level of chronic stress than women, which cause more injuries and death. (Debra, L.*et. al.* 2002, Pp., 3-12). Chronic stressors and psychological resources play an important role in determining health, but their effects are generally stronger for women than men (Denton, Prus, & Walters, 2004, pp. 2585-2600). Indeed, men and women differ in terms of coping with stress. Men tend to use problem-focused coping strategies like planful problem solving skill, whereas women are more likely to maintain healthier and supportive relationship with family and friends, which can help them to cope with the stressful situation effectively. Emotional Intelligence has no gender bias. Men who are high in emotional intelligence are socially poised, outgoing and cheerful, not prone to fearless or worried rumination. They have the notable capacity for commitment to people or causes, for taking responsibility, and for having an ethical outlook: they are sympathetic and caring in their relationships. They are comfortable with themselves, others, and the society they live in, and also able to handle stress better than women. Emotional intelligent women, by contrast, tend to be assertive and express their feelings directly, and to feel positive about themselves; life holds meaning for them. Like the men, they are outgoing and gregarious, and express their feelings appropriately; they adapt well to stress. (Goleman, 2009). (Ahmad, S.*et.al.* 2009) found that men exposed more assertiveness; self-recognition about himself, showed more independence and management according to the situations than the women.

Difference between EI and IQ:

Intelligence Quotient is a measure of one's cognitive intelligence such as the capacity to learn or understand new situations; reasoning through a given predicament or setting, and the ability to apply one's knowledge in current circumstances. Intelligence Quotient (IQ) defines the level of intelligence an employee possesses to understand, interpret, and implement one's knowledge in varied situations, leading to his or her growth as well as the organisation. If someone has a high IQ, they are analytical, logical and will focus on tasks. While on the other hand Emotional Intelligence defined as ability or a trait or a mixture of the two. However, EI is a set of abilities that enable individuals to organize and manage the emotions of themselves and others. This intelligence includes understanding one's own feeling and using them for taking appropriate decision in personal as well as professional aspects of his/her lives.

In the fitness of things, intelligence quotient (IQ) is genetically determined, whereas emotional intelligence quotient (EQ) can be developed and fine-tuned through education training and self-development interventions. Performance quotient (PQ) in modern organisations is determined with a higher weightage of EQ (50%), IQ (25%) and spiritual quotient (SQ) (25%). According to Swamy Vivekananda, spirituality is nothing but the science of human excellence. Unleashing human potential within every person by looking beyond oneself, the boundaries of interpersonal interaction, team relationships and the organisational effectiveness. EQ is indicated by answering three basic questions: do we have the ability to understand our own feelings/emotions? Do we have the ability to understand and appreciate the feelings/emotions of 'relevant others' (superiors, peers, subordinates in our role set). Finally, do we have the ability to respond to the feelings/emotions/expectations of 'relevant others' through genuine, timely and appropriate actions? If the answers to all the above three questions are positive, it is said that the person is blessed with reasonable level of EI.

Review of Literature:

(Ahmad, S. *et. al.* 2009). Studied Emotional Intelligence and Gender Differences of males (80) and (80) females from North West Frontier Province (N.W.F.P), Pakistan. An analysis of EI was found that women, on average, are more aware of their emotions, show more empathy, and are more adept interpersonally. Men, on the other hand, are more self-confident, optimistic, and adaptable. It was found that men are also able to handle stress better than women. (AI Demerdash, 2012) carried out a study on Emotional intelligence: its role in managing stress and anxiety in elementary school teachers at workplace, Saidu Salim Sector, Kafr EL Sheikh Governorate, Egypt, with a sample of 26 female and 74 male

elementary school teachers. The findings of the study indicated that the low and high level of Emotional Intelligence establish relationship to some extent with stress and anxiety. Negative correlation of Emotional Intelligence with stress and anxiety highlights that emotional intelligence will prove helpful tool in dealing with stress and anxiety.

(Bidlan & Sihag, 2014) in their research on Occupational stress, burnout, coping and emotional intelligence: exploring gender differences among different occupational groups of 600 healthcare professional included nursing, support staff & doctors, with equal number of male and female participants from the private hospitals of Delhi, NCR. The study results indicated that the main effects for gender and occupation type were significant in various dimensions of occupational stress, burnout, coping and emotional intelligence: whereas the interaction effect of gender and occupation type was significant only the managing emotion dimension of emotional intelligence.

(Bibi, F *et al.* 2015), investigated the Relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Coping Strategies among University Teachers of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Using a sample of 222 male and 152 female University teachers. They concluded that with higher level of Emotional Intelligence teachers used adaptive coping strategies and with low level of EI teachers used maladaptive coping strategies; The teachers who scored low on EI also scored high on maladaptive coping strategy, these finding should be included in policy making to offer training and workshop to improve the level of EI.

(Karim, 2009), conducted a study on Emotional intelligence and occupational stress among professional staff in New Zealand. The sample consisted of 157 professional staffs including salaried staff, line managers, senior managers, managing directors and chief executive officers. The study found that respondents who were better able to understand others' emotions were also more likely to use challenge appraisals, task-focused coping and social support. Respondents who could manage their own emotions were more likely to use challenge appraisals and less likely to use threat appraisals, more likely to use task-focused coping and less likely to use avoidance, but no more likely to use social support. Emotional self-management was also related to higher levels of positive affect and lower levels of negative affect.

(Khaniyan, M. *et.al.* 2013) aimed to examine the Emotional Intelligence and Occupational Stress among Rehabilitation Staffs working in Tehran's Training Hospitals, in Tehran. In a cross-sectional study, 169 individuals selected from a total number of 300 rehabilitation staffs including occupational therapists, physiotherapists, speech therapists, audiologists, orthotic and prosthetic specialists and optometrists. The results showed that persons having high level of EI may suffer less from occupational stress. The results also confirmed

that there are significant relationships between EI dimensions and occupational stress.

(Yamani, Shahabi, & Haghani, 2014), discovered that the relationship between emotional intelligence and job stress in the faculty of medicine in Isfahan University of Medical Sciences. The sample was obtained 202 faculty members from IUMS. The study result found that a significant relationship between emotional intelligence and job stress. If an individual understands his/her own feelings and knows them according to the concepts of emotional intelligence, then he/she can make better choices of life regarding his/her jobs, friends, etc.

Based on the extensive review of literature in this domain the following specific interventions tailored to the needs of individual. An organisation should help an individual's: to improve problem solving skills, more involvement with peer, improve interpersonal effectiveness and popularity, enhance better coping skills with stress and anxiety, better conflict-resolution skills, and less delinquent behaviours at the workplace. (Elias, M.J. *et al.* 1990, pp-177-200)

Comparison chart of IQ and EQ:

IQ	EQ
An intelligence quotient (IQ) is a score derived from one of the several standardized tests designed to assess intelligence.	Emotional quotient (EQ) or emotional intelligence is the ability to identify, assess, and control the emotions of oneself, of others, and of group.
Ability to identify, evaluate, control and express emotions one's own emotions; perceive, and assess others' emotions; use emotions to facilitate thinking, understanding of emotional meanings.	Ability to learn, understand and apply information to skills, logical reasoning, and word comprehension, math skills, abstract and spatial thinking, filter irrelevant information.
IQ measures cognitive abilities	EQ measures emotional abilities
IQ is a genetic trait	EQ is something one can train themselves to gain
IQ is what one has or born with	One can improve upon his / her EQ
IQ can measures concepts like word power, math skill and logical reasoning, it falls short when it comes to creative skills and emotional abilities of a person	EQ is a measure of a person's emotional intelligence and tells the ability of a person to use both his/her emotions as well as cognitive abilities.

Source: [http://www.diffen.com/quotient and difference/EQ_vs_IQ](http://www.diffen.com/quotient_and_difference/EQ_vs_IQ)

Intelligent quotient and emotional intelligence are not opposing competencies, but rather separate ones. (Goleman, 2009). EQ has more to do with happiness and successes in life than IQ. Emotionally resilient

persons are more likely to handle stressors and strains than the emotionally imbalanced and disturbed persons. High level of EQ would enable the person to take well-informed decisions implement those decisions with appropriate and timely actions having positive intended consequences. On the contrary, a highly stressed individual cannot apply his/her mind in a balanced manner resulting in wrong decisions, wrong actions and accompanying adverse effects.

Conclusion:

To sum up, emotional intelligence quotient can be leveraged to manage workplace stress successfully. It certainly goes a long way in enhancing the personal and interpersonal effectiveness. In this context, effective and efficient measurement and assessment of EI will be a precondition to conquer work stress through the management of self and others. Accordingly, in future emotionally resilient workplace is the reality.

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