

ROLE OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE IN MANAGING STRESS AND ANXIETY AT WORKPLACE

Dr. P. Asokan

Controller of Examinations, Thiruvalluvar University, Vellore - 632 115

Abstract

The phenomenon of emotional intelligence is a growing topic for behavioural investigation as researchers strive to understand its influence on various social interactions. Recent research indicates that emotions play an integral part in Managing stress and Anxiety at workplace. A review of the literature highlights the need for examination of the relationship of emotional intelligence as an overarching concept to the Management of Stress and Anxiety. The researcher examines two null hypotheses that investigate the measurement of emotional intelligence as a predictor in managing Stress and Anxiety. 120 Management students were taken for the study. Emotional Intelligence Scale, Stress Inventory and General Anxiety test were used for the measurement of all the variables. Descriptive statistics, Correlation and Regression analysis were used for data Analysis. Results indicate that there was a significant relationship between Emotional Intelligence and the variables of Stress and Anxiety. Stress management component and anxiety component; emerge as statistically significant with respect to the relationship with Emotional Intelligence.

Introduction

People who rise to the top of their field whether it is Management, Psychology, Law, Medicine, Engineering or Banking are not just good at their jobs. They are easy-going, flexible and optimistic. In other words, it takes more than traditional cognitive intelligence to be successful at work. It also takes 'emotional intelligence,' the ability to restrain negative feelings such as anger, self-doubt, stress, anxiety and instead focus on positive ones such as confidence, empathy and congeniality.

In an era of shifting paradigms, one should be able to develop its human resources as a source of competitive advantage. In order to develop and enhance workforce capabilities and to successfully compete in the 21st Century, organisations have to embark on future oriented human resources strategies. It could be argued that the individual competencies of the workforce in any organisation would determine its overall success. This success, among other things, may be their job-role and position-power to gain common ground in any organisational setting.

Over the last decade Emotional Intelligence (EI) has drawn significant interest from academics and HR practitioners throughout the world. The development of emotional intelligence skills is important because it is an area that is generally overlooked when skills development programs are designed. And yet research shows that emotions, properly managed, can drive trust, loyalty, and commitment. Many of the greatest productivity

gains, innovations, and accomplishments of individuals, teams, and organisations have occurred within such a framework.

Basic Components of Emotional Intelligence (EI)

EI is distinct from but complimentary to academic intelligence, the purely cognitive capacity measured by IQ. Unlike IQ that does not significantly change over one's life time, emotional intelligence can be taught and learned. It requires commitment to develop one's competencies and skills through repeated application, practice, and feedback. EI has basic components such as:

Self-awareness

Self-awareness is the heart of emotional intelligence. It is the foundation on which most of the other elements of emotional intelligence are built, the necessary first step toward exploring and coming to understand yourself, and toward change. It is the ability to recognize and understand your moods, emotions, and drives as well as their impact on others. Emotional self-awareness is also about knowing what motivates you, what brings you fulfillment, and what lifts your heart and fills you with energy and aliveness.

Self-regulation

Self-regulation or impulse control is-the ability to regulate your emotions and behavior so that you act appropriately in various situations. It involves resisting or delaying an impulse, drive, and temptation to act, responding versus reacting.

Interpersonal skills

Interpersonal effectiveness involves being empathetic (i.e., being aware of, understanding, and appreciating the feelings of others); being a constructive, cooperative, and contributing member of your social group; and, establishing and maintaining mutually satisfying relationships.

Emotional Intelligence at Workplace

A manager is a person who has to manage the mood of their organizations. The most gifted corporate leaders accomplish that by using a mysterious blend of psychological abilities known as emotional intelligence. They're self-aware and empathetic. They can read and regulate their own emotions white intuitively grasping how others feel and gauging their organization's emotional state.

Intelligence (EI) has been recently validated with major skill areas that can influence your career and create abilities that improve your worth at work. A very recent and excellent review of the EI literature demonstrates clearly that EI impacts on work success.

Adaptability

Adaptability is the capacity to cope with environmental demands by effectively and realistically sizing up and flexibly dealing with problematic situations. It is the ability to adjust your emotions, thoughts, and behavior to changing situations and conditions.

Stress Tolerance

Stress tolerance is the ability to withstand adverse events, stressful situations, and strong emotions without falling apart but by actively coping with stress.

General Mood and Motivation

Two factors that facilitate emotionally intelligent behavior are optimism and happiness. Optimism is the ability to look at the brighter side of life and to maintain a positive attitude even in the face of adversity. Happiness is the ability to feel satisfied with one's life, to enjoy oneself and others, and to have fun and express a positive mood.

Different jobs also call for different types of emotional intelligence. For example, success in sales requires the empathetic ability to gauge a customer's mood and the interpersonal skill to decide when to pitch a product and when to keep quiet.

“Don’t bring your personal problems to work” is one variation of the argument that emotions are inappropriate in the workplace. Business decisions, so the argument goes, should be based on information, logic and calm cool reason, with emotions kept to a minimum. But it is unrealistic to suppose that emotions can be checked at the door when you arrive at work. Some people may assume, for a variety of reasons, that emotional neutrality is an ideal, and try to keep feelings out of sight. Such people work and relate in a certain way: usually they come across as rigid, detached or fearful, and fail to participate fully in the life of the workplace. This is not necessarily bad in some situations, but it is usually not good for an organization for such people to move into management roles. The same would be true for people who emote excessively, who tell you how they feel about everything. Simply being around them can be exhausting.

Developing emotional intelligence in the workplace means acknowledging that emotions are always present, and doing something intelligent with them. People vary enormously in the skill with which they use their own emotions and react to the emotions of others—and that can make the difference between a good manager and a bad one. It’s not overly egalitarian to suggest that most professionals, managers and executives are fairly smart people (of course there can be glaring exceptions), but there can be a huge difference in how well they handle people. That is, the department manager may be a genius in technical, product or service knowledge—and get failing marks in terms of people skills.

Stress at Workplace

The workplace had become a high stress environment in many organizations cutting across industries. Employees were experiencing high level of stress due to various factors such as high workload, tight deadlines, high targets, type of work, lack of job satisfaction, long working hours, pressure to perform, etc. Interpersonal conflicts at the workplace, such as boss-subordinate relationships and relationships with peers, were also a source of stress.

Experts believed that the dysfunctional aspects of stress could directly impact an organization's performance and also affect the well-being of its employees. Stress at the workplace was linked to absenteeism, higher attrition, and decreased productivity. Stress led to fatigue, irritability, poor communication, and quality problems/errors.

High stress levels also affected the morale and motivation of the employees. Prolonged exposure to stress without effective coping mechanisms could lead to a host of physical and mental problems. For instance, stress could lead to stress-induced gastrointestinal problems, irritable bowel syndrome, acidity, acid reflux, insomnia, depression, heart disease, etc. Moreover, stress could push the victim toward high risk behavior such as smoking, drinking, and substance abuse. Stress-related illness led to increase in absenteeism and attrition affecting the profitability of the organizations.

Anxiety at Workplace

In today's economic upheavals, downsizing, layoff, merger, and bankruptcies have cost hundreds of thousands of workers their jobs. Millions more have been shifted to unfamiliar tasks within their companies and wonder how much longer they will be employed. Adding to the pressures that workers face are new bosses, computer surveillance of production, fewer health and retirement benefits, and the feeling they have to work longer and harder just to maintain their current economic status. Workers at every level are experiencing increased tension and uncertainty, and are updating their resumes.

Work is one of the leading sources of stress and anxiety. Dealing with strict supervisors, chances of a demotion, whether you can get your job done on time and ultimately, the fear of getting fired can really give every worker something to be anxious about.

In any workplace, there is an existing system that you are forced to adhere to. These may include rules, regulations and office policies. Sometimes anxiety is brought about the fact that there may be some conflict of interest between doing what you think is right and what the present system dictates. This may be further illustrated when workers have to deal with customers or with their relationship with their co-workers. It is human nature to ease his or her own anxiety - either by adapting or leaving your workplace.

Rationale of the Study

This study represents the systematic attempt to find out the role of emotional intelligence in managing stress and anxiety at workplace. The main objectives of the study are:

- To examine the role of Emotional Intelligence in Managing Stress at workplace
- To examine the role of Emotional Intelligence in Managing Anxiety at workplace
- To examine relationship of Emotional Intelligence with stress and anxiety.

Problem

Each and every research starts with the problem, the basic element of research which helps to transform an idea into concrete research operations. A problem is an intellectual stimuli calling for an answer in the form of scientific inquiry. The statement of the problem is: “Role of Emotional Intelligence in Managing Stress and Anxiety at Workplace”.

Hypotheses

The hypotheses of the present study are:

- The emotional intelligence will correlate negatively with stress and anxiety
- Emotional intelligence will be predicted through levels of Stress and Anxiety.

Methodology

Sample

Random Sampling technique was used in the selection of sample of the present study. The present study was conducted on a random sample of 120 (86 males and 34 females) MBA students from different management institutes in NCR- Delhi. The participants ranged from 21 to 26 years of age ($M = 23.5$).

Measures

For the present research study following measures were used

1. Emotional Intelligence Scale

The Emotional Intelligence Scale was developed by Schutte et al. (1998). It is a 33-item scale with a five-point Likert-type scale. As suggested in Salovey and Mayer's theory of emotional intelligence (1990), the instrument has three categories: (a) the appraisal and expression of emotion assessed by 13 items; (b) the regulation of emotion assessed by 10 items; and (c) the utilisation of emotion assessed by 10 items. Participants read each statement and decide whether they ‘strongly disagree’, ‘disagree’, are ‘undecided’, ‘agree’, or ‘strongly agree’ with the statement.

Schutte et al. (1998) reported a Cronbach alpha (α) of 0.90 for the internal consistency for adults with mean age of 29.3 (S.D. = 10.2) and $\alpha = 0.78$ for test-retest reliability after a two-week interval on the scale for a smaller group drawn from the sample. Schutte et al. (1998) reported predicted validity of $r(63) = 0.32$ for first year GPA of college students, for discriminant validity they reported $r(41) = -0.06$ for the correlation between the scale and SAT scores, and $r(22) = -0.28$ to 0.54 for subscales of NEO Personality Inventory of scores of college students.

2. Stress Inventory

The stress inventory was developed by Hari, S. (2005) is a tool to measure the amount of stress experienced in daily life. It is a 66 - item scale with five alternatives, 'fully agree' 'agree', 'undecided', 'disagree' 'fully disagree'. This Stress inventory is Based on the writing of James (1982), Sutherland and Cooper (1990) and Pohorecky (1991). It covers 8 areas of stress which includes Stress as a predisposition, Source of stress in family, Source stress in occupation, Subjective assessment of situations, Somatic outcomes of stress, Psychological outcomes, Specific patterns of responding to stress, and Engagement in tension reduction activities.

In order to ascertain the reliability of the inventory, internal consistency as determined by split half method was calculated on the basis of responses given by a sample of 50 college students. The product moment co-efficient of internal consistency as corrected by Spearman- Brown formula was found to be 0.74. To test the temporal consistency, the inventory was administered to the same of 50 college students after 4 weeks. Test-retest coefficient of correlation was found to be 0.79 and temporal consistency to be 0.88.

3. General Anxiety test

The general anxiety test is a tailor-made test. This test is not intended to give a diagnosis for anxiety. This test is helpful in identifying anxiety symptoms. The test is having 10 items where subject have to respond in 'Yes' or 'No' manner. The test-retest reliability after a two-week interval was 0.74 for a smaller group drawn from the sample of 60 students.

Scoring of the tests

Hand scoring was done by using separate scoring keys for different tests. Emotional Intelligence scale and Stress inventory were scored by the scoring key provided with the manual of respective test. In General Anxiety test the scoring was done simply by adding the number of 'yes' at each item of the test. Total number of 'yes' was the total score of an individual on the test.

Results and Discussion

To fulfil the main objective of the present study, the obtained data were subjected to a number of statistical analyses by using statistical package for social sciences (SPSS 13.0). Although the analysis most pertinent to the objectives of the study was Regression Analysis, Descriptive statistics and Pearson Correlation were also used. The results of various analyses have been presented in separate headings.

Descriptive Statistics

Table presents the Mean and standard deviations of all the observed variables. Descriptive statistics was worked out to know the pattern of score distribution. A perusal of table 1 reveals that the mean score on Anxiety variable is 4.40 with the standard deviation of 1.79. The mean score on Stress is 136.54 with the SD of 17.34 and on Emotional Intelligence (EI) the mean score was 124.97 with the SD of 10.92. It shows that the scores on Anxiety variable ranged Average and Normal. Similarly on Stress and Emotional Intelligence variables the score ranges average and above average but normal.

Table 1 -Mean and Std. Deviation

Sr. No.	Variables	Mean	S.D.
1	Anxiety	4.40	1.79
2	Stress	136.54	17.34
3	Emotional Intelligence (EI)	124.97	10.92

Conclusion

The present investigation was conducted to find out the role of emotional intelligence in managing stress and anxiety at workplace. After analyzing the results, it can be said that the hypotheses of the present study i.e., the emotional intelligence will correlate negatively with stress and anxiety, and Emotional intelligence will be predicted through levels of Stress and Anxiety, is partially conformed. The findings of the present study indicates 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 at workplace.

The studies conducted by Oginska et al., (2005), Matthews et al., (2006), Montes-Berges et al., (2007), Naidoo et al., (2008) etc, also reveals similar results. So it can be said that 'emotional intelligence,' is the ability to restrain negative feelings such as anger, self-doubt, stress, anxiety and instead focus on positive ones such as confidence, empathy and congeniality. So one should emphasize on developing emotional intelligent to overcome stress and anxiety at workplace and to get success in life.

References

1. Ashkanasy, N.M. (2002). Studies of Cognition and Emotion in Organisations: Attribution, Affective Events, Emotional Intelligence and Perception of Emotion. *Australian Journal of Management* 27:11-20.
2. Cooper, R. (1997). "Applying emotional intelligence in the workplace", *Training and Development*, Vol. 51 No. 12, pp. 31-8.
3. Dearborn, K. (2002). Studies in Emotional Intelligence Redefine Our Approach to Leadership Development. *Public Personnel Management* 31 (4):523-530.
4. Gardner, L., and Stough C., (2002). Examining the relationship between leadership and emotional intelligence in senior level managers. *Leadership & Organisation Development Journal* 23 (1/2):68-78.
5. Mayer, J.D. and Salovey, P. (1993). "The intelligence of emotional intelligence", *Intelligence*, Vol. 17, pp. 443-42.
6. Salovey, P., and Mayer, J. D. (1990). Emotional intelligence. *Imagination, Cognition, and Personality*, 9, 185-211.