

"Emotional Intelligence and Workplace Productivity: A Pathway to Sustainable Development Goals"

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ABSTRACT

Workplace stress and employee performance have been in discussion in research for quite some time but it is believed that there are other variables too which impact employee performance in an organisation, a key factor in sustainable economic growth of any country. This paper highlights the possible, additional role of emotional intelligence (EI) in the relationship between workplace stress and employee performance. A review of existing literature carried out on workplace stress, its adverse effects on performance, and the role of EI in mitigating these effects has been presented here.

Research suggests that high emotional intelligence among employees can serve as a protective factor, enabling them to effectively manage stress and maintain performance, despite its common association with decreased productivity and job satisfaction. By integrating insights from various studies, authors have noted that while EI seems to directly influence work performance, it also appears to moderate the (negative) impact of stress on it, making it a critical factor in organizational success. The observations underscore the importance of fostering emotional intelligence in the workplace to improve employee well-being and performance outcomes.

This study also emphasizes the significance of promoting sustainable workforce practices by incorporating emotional intelligence into corporate strategy. By linking worker productivity to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the findings highlight the importance of emotional intelligence in attaining long-term organizational sustainability and resilience (Bexell & Jönsson 2016).

Keywords: Emotional intelligence, sustainable productivity, workplace stress, job performance, organisational behaviour, stress management

1. INTRODUCTION

Employee work performance refers to his/her behaviours and activities that are carried out during the course of employment in an organization. This may be evident in several areas of performance including task, context, and adaptation along with, counter-productive work behaviour (Koopmans et al, 2013).

Research has given substantial amount of emphasis on the relationship between workplace stress and productivity because more and more data point to a negative correlation between the two constructs (Bui et al., 2021). According to cognitive stress theory, stress is caused by interactions with the environment that are perceived as potentially harmful and beyond an individual's control. This leads to physiological and psychological responses.

Genaidy et al. (2000) feel that a wide range of workplace characteristics seem to influence performance at the job & processes, thus, one must identify the factors impacting it. Identifying and (subsequently) evaluating all work-related aspects is therefore critical to generating comprehensive and long-term solutions to employee performance issues.

According to Randhawa (2007), employee performance includes all of the actions and behaviours people exhibit to achieve the aims and objectives of the organisation. Modern perspectives on performance acknowledge its (viz. performance's) subjective nature and the impact of emotions, motivations, and interpersonal dynamics on work behaviours. This is in contrast to traditional conceptions of performance that have concentrated only on measurable results and productivity metrics. Consequently, enhancing organisational efficiency requires an awareness of the complex interactions that exist between emotional states and performance outcomes.

Once aware, an employee can improve his/her emotions more effectively (termed as emotional intelligence or EI, in the relevant literature) and possibly, thereby, his performance.

Fiori et al., (2024) suggest that among the many forms of social intelligence, emotional intelligence encompasses the ability to perceive, understand, and manage one's own and other people's emotional states, as well as, their thoughts and behaviours.

The notion of a sustainable workforce focuses on developing a resilient, flexible, and healthy personnel base that can contribute to long-term corporate success and social welfare. Emotional intelligence, as a crucial ability, promotes these characteristics by improving stress management, fostering teamwork, and increasing productivity leading to sustainable economic growth. Organizations that include emotional intelligence into their workforce strategy can more effectively handle problems and contribute to long-term growth (Radu, 2023). These are consistent with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), notably Goal 8, which calls for decent employment and economic growth, and Goal 3, which focuses on mental health and well-being (Schwab & Zahidi (2020).

In view of this background, a review of literature was carried out to study the relationship between EI, Work-place stress & Work Performance in previous studies. Various factors such as workplace stress, stress coping techniques, emotional intelligence, employee well-being, etc were found to impact job performance, which, have been considered in a framework for improving employee productivity.

The researcher searched on multiple databases and search engines, with a timeframe of slightly above 2 decades (2000 to 2024), for the purpose. Academic databases including PubMed, Google Scholar and Scopus were utilized to locate relevant studies. The search terms included the following: "employee performance," "workplace stress," "emotional intelligence," "job performance," "occupational stress," "emotional regulation," and "organisational behaviour." This resulted in 78 articles, which were sifted and shortlisted based on relevance, arriving at 57 articles. These articles were then used for the review in this paper.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 IMPACT OF STRESS & OTHER FACTORS ON PERFORMANCE

Ramesar et al., (2009) view stress and its management as situations that challenge a person's personal coping resources, the use of cognitive and behavioural strategies to solve

problems effectively, and the reduction of stress. Stress is seen as internal demands exceeding personal resources, while coping emphasises psychological strengths to manage stress.

A study, carried out in the hospitality industry, revealed that contacts with supervisors typically resulted in sentiments of irritation, disappointment, anger, grief, contempt, or tension. Emotional leadership helps balancing job expectations without causing unnecessary stress for others (O'Neill & Davis, 2011).

High levels of stress have been observed to impact staff motivation and morale. Long periods of stress exposure without suitable coping methods can cause a number of mental and physical health difficulties (Sunil & Rooprai, 2009). It has been noted that excessive levels of stress reduce employee engagement and happiness, which in turn compromises performance. They (stresses) also impede cognitive functioning and decision-making (Chhabra & Mohanty, 2013). Individual variations in how they feel about stressors also worsen the effect on performance on some employees, which emphasises the need for customised therapies to lessen the negative effects of stress.

The United Nations' SDG 8 emphasizes decent work and economic growth, advocating for strategies that ensure employees' mental well-being and equitable opportunities. Organizations aligning with these goals report a 23% reduction in turnover rates, showcasing the impact of sustainable practices on workforce stability (UN, 2015).

Employee productivity depends on both the number of hours spent at work and the quality of those hours, referred to as "mental presence" or effective operations. Individuals' perceptions of productivity align with their perceived efficiency, even during significant changes in the workplace, such as transitions (Godfred et al., 2023). Thus it is not surprising to find that work from home also affects performance, as seen in a study of Indonesian employees, which indicated that it (working from home) increased employee satisfaction, contentment, and motivation, resulting in improved job performance. According to the findings, work-from-home, teamwork, and the work environment all had a positive and significant effect on employee performance, either independently or simultaneously.

Research indicates a strong correlation between job performance and organisational productivity. At the individual, job, and organizational levels, a variety of factors impact work performance. Work-family dynamics and personality have a substantial influence on individual work performance (Cabarcos et al., (2022); Pandey 2019). Vigor, dedication,

physical environment have a positive impact on work performance of employees (Aropah et al., 2020). Remuneration, incentive, governance, working conditions, assessment of performance, professional expertise, and training also have an impact on work performance, whereas disputes, job anxiety, and work hours have adverse consequences (Waworuntu et al., 2022).

Factors affecting job performance may be classified as demands (physical, cognitive, emotional), resources (individual, job, organizational, social), and stresses whether individual, work, or family (Pandey, 2019). Administrative righteousness, employment engagement, and volunteering drive, all have an immediate impact on job performance, however, managerial change has both immediate and long-term implications. Understanding these elements can help firms establish methods to improve employee performance and accomplish strategic goals (Waworuntu et al., 2022; Jatin Pandey, 2019).

Compensation, inspiration, management, working atmosphere, appraisals, work experience, and educational opportunities too, impact employee performance. Disputes, job stress, and time at work have a significant adverse influence (Mesiya, 2019). Unguren (2021) presented a conceptual framework mentioning corporate equity, involvement in the workplace, employee enthusiasm, and innovative management having a direct or indirect impact on job performance.

Organizations have to confront global competition, continual development, cost-effectiveness, constrained budgets, and enhanced competitiveness. Technological revolutions, market developments, unemployment, deregulation, privatization, mergers and acquisitions, labor movement, consumer empowerment, and demand patterns together also put great pressure on the working environment (Ramesar et al., 2009). Thus, the added emphasis on stress & mitigating strategies in industry.

According to the World Economic Forum (2020), organizations that prioritize employee well-being and adaptability report a 30% higher productivity rate compared to those that do not. This highlights the critical role of fostering emotional and psychological resilience in achieving sustainable performance (Schwab & Zahidi (2020).

2.2 STRESS, EMOTIONS AND EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

As observed earlier, the term "job stress" describes an individual's emotional reaction to a work environment that they perceive as harmful. To overcome stress, workers require specific types of motivation and work-related stress-reduction techniques, and abilities. Emotions exist in all employees at the workplace but the capacity to recognise them and deal with them appropriately in the situation at hand, reflects the EI of the individual. Academics have suggested that emotional intelligence could help workers feel less stressed at work at all management levels.

Emotional intelligence plays a major role in lowering workplace stress, given that it makes the worker more adept at recognizing and controlling emotions such as annoyance and work pressure (Jang & Thomas, 2011). Studies reveal that there is a strong correlation between employees' emotional intelligence and stress at work (Hussain et al., 2021; Yamani et al., 2014).

Emotional intelligence contributes to workforce sustainability by enhancing collaboration, reducing absenteeism, and improving decision-making. Studies indicate that emotionally intelligent teams can be up to 20% more effective in achieving organizational goals, particularly in high-stress environments (Goleman, 1995).

Regardless of the industry or sector, those who reach the peak of their profession are not merely skilled employees, instead, they are also optimistic, versatile and relaxed. Emotional intelligence has been seen to help control unpleasant feelings such as tension, nervousness, anger, and insecurity in place of appealing, assured, and empathetic ones (Sunil & Rooprai, 2009).

Of course, the impact of emotional intelligence on routine life interactions has also drawn a lot of attention. It has been reported that both psychological well-being as well as, success of the work environment is significantly influenced by emotional intelligence (Hussain et al., 2021). Employees with high EI, better working relationships, higher integrity, have been seen to obtain better performance (Dhani & Sehrawat, 2016).

Radu (2023), and, Ly (2024) are of the opinion that resources and programs aimed at stress reduction and emotional control can help employees navigate work challenges more effectively, ultimately improving performance outcomes. Therefore, it has been suggested that organisational leaders should proactively support employees' emotional resilience and well-being, thereby enhancing productivity.

According to Gu and Day (2007), people who are agitated may struggle to effectively interpret others' emotions, resulting in decreased social skills. They studied resilience as a measure for work effectiveness and opine that distress not only reduces cerebral ability but also lowers emotional intelligence. Research conducted on healthcare students, found that emotional intelligence helps to reduce detrimental effects of stress. The study found favourable relationships between lucidity, social support, healing, and well-being (Montes-Berges & Augusto, 2007).

Zhang, Zhao, Liu et al., 2022 observed that positive emotions foster motivation, resilience, and creativity, while unfavourable emotions impair interpersonal relationships and cognitive abilities. Furthermore, negative emotions like stress, anxiety, and burnout can damage relationships and cognitive functions, hindering productivity and company effectiveness. Also, a positive emotional environment characterised by psychological safety, support, and trust can enhance worker satisfaction, engagement, and productivity.

Research suggests that job satisfaction is linked to pleasant emotions and enhanced brain efficiency, and in turn leading to better work performance & a more optimistic view (Sunil and Rooprai, 2009). Managers who disseminate negativity are detrimental to the company, but those that exude positivity increase productivity (Jamali et al., 2008). It has thus been suggested that organizations should develop adaptable ways to balance employee productivity and well-being (Marecki, 2024).

Given the substantial impact that emotions have on workers' ability to perform at work, organisational leaders need to be proactive in promoting their emotional resilience and well-being (Barsade & O'Neill, 2016). Building a pleasant emotional climate characterised by psychological safety, support, and trust can increase employee engagement, contentment, and productivity at all organisational levels (Ashkanasy & Dorris, 2017). In addition, providing resources and programs aimed at stress reduction and emotional control might enable staff members to handle obstacles at work more skilfully, improving performance results.

2.3 EI'S IMPACT ON WORK PERFORMANCE

Good employee performance is a prerequisite for efficient organisational functioning since it directly affects productivity, operational efficiency, and competitive advantage. However, maintaining high performance levels in firms is a complex process influenced by a variety of factors, including organisational culture, individual capability, and external influences (Hokka et al., 2020).

People's engagement and disengagement are shaped by their social contexts. Self-determination theories examine the factors that promote or impede self-motivation and psychological development. Ryan and Deci (2000) observed that conditions promoting competence & independence help human development. This is essential to instilling dedication, diligence, and high performance.

Abraham (2004) mentions that engaging with demands of the job and the organizational climate, emotional abilities (including motivation, self-control, resilience, social skills, & conscientiousness), dependability, and integrity play a critical role in determining performance.

As mentioned earlier, research has demonstrated that emotional intelligence is critical in determining how people navigate social contexts and control their emotions. Emotional intelligence is said to include self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills (Goleman, 1995). These components of emotional intelligence may have a substantial influence on an individual's capacity to thrive in a variety of areas of life, including personal relationships and professional endeavours. By understanding and developing emotional intelligence, individuals can manage their emotions and interactions with others more effectively leading to improved overall wellbeing and success (Kanesan, 2019).

There has been a growing interest in the impact of emotional intelligence on organizational performance. It has been claimed that in this age of globalisation, information technology, and quick and unexpected change, emotional intelligence is becoming a critical ability required for collaborative work (Weinberger, 2002). In general, emotional intelligence and emotional competencies are important variables that affect how well people perform at work and should be taken into account in both organizational and individual situations.

Understandably, therefore, emotional intelligence and work performance have been a subject of much research in the recent years. Studies reveal a robust relationship between satisfaction at work and emotional intelligence, surpassing that of cognitive ability and “Big Five personality characteristics” (Dana et al., 2015). They have been related to a wide range of behaviours, including academic success and employment performance.

Emotional intelligence involves managing emotions and communicating them effectively, fostering positive collaboration and open communication among employees (Hussain et al 2021). Effective leaders boost performance at the individual, process, and organizational levels. Considering the essential function that leaders play in enterprises, EI and employee performance cannot be examined without also examining the performance of their leaders (Nafukho, 2009).

Goleman (1998) established that emotional intelligence is important for leadership performance. Leaders with strong emotional intelligence can better regulate their own emotions and comprehend the emotions of others, leading to improved communication, teamwork, and overall organisational success. As discussed earlier, Amabile and Kramer (2011) have reported that pleasant emotions in the workplace can improve employee creativity and innovation. This emphasises the importance of leaders' ability to effectively regulate their own emotions while also creating a healthy work environment for their colleagues.

2.4 SHOULD EI BE USED AS A MEASURE OF WORK PERFORMANCE?

Critics of EI, some years ago, contended that the concept is inaccurate since it is not a type of intelligence and its definition is not only too wide but constantly changing. They argued whether EI is solely a personality theory or a blend of intellect and personality. The concept of EI claims that it is not the same as intelligence, and that intelligence should be divided from reason. Cherniss (2010) felt that not only EI is continually shifting & overly broad, but contradictory, as well. The author claimed that there is no such thing as EI and suggested that EI should, instead, be redefined as a personality attribute.

Some other authors, around the same period, have also questioned EI measures hitherto considered ‘established’. Questions were raised as to why multiple metrics were used for the same construct, using various answer forms / methodologies, even challenging existing measurements which perhaps lack psychometric assessment qualities (Conte, 2005); Matthews et al., 2002); Rooy and Viswesvaran, 2004). Another author also questioned the relevance of

EI being analytical as opposed to qualitative and consequently measurement (Waterhouse, 2006). Nevertheless, EI continues to be recognised and used by both practitioners and academics, globally.

A study by the McKinsey Global Institute (2024) found that companies implementing emotional intelligence training programs as part of their workforce development strategies achieved a 15% increase in employee engagement and a 12% improvement in productivity metrics (Brassey & Maor (2024).

2.5 EI AS A MEDIATOR BETWEEN STRESS & WORK PERFORMANCE

As discussed above, job performance factors may be classified as demands (physical, cognitive, emotional), resources (individual, job, organizational, social), and stresses at the individual, work, & family level. Performance is broadly affected by work-family dynamics and personality (Pandey 2019), of which workplace related factors including compensation, motivation, leadership, environment, performance assessment, job experience, and training influence performance positively, while conflict, job stress, and working hours negatively impact performance (Waworuntu et al., 2022). Organizational justice, work engagement, and public service motivation also have a direct impact on job performance, but transformational leadership has both direct and indirect benefits (Jankingthong & Rurkkhum, 2012). Understanding these factors can help businesses develop ways to enhance worker efficiency and achieve strategic objectives (Waworuntu et al., 2022; Pandey, 2019).

EI has been seen to have a significant positive effect on employee performance in a number of organizational situations. Employees who have higher EI perform better (Maldonado & Márquez, 2023). Emotional intelligence is critical to productivity, performance, interpersonal effectiveness, and cooperation (Shah & Sah, 2024). It improves with age, education, and experience, with a greater emphasis on emotional awareness (Carstensen et al., 2011).

EI has a significant impact on how managers and employees interact in the workplace (Jorfi & Jorfi, 2010). It improves job performance by developing pleasant relationships, enhancing group dynamics, and increasing social status. EI is strongly connected with work performance and has a modest correlation with corporate citizenship behavior (Chaudhary & Usman, 2011). These findings emphasise the significance of EI in human resource planning, job profiling, and recruiting procedures (Maldonado & Márquez, 2023). It is therefore felt that

emotional intelligence scores can predict work performance, implying that they can be utilized as a selection tool by HR managers (Vratskikh et al., 2016). Hatta & Abdullah (2020) found emotional intelligence diminished the link between stress at work and performance. It promotes self-efficacy & organisational well-being, and can also buffer or moderate the impact of burnout.

3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

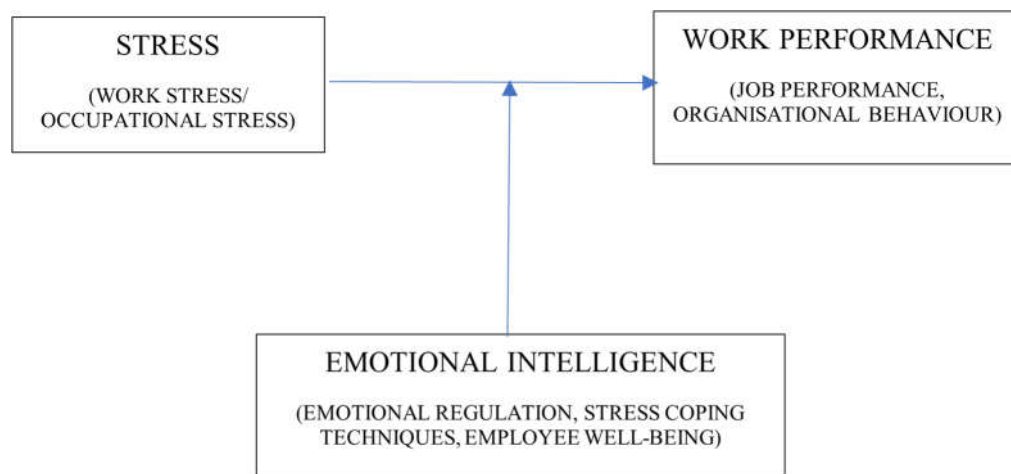


Figure 1: Proposed Conceptual Framework (*source: author's own*)

The paper suggests that emotional intelligence may moderate the association between job stress and job performance. Stress is not necessarily caused by pressure, but by how an individual perceives it. Employees with high emotional intelligence are more likely to decrease or alter the negative impacts of job stress on performance. Employees with low emotional intelligence, on the other hand, perform poorly in terms of job stress. This shows that people with low emotional intelligence are less capable of dealing with job-related stress.

This conceptual framework shows that while workplace stress negatively impacts employee performance, emotional intelligence may moderate this relationship, reducing the adverse effects of stress and hence enhancing performance.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Past studies have established a significant negative relationship between workplace stress and employee performance. The researches have also shown that high levels of workplace stress are consistently associated with reduced productivity, lower job satisfaction, and increased absenteeism. Managing employee performance is thus seen as challenging due to complex reasons such as workloads, expectations, and stress. Workplace pressures can cause anxiety in employees, just as, home and social environments (in work from home) too, contribute to stress. The negative effects of anxiety, particularly stress, are common among both the public and employees, making it difficult for organisations to address them independently.

Prior studies have also demonstrated the positive influence of Emotional intelligence (EI) on employee performance. Employees with higher EI tend to have better interpersonal relationships, higher job satisfaction, and greater resilience, leading to enhanced performance. Employees with high EI show better performance metrics and are more capable of handling workplace challenges effectively as employees are able to manage their emotions, reducing negative feelings like stress and anxiety, which in turn enhances performance.

Considering that EI reduces stress, on one hand, and higher stress reduces employee performance, one can argue that the three factors- EI, stress & employee performance are all related and thus, perhaps can be placed under one frame with clear & individual effect. The literature helps propose that Emotional intelligence moderates the relationship between workplace stress and employee performance. Thus, one could state that employees with higher EI are better equipped to handle stress, thereby mitigating its adverse effects on performance.

The study's findings highlight the transformational power of emotional intelligence in developing sustainable workforces. Organizations may establish an ecosystem that coincides with the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly those related to decent work, well-being, and inclusive & sustainable economic growth, by providing employees with emotional resilience and increasing productivity. Prioritizing sustainable workforce practices not only promotes long-term company performance, but also supports larger society objectives, paving the path for Vision Viksit Bharat at 2047.

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