

## **Managing stress at workplace: The moderating effect of emotional intelligence on work performance**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study examines the effects of workplace stress on employee performance, with an emphasis on the moderating function of emotional intelligence (EI). Workplace stress has become a major worry in modern firms, frequently resulting in poor job performance and general employee well-being. Emotional intelligence, defined as the capacity to perceive, comprehend, and control emotions, is thought to help reduce the negative impacts of stress on work performance. Using a conceptual framework based on the transactional model of stress and the ability model of EI, this study investigates how various components of workplace stress impact performance and how EI mediates this connection. The findings show a substantial negative relationship between workplace stress and performance, with high emotional intelligence acting as a buffer to mitigate the effects of stress. These findings highlight the relevance of emotional intelligence in maintaining high levels of employee performance in stressful work contexts, as well as practical implications for stress management measures in organizations.

**Keywords:** *Workplace stress, Emotional intelligence (EI), Employee performance, Stress management, Organizational behaviour, Employee well-being*

## **INTRODUCTION:**

### **1.1 STRESS AT WORKPLACE**

Performance refers to an employee's ability to accomplish work-related objectives and expectations within set parameters. Workplace performance is assessed on two dimensions: task and contextual performance. Task performance entails actions that contribute to organizational targets whereas contextual performance emphasizes worker conduct that lead to the organization's effectiveness (Çalışkan & Köroğlu, 2022). Stress is a condition of threatened homeostasis caused by internal or external detrimental factors (stressors), which is mitigated by an elaborate set of behavioral and physiological responses that focus on maintaining or reestablishing ideal bodily balance (Tsigos et al., 2020).

Workplace stress has become an increasingly prevalent issue in modern society, with numerous studies highlighting its detrimental effects on both individual and organizational well-being. One critical area that is heavily impacted by occupational stress is emotional intelligence, a crucial component of effective job performance and overall employee satisfaction (Quick & Henderson, 2016). A lot of individuals experience occupational stress due to a variety of job-related factors, often known as environmental stimuli. Job stress among employees is currently causing low morale and is also becoming more common. Employees in an organization may experience job stress as a result of a variety of employer-related reasons, including a competitive climate, technological developments, poor pay, a lack of recognition, a lack of motivation, overwork, a heavy workload, and social factors (Alblihed & Alzghaibi, 2022).

### **1.2 STRESS AND PERFORMANCE AT WORKPLACE**

Stress is a multifaceted process that requires physiological, cognitive, behavioural, and emotional responses to preserve human well-being. It is a marker of adaptive success, demonstrating a beneficial interaction between a person and their surroundings that helps them achieve their objectives. When environmental demands surpass a person's adaptive resources, they act as obstacles to their ability to function

adaptively in their environment, jeopardising goal attainment (Chu et al., 2024). Occupational stress is defined as a state of cognitive or physiological arousal or "readiness for action," and diversity in performance among stressed persons has been related to differences in mental and physical task capabilities. Capacity theory explains inter-individual variability in performance under stress by focusing on cognitive and attentional skills. It does not, however, account for intra-individual variability in behavioral reactions to stress (Ashkanasy et al., 2016). Stress can cause distraction such as reduced search action, rigidity, prolonged reaction time, data processing oversights and issues with memory resulting in a decline of important task knowledge and low efficiency in challenging tasks (Liu et al., 2020).

The stress reaction can include less empathy, hostility, disregard for social cues, and poor teamwork among members. According to researchers, stress-induced attention constriction can reduce social cues and lead to a disdain for social or interpersonal indications. Furthermore, attentional constriction can cause a lack of behavior monitoring, resulting in higher self-regulatory failure, which can interfere with effective behavioral control and have a detrimental influence on physical or interpersonal job activities (Azulay et al., 2022). Jung et al. (2019) identified substantial negative relationships between stress and emotional intelligence components such as emotional awareness and expression, emotional reasoning, and emotional regulation. High levels of rage, a component of stress, were substantially associated with poor emotional control.

### **1.3 STRESS AND EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE**

Emotional intelligence is a critical determinant of well-being, health, and quality of life, influencing our capacity to regulate behavior, manage social circumstances, and make constructive decisions. It is necessary in both personal and professional settings, and unlike cognitive intelligence, which is constant, emotional intelligence may be improved with time. Evidence from the literature suggests that developing emotional intelligence is a crucial step in mitigating the negative effects of workplace stress. (Shengyao et al., 2024). Emotional responses to stress represent an individual's efforts to respond to circumstances and initiate as an emotional reaction to perceived or anticipated risks to well-being. Each stress emotion, such as anger, aggravation,

concern, guilt, terror, or dread, communicates how a person perceives their present relationship with the environment and how they are coping with the adaptive transaction (Lupis et al., 2014).

Chronic workplace stress can significantly undermine emotional intelligence, leading to a range of negative outcomes. Employees who experience high levels of occupational stress may struggle to maintain composure, make sound decisions, and effectively collaborate with their team members. This, in turn, can have a detrimental impact on overall organizational effectiveness, as emotionally stressed employees are less likely to contribute positively to the work environment (Yamani et al., 2013). EI is an important aspect in lowering stress and promoting psychological wellness. It entails understanding emotions, applying emotional information to impact thoughts and behaviors, and discriminating between moods. Higher EI is associated with lower levels of stress and burnout, as well as improved task performance and workplace efficiency. Studies have found a correlation between cognitive impairment and stress-related fatigue, and cognitive training can help patients with stress-related weariness (Supramaniam & Singaravelloo, 2021).

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 FACTORS AFFECTING (STRESS AT WORK/ OCCUPATIONAL STRESS)**

Occupational stress is a major concern in the workplace, impacting employees' well-being and triggering health-related impairments. The World Health Organization (WHO) recognizes the importance of mental health management, prompting enterprises to place an emphasis on employees' well-being (Fortes et al., 2020). The advancement of a worker's professional development, as well as the framework and leadership of an organization, may each contribute to workplace stress. Employees are under increased stress owing to demanding knowledge work, high productivity, inventiveness, flexible work hours, and flexibility to changing settings. The persistent mental effort and ongoing technological advancement, which need talent to adapt and learn on a regular basis, adds to their stress levels (Bolliger et al., 2022). When people experience discomfort, they do two cognitive evaluations: first, they assess if the stress agent or event is harmful (primary appraisal), and then they judge whether an event is

positive, negative, or neutral (secondary appraisal). Stress develops anytime an individual senses an imbalance among the needs of a circumstance and the resources that are accessible to the individual's psychological, social, and biological systems as a consequence of their relationship with their surroundings. (Belias, Koustelios, Koutivae et al, 2013). Sources of stress in modern civilizations include the familial, educational or occupational setting, the environmental and social surroundings, as well as individual features and personal circumstances.

The condition of burnout is an individual's response to persistent work stress that builds gradually and can finally become chronic, resulting in health changes. From a psychological standpoint, this condition produces cognitive, emotional, and attitudinal harm, which manifests as negative conduct toward work, coworkers, users, and the profession itself. Yet it is not an individual issue, but due to particular features of the work environment (Edú-Valsania et al., 2022). Aside from somatic symptoms, occupational stress is likely to cause frequent absenteeism, decreased productivity, inability to solve problems, poor motivation, job loss, and turnover (Dewe & Cooper 2017). Occupational burnout is a widespread concern impacting many worldwide across varying ages, races, and backgrounds. Individual factors like age, gender, education level and experience influence job performance and wellbeing. Demographic factors are linked to work factors like job satisfaction, commitment, stress, and burnout (Belias et al., 2013). Stress is often caused by an individual's feeling of pressure, rather than the actual source. Individual differences affecting perceptions should be acknowledged. Furthermore, dispositional characteristics (e.g., emotional intelligence) are connected with stress perceptions, and some studies claim that they may attenuate the influence of stress outcomes inside an organization (Wu, 2011).

## **2.2 EI AS ABILITY TO MANAGE STRESS**

Research consistently shows a negative correlation between emotional intelligence (EI) and work stress across various professions. Employees with higher EI perceive less stress in the workplace. Higher EI is also associated with increased job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Chen et al., 2011). EI and work stress levels vary across management levels, with senior managers scoring higher on EI and experiencing less stress. The concept of emotional intelligence has gained popularity due to the belief that it can be created and learnt at any age (Emmerling & Goleman,

2003). A person's capacity to intelligently manage his or her emotions has been linked to achievement in personal, educational, professional, health, social, and coexistence domains (Miranda, 2012). As a result, several researches have been undertaken globally to assess and expand the relationship between emotional intelligence and vocation. Furthermore, various inventories have been designed to assess an individual's emotional intelligence (Sweis et al., 2023). Employee emotional intelligence has a significant impact on occupational aspects such as innovation, talent designation, job commitment, promotion opportunities, leadership and administration skills, anxiety management, and coping strategies (Zeidner et al., 2004). High emotional intelligence improves interpersonal relationships, emotional management, and the capacity to operate under pressure and adapt to changes in the workplace.

Employees with high emotional intelligence can maintain a pleasant affective state, manage their emotions, and benefit from the emotions of others. As a consequence, individuals are more likely to feel confident and in control of events, working conditions, changes, and pressures that may lead to a desire to resign (Belias et al., 2013). Yusoff et al. (2013) found a negative association between workplace stress and productivity amongst university faculty, but a strong positive relationship between emotional intelligence and job performance. Models on Job Stress and Performance show that people's ability to deal with job stress typically leads to improved performance. According to these models, various qualities contribute to mitigating the negative effects of occupational stress at work (Yusof et al., 2013). Day & Carroll (2008) reviewed the ability model of emotional intelligence, according to this framework, emotional intelligence is a combination of four interconnected talents that allow people to notice and comprehend emotions in themselves and others, as well as utilize this awareness to direct their thought and conduct.

### **2.3 ROLE OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE ON WORK -PERFORMANCE**

There is less research on the relationship between emotional intelligence and work success, despite widespread interest. Limited research exists on the relationship between emotional intelligence and work performance, as well as the potential processes underlying this relationship. This ambiguity has partly contributed to concerns of the scientific standing of emotional intelligence in organizational research (Maldonado & Márquez, 2023). Research shows trait-based EI improves performance

in various fields, including interviewing, management, academics, and teams. However, less research has explored ability-based EI and its relationship with performance. Studies show that emotional expression (EP) alone leads to better performance, and individuals giving speeches are rated more positively when their emotional expression matches the message's emotional valence. These findings suggest that EP should enhance task performance (Kopp et al., 2021).

### **3. RESEARCH GAPS**

The study identifies significant gaps in previous research on occupational stress and emotional intelligence. First, additional study is needed on the link between emotional intelligence and performance, particularly in the setting of professional stress.

Second, further research is needed to determine which precise components of emotional intelligence are most beneficial in regulating workplace stress.

Third, specific training programs or tools for enhancing work performance to be developed emphasising the regulation of stress and emotions.

### **4. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

1. To examine the direct impact of workplace stress on employee work performance.
2. To assess the moderating role of emotional intelligence in the relationship between workplace stress and work performance.
3. To identify key components of workplace stress that significantly impact employee performance.
4. To explore the specific elements of emotional intelligence that are most effective in moderating workplace stress.

### **5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This research uses a review-based perspective methodology to investigate the link between workplace stress, emotional intelligence (EI), and job performance. The approach entails conducting a thorough study of existing literature and theoretical

models in order to integrate current information and provide fresh insights into how EI mitigates the influence of workplace stress on employee performance.

## 6. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

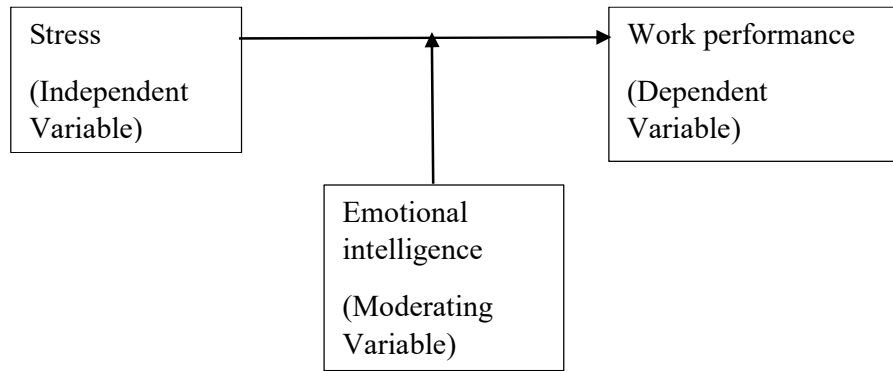


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework *(Source Author's own)*

This study's conceptual approach is based on the transactional stress model and emotional intelligence theory. According to this framework, stress can be caused by an individual's interactions with their surroundings, and emotional intelligence plays an essential role in regulating this interaction (Berjot & Gillet, 2011). According to the model, when a person perceives a stressful circumstance, they will have a stress reaction, which might affect their performance. Individuals with high emotional intelligence, on the other hand, are better able to handle their stress reaction and function at their best.

The framework also incorporates the ability model of emotional intelligence, which proposes that emotional intelligence is a collection of talents that can be taught and enhanced via practice and training (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). Emotional intelligence moderates the impact of workplace stress on work performance by influencing an individual's ability to manage their stress response and maintain their performance.

This conceptual framework provides a theoretical foundation for understanding the links between workplace stress, emotional intelligence, and work performance, as



well as how emotional intelligence mitigates the influence of workplace stress on job performance.

## **7. FINDINGS**

The study observed a strong negative correlation between workplace stress and employee performance. The findings also revealed that emotional intelligence moderates the association between workplace stress and performance, with people with high emotional intelligence doing better in stressful situations.

The study highlighted the important elements of workplace stress that influence employee performance, such as workload, role ambiguity and lack of control. The findings indicate that these stress factors may be addressed by organizational interventions such as workload management, role definition and employee empowerment.

## **8. CONCLUSION**

According to the findings, the ability model of emotional intelligence might provide a valuable framework for analysing the link between emotional intelligence and performance. The study highlights the importance of addressing the key components of workplace stress and providing resources to help employees manage their stress levels.

Finally, further study is needed on organizational solutions that might be utilized to reduce workplace stress and improve employee performance.

## **9. IMPLICATIONS**

The study's findings have a number of implications for both businesses and people. The research emphasizes the significance of controlling workplace stress in order to promote employees performing well. Organizations can create stress management programs and give tools to assist employees in managing their stress levels.

Second, the study concludes that emotional intelligence plays an important role in mitigating the association between workplace stress and performance. Organizations may provide training and development programs to assist employees improve their

emotional intelligence, allowing them to better regulate their stress responses and sustain their performance.

Finally, the study emphasizes the necessity of recognizing and resolving the important aspects of workplace stress that affect employee performance. Organizations can undertake routine stress audits to identify the sources of stress and create strategies to mitigate them.

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