Examining the impact of Emotional Intelligence on Organizational Role Stress: An empirical study of the Indian IT sector

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ABSTRACT

The nature of jobs in the service industry, are characterized by complex work systems and customer orientation; which require huge emotional labor. These multitudinous demands on the personal and professional fronts, lead to a depletion and exhaustion of resources of the mind and body. Prolonged exposure to such situations has been found to have dysfunctional effects on the individuals; leading to organizational role stress. It has been observed that employees with higher emotional intelligence are more aware of the coping strategies to deal with stress. The acknowledgement to develop emotional competencies of the workforce is therefore, a focal point of concern for human resource practitioners today. This paper attempts to explore the relationship between organizational Role Stress and Emotional Intelligence in the Indian IT industry. Data was collected from a total of 160 employees, both Managers and Non Managers working in the Delhi NCR Region. Emotional Intelligence was measured by developing a scale consisting of 27 items, which was developed by the researchers in the previous studies; by adapting to Indian and Western perspectives on emotional Intelligence. Stress was measured using the Organizational Role Stress questionnaire comprising of 50 items. The results show a strong correlation between Role Stress and Emotional Intelligence and significant impact of Emotional Intelligence and Organizational Stress.

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence, Information Technology, Organizational Role Stress, Workplace Stress

INTRODUCTION

Workplace stress has been studied from various historic and contemporary perspectives. In the history of managing employees, the tradition of keeping emotions at distance from the professional space was always found more appropriate. Logical thinking and rational analysis were always considered effective for handling and solving people and business issues. With an eventual rising importance of the human resources, the contemporary organizational milieu sees a drift in this accepted thought process. The role of emotions and feelings as
determinants of one’s ability to work in groups is recognized as a considerable factor in managing human resources. The IT industry is a service industry that is characterized by an intense use of emotional intelligence and emotional labor. Hochschild (1983) contended that jobs involving emotional labor require the employee to interact face to face or voice to voice with other stakeholders such as clients, customers and guests. They are also required to produce emotional states in another person under expressions that are guided by the organizations display rules requirement; making the employee the actor, the client the audience and the shop floor the stage (Goleman, 1998). This leads to stressful encounters for the employee, as he is forced to display feelings and emotions that he may or may not genuinely feel.

In the IT industry, the life expectancy of products and programs declines each year, while the demands on employees increase; due to the unique set of environmental pressures such as continuous re-engineering, outsourcing, more demanding customers and general information overload (Karad 2010). Organizations are now recognizing the importance of effective management of Information Technology professionals for effective performance and functioning (Yeh, Lee & Pai, 2011), yet empirical evidence proves that problems associated with employees and their issues, are the major impediments in this context (Hazzan & Hadar, 2008). Amongst the major issues, there are problems like a shrinking student base, low attractiveness of the profession in terms of image and status (Day, 2007) and career commitment and turnover (Carayon et al., 2008); (Quan & Cha, 2010). The reason for this turnover has historically been attributed to stress (Engler, 1998). In the Indian IT industry, the trend towards aspiring youngsters to work extra hours to acquire material comforts; seems to increase (Ghapanchi & Aurum, 2011); yet there is also a very common practice of software engineers who have less than five years of work experience; to leave work (Colomo-Palacios, 2014). Researchers have shown that the major causes of workforce turnover in the IT sector are; work-related, psychological and emotional in nature. The specific variables are effort-reward imbalance, perceived workload and emotional exhaustion.

Given the current scenario, it is important to explore if Emotional Intelligence can be leveraged to make the employees handle the environmental pressures and stress in a better way; that may also lead to reduction in turnover. Though considerable studies have attempted to understand the relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Organizational Stress in other sectors; no research has been undertaken in the Indian IT sector. The present study is also unique from previous studies, as it uses an Emotional Intelligence scale that has been developed by the researchers in a previous study by integrating Indian and Western perspectives on Emotional Intelligence (Rathore et al. 2012).

**From Intelligence to Emotional Intelligence**

In 1920, it was suggested by Thorndike that humans have several types of intelligence, one form of this is, “social intelligence” or the ability to, “understand and manage men and women, boys and girls, and to act wisely in human relations” (Thorndike, 1920). A new concept of intelligence was defined by David Wechsler in 1940 as he defined intelligence as, “the aggregate or global capacity of the individual to act purposefully, to think rationally, and to deal effectively with his environment” (Wechsler, 1958).

Howard Gardner proposed that the foundation for most of the models created on Emotional Intelligence were based on interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligence. Gardner believed that these intelligences were as significant as the type of intelligence typically measured by IQ tests (Gardner, 1983). Peter Salovey and John Mayer were the theorist who initially and primarily focused on the studies about social intelligence and concluded that the research on emotional intelligence was based on the notion of social intelligence (Salovey and Mayer 1990) and also that both concepts are linked and interconnected. Going forward, Emotional Intelligence...
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