

The Downside Effect of Emotional Intelligence on Job Stress Among Non-Academic University Staff

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Abstract

Behavioral science researchers and scholars have attempted to find effective elements that influence efficiency and effectiveness to improve organizational performance, as well as factors that contribute to job stress. Meanwhile, previous studies shows that by enhancing emotional intelligence, it can help individual to cope with stress, develop great relationships, empathize with others, and accomplish goals. Thus, this study aimed to examine the relationship between four types of emotional intelligence: self-emotion appraisal, other's emotion appraisal, use of emotions, and regulation of emotion on job stress. A cross-sectional design method was used to employ a quantitative approach via a self-administered questionnaire with respondents were among the non-academic staff from a Malaysian public university. Interestingly, the results contradict to previous studies whereby all four types of emotional intelligence were positively associated to job stress with regulation of emotion being the main unique predictor to job stress. Specifically, the results indicate that the higher the individual's emotional intelligence, the more prone they were to job stress. Thus, further explanation and implications of high emotional intelligence to one's functioning has been discussed in this paper.

Keywords: Self-Emotion Appraisal, Other's Emotion Appraisal, Use of Emotions, Regulation of Emotion, Job Stress

Introduction

It is widely acknowledged that poor workplace design and management can have a detrimental effect on both physical and psychological health. Work-related stress is a common consequence of prolonged exposure to psychological hazards on the job, and it has negative consequences for both individuals (e.g., health problems, anxiety, depression, and burnout) and organizations (e.g., low productivity, increased accident rates, increased turnover, and absenteeism). Nowadays, work-related stress is seen as a significant problem that must be addressed. By reducing workplace stress has been shown to have considerable

advantages for both employee well-being and organizational productivity (Bostock et al., 2019).

Nowadays, everyone wants a stable job that satisfies their basic requirements and desires in life. According to Naseem (2018), people without a secure job tend to believe that people with a stable job will achieve greater happiness and fulfilment in their lives than they will. However, while people derive joy from their work income, they also face mental health issues and physical health problems, including job stress, workplace stress, and a low-quality work life (Maulik, 2017). Job stress and dissatisfaction are the primary causes of mental and physical illness. Stress, which is described as psychological pressure that results in a physical and mental response to any incident, causes an individual to experience feelings of fear, excitement, anxiety, danger, or anger (Yamani et al., 2014). As a result, everyone in the organizations should be more sensitive to and concerned about job stress issues. Moreover, the employee's well-being is crucial to sustain their productivity at work. According to the Malaysian workplace wellness evaluation, wellness programmes should cater any unhealthy behaviors such as poor diet, inactivity, stress, obesity, and smoking. Additionally, they emphasize the importance of every organization implementing and avoiding stress through the creation of a healthy psychosocial work environment. Therefore, the issue of job stress requires the effort and support of every individual.

To investigate the causes of job stress in the workplace, it is necessary to examine the elements that contribute to job stress. The elements that contribute to job stress vary according to the type of job. Previous research on job stress indicates that employees encounter situations such as poor pay, increased workload, and extended working hours (Jang & George, 2011). According to Najimi et al (2012), job stress is mostly caused by the interplay between the job environment and the employee's qualities, as well as the demands of the additional job requirement. All these negative conditions may render employee's incapable of doing their assigned jobs. It may, however, lead to the organization's growth in terms of production and physical and psychological problems efficiency. Thus, job stress may influence both the employee and the organization.

Likewise, job stressors can come from both internal and external sources, including the organization and the individual itself. The organization may refer to any conflict arise, work overload, and working conditions, whereas the individual refers to one's personality characteristics, personal problems, and demographic factors (i.e., gender, married status, and educational background) (Sathasivam et al., 2015). As a result, it can be inferred that both internal and external influences may influence job stress. However, this study underlines those emotional states associated with the employees' internal characteristics on job stress.

Emotional Intelligence and Job Stress

Salovey and Mayer (1990) defined emotional intelligence as the ability to monitor one's own and others' moods and emotions, to distinguish between them, and to utilize this information to influence one's thinking and behavior. Emotional intelligence can reduce stress by identifying and then regulating feelings of irritation and tension. For instance, employees with a high level of emotional intelligence may be able to identify or express concern about stressors and then establish a pleasant work atmosphere that contributes to job stress reduction (Jang & George, 2011). Additionally, Stahasivam et al (2015) discovered a

substantial positive correlation between emotional traits and job stress, as opposed to physical and social stresses. Meanwhile, Salovey and Mayer's (1997) model identified four characteristics of the relationship between job stress and emotional intelligence: the ability to sense, use, comprehend, and manage emotion.

According to Trivellasa et al (2013), employees who report a greater level of emotional intelligence likely to have more pleasant or good moods and emotions and to be more satisfied with their jobs. This is because employees with a higher level of emotional intelligence are more skilled at evaluating, monitoring, and directing their own emotions than those with a lower level of emotional intelligence. Additionally, individuals with a greater level of emotional intelligence can identify disappointment and dissatisfaction along with their underlying causes, regulating their emotions quickly, and developing methods and perseverance to deal with the negative effects. Meanwhile, employees with low emotional intelligence have a difficult time understanding and managing their emotions when confronted with challenging and complex situations, which results in unbalanced behaviors.

While emotional intelligence can be characterized in a variety of ways, this research adopted Wong and Law (2002) in classifying it into four categories: self-emotional appraisal, other's emotional appraisal, use of emotion, and regulation of emotion. Self-emotional appraisal refers to an individual's capacity to comprehend and express their deepest emotions naturally. Moreover, self-emotion appraisal is crucial in assisting the individual in comprehending and expressing their profound emotions. According to Trivellasa et al (2013), employees with a higher self-emotion appraisal will have more positive moods, which will result in higher levels of satisfaction, as opposed to those who view negative emotions as distress and disappointment, and thus will not experience a higher level of fulfilment. Meanwhile, other's emotion appraisal refers to individuals who can manage not only their own internal feelings but also the emotions of those around them. This type of appraisal strengthens their interpersonal relationships. For instance, this capability can be utilized to deal with or moderate any unpleasant feelings elicited by the environment.

Furthermore, the use of emotions, refers to an individual's capacity to channel their emotions into positive activities and personal performance. According to Trivellasa et al (2013), employees who perceive the ability to utilize their emotions have a proclivity to develop multiple and flexible plans, while also improvising their decision-making, providing creative thinking, and most importantly, improving their thinking when confronted with difficult tasks toward a more adaptive and effective way of dealing with positive and negative emotions. Meanwhile, Wong and Law (2002) define regulation of emotion as a person's ability to control their emotions, which enables a more rapid recovery from psychological discomfort. This component assesses an individual's capacity to manage their emotions, which is necessary for a speedy and successful recovery following psychological trauma. Thus, considering the functions of these emotional intelligence components, it is critical to investigate in detail how these components affect an individual's ability to deal with job stress.

Problem Statement

While the job is the primary aspect of an individual's life, concerns arising from job stress are increasing. Job stress has a different effect on different individuals and job professions. To support this, Najimi et al (2012) discovered that the relationship developed between top

management and employees may assist reduce job stress by instilling in employees a sense of autonomy, confidence, and responsibility for their organization. Meanwhile, most studies have been focused on senior managerial and professional employees (Goswami, 2015). Specifically, from the perspective of this study, which is based on a public university setting, most of the research has concentrated on the emotional and professional stress experienced by academic staff, with relatively little research undertaken on non-academic staff. According to Anwar et al (2014), in their study on academic staff and job stress, academic staff have challenges with job performance and emotional competency. Additionally, to carry out their task, they require assistance and collaboration from the non-academic staff. This demonstrates that, regardless of the job position, academic and non-academic staff have similar job stress at the university. Additionally, Asiamah et al (2017) discovered that among non-academic staff, job stresses include work methods, performance, work scheduling, workload, and interpersonal interactions. However, more research is needed to determine the level of job stress experienced by the non-academic staff and to determine whether their emotional intelligence type adds to their job stress reduction, if any.

Method

Participants

This study involved 243 non-academic staff from a Malaysian public university. Approximately 82 respondents (33.74%) were male, and 161 respondents (66.26%) were female. In terms of age, majority of the respondents aged between 31 – 40 years old (59.8%), followed by 33.3% aged 41 – 50 years old, 4.9% aged between 18 – 30 years old, and 2% aged above 50 years old. In relation to marital status, majority were married (85.3%), 12.7% were singled, followed by 1% widowed and divorced.

Data Collection

A cross-sectional design method was used to employ a quantitative approach via a self-administered questionnaire. Focusing on the non-academic staff, the data was collected involving three divisions: registrar division, admission division, and the academic and students' affairs division.

Measures

Emotional Intelligence. Emotional intelligence was measured using the Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS) (Wong & Law, 2002). This scale consisted of 16 items scored on 7-point Likert-scale with indicators of 1 (totally disagree) to 7 (totally agree) which indicated by the higher the score, the higher level of emotional intelligence. The scale consisted of four subscales with four items each; *self-emotional appraisal*, example, "I have a good sense of why I feel certain feelings most of the time" ($\alpha = .83$), *others emotion appraisal*, example "I always know my friends' emotions from their behaviour" ($\alpha = .92$), *use of emotion*, example, "I always set goals for myself and then try my best to achieve them" ($\alpha = .85$), *regulation of emotion*, example "I am able to control my temper and handle difficulties rationally". Higher level scores indicate higher emotional intelligence. The reliability was $\alpha = .89$.

Job stress. Job stress was assessed using the Work-Related Stress Questionnaire by (De Slor et al., 2020). This scale consisted of 39 items scored on 5-point Likert-scale with indicators 1 (Never) to 5 (always) which indicated by the higher the score, the higher the work-stress. Examples of items; “If work gets difficult, my colleagues will help me”, “Staff are always consulted about change at work”, “I have to neglect some tasks because I have too much to do”). The reliability was $\alpha = .88$.

Results and Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the association between different types of emotional intelligence and job stress in non-academic staff. Table 1 illustrates the level of emotional intelligence and job stress. The findings reveal that majority of the respondents show moderate to high levels in all emotional intelligence subscales. Emotions can be powerful, yet they are also transient. When an emotionally charged incident occurs, such as feeling furious at a coworker, the emotionally wise approach is to pause before responding. This enables everyone to regain control of their emotions and think more sensibly about the various issues at play in the debate. Meanwhile for job stress, results also show moderate to high level of job stress among the respondents. It was found that work methods ambiguity, performance criteria ambiguity, workload, and interpersonal relationships were the key job stressors among the non-academic staff. The result indicated that it is becoming more evidently clear that university *staff* especially *non-academics*, are recording *higher* percentage of occupational *stress* which invariably may lead to lower productivity.

Level	N	%	Mean	SD	Min	Max
<u>Self-emotion appraisal</u>			21.22	4.097	4	28
High EQ (21-28)	126	51.8%				
Moderate EQ (13-20)	112	46.1%				
Low EQ (4-12)	5	2.1%				
<u>Others emotion appraisal</u>			19.38	4.044	4	28
High EQ (21-28)	123	50.6%				
Moderate EQ (13-20)	117	48.2%				
Low EQ (4-12)	3	1.2%				
<u>Use of emotion</u>			21.33	4.082	4	28
High EQ (21-28)	134	55.2%				
Moderate EQ (13-20)	98	40.3%				
Low EQ (4-12)	11	4.5%				
<u>Regulation of emotion</u>			19.80	4.124	4	28
High EQ (21-28)	145	59.6%				
Moderate EQ (13-20)	95	39.2%				
Low EQ (4-12)	3	1.2%				
<u>Job stress</u>			20.43	4.132	39	195
High	147	60.5%				
Moderate	90	37%				
Low	6	2.5%				

Meanwhile, Table 2 indicates the relationship between emotional intelligence categories and job stress. The findings reveal that all four types of emotional intelligence are significantly associated with job stress. Specifically, the results indicate that each emotional intelligence type was positively associated with job stress: self-emotion appraisal ($r = .671, p = .001$), other-emotion appraisal ($r = .543, p = .001$), use of emotion ($r = .650, p = .001$), and regulation of emotion ($r = .650, p = .001$). These findings generally imply that an increase in emotional intelligence is associated with increased job stress, which is contradict to previous research demonstrating that emotional intelligence aids in stress management and provides greater flexibility in coping with stressors (Ramesar et al., 2009; Wons & Matusiewicz, 2011).

In explaining the results, a high self-emotion evaluation indicates that the respondents can express their profound emotions naturally, which may lead to job stress. As a result, it can be explained in terms of the social context, where even while the staff can express or demonstrate their feelings, they are not always welcomed, and for a variety of reasons, being

too emotional may backfire on them. Additionally, according to this study, understanding the feelings of others would only lead to job stress, since being able to deal or manage any negative emotions from others or their environment can burden someone at some time, thus adding to or contributing to their stress. Additionally, while individuals can channel their emotions into constructive activities such as planning, improvising their decision-making, and providing creative thinking, excessive planning without proper execution will only contribute to job stress if combined with a procrastinating attitude. Finally, emotion regulation enables them to monitor, analyze, and respond to variations in mood. However, this study demonstrates that it just adds to one's job stress. It is recognized that individuals use a variety of different regulation tactics when attempting to manage their emotions, and that these various strategies may influence their feelings, well-being, and even personal relationships.

Table 2

The relationship between job stress and emotional intelligence

Variable	Job Stress	
	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>
<i>Emotional Intelligence</i>		
Self-emotion appraisal	.671**	.000
Other-emotion appraisal	.543**	.000
Use of emotion	.650**	.000
Regulation of emotion	.659**	.000

Note: ** Level of significant is at $p < 0.001$

Table 3 reported the main emotional intelligence indicators that contribute to job stress. Overall, the model shows a significant with $R^2 = .54$. This shows that this model contributes 54% variance to job stress with $F = 28.55$, $p < .001$. Specifically, only regulation of emotion ($\beta = .22$, $p = .005$) contributed to job stress. This finding explains that while the ability of a person to effectively manage and respond to an emotional response should supposedly assist them in dealing with job stress, in this study, however, it contributes to one's stress, which could be explained by excessive monitoring and evaluation of one's emotions, which results in increased stress, particularly in the working context. Even if it is possible to exert control over emotion, the processes involved in emotional regulation, such as rethinking a difficult work scenario may add to anger or anxiety, thus explains the job stress.

Table 3

Multiple regression in determining the main indicators of job stress.

Variable	Job stress			
	B	SE. B	Beta, β	<i>p</i>
<i>Emotional Intelligence</i>				
Self-emotion appraisal	.0836	.207	1.553	.124
Other's appraisal	.465	.113	1.163	.248
Use of emotion	.883	.217	1.918	.058
Regulation of emotion	1.215	.418	2.908	.005
Adjusted R²	.541			
F	28.553			

The Implications of High Emotional Intelligence towards Individual Functioning

Though definitions vary, emotional intelligence always encompasses intrapersonal and interpersonal skills, most notably adaptability, sociability, sensitivity, and prudential judgement. Previous research has examined the impact of emotional intelligence in a variety of domains of life, demonstrating the compelling benefits of higher emotional intelligence in the areas of employment, health, and relationships. For instance, leadership, job performance, job satisfaction, happiness, and well-being are all positively connected with emotional intelligence (both physical and emotional). Additionally, emotional intelligence is associated with counterproductive job habits, psychopathy, and a tendency for stress. However, is increased emotional intelligence always beneficial? Although the negative to increased emotional intelligence is mostly unknown, there are numerous reasons to be skeptical of a one-size-fits-all or higher-is-always-better approach to emotional intelligence. Most things are better in moderation, and there is a downside to every human trait.

Firstly, high in emotional intelligence reduced the capacity for creativity and innovation. There is a negative correlation between emotional intelligence and a number of the personality qualities associated with creativity and innovation. For example, creativity has been associated with traits associated with low emotional intelligence: artistic moodiness, nonconformism, antagonistic impulses, and an exuberant ("up-and-down") personality. While it is possible for creative people to be emotionally intelligent, the more common pattern for individuals is to excel at following processes, developing relationships, and collaborating with others but to lack the necessary levels of nonconformity and unconventionality to motivate them to challenge the status quo and create something new.

Secondly, those with high emotional intelligence may have difficulties in giving negative feedback and receiving it. In first impression, high emotional intelligence individuals may appear to excel at both giving and receiving feedback, as both need social interaction. However, scratch the surface and we may discover that individual's great interpersonal sensitivity and empathetic care may make it difficult for them to provide critical or negative feedback to others. Additionally, high emotional intelligence individuals may be so well-adjusted and cool-headed that they may be apathetic to negative criticism they receive. Indeed, because they are often so calm, balanced, and optimistic, high emotional intelligence scores might be difficult to shake.

Thirdly, higher emotional intelligence may contribute to a highly developed capacity for manipulation. The high emotional intelligence may enable one's to sympathize with audience and give a message that feels authentic to them, which is frequently a good thing. When taken too far, though, it can devolve into manipulation. The danger of overusing one's social abilities is that one will focus only on the emotional parts of communication while ignoring logical arguments and more transactional aspects. In that view, the darker side of emotional intelligence is that it enables people with malicious purpose to be excessively persuasive and gain their desired outcome. As with charisma, it is somewhat preferable to view emotional intelligence as a good quality; nonetheless, it can be used to accomplish both unethical and ethical aims.

Moreover, highly emotional intelligence will make someone fear of risk. Most creative endeavors necessitate a delicate mix of risk taking and risk avoidance. Individuals with high emotional intelligence considerably more prone to take calculated risks and avoid making bold choices. This is because a high emotional intelligence correlates with greater conscientiousness. In other words, the higher one's emotional intelligence, the more likely they resist to temptations and make rational choices. While increased in emotional intelligence equals to increased self-control, excessive self-control results in unproductive perfectionism and risk avoidance.

To be clear, those with high emotional intelligence may be attractive, but extraordinarily high emotional intelligence qualifies individual for tasks that need self-regulation and the ability to recognize and respond to the emotional needs of others. It is understandable that salespeople, real estate agents, customer service representatives, counsellors, and psychologists benefit from having high emotional intelligence. By contrast, the high emotional intelligence may be detrimental, and may even be a handicapped, in positions that need creativity, innovation, leading change, or taking risks. That is not to imply that they are not aspire to a top leadership position, but somehow it would take some self-coaching. For instance, one's would need to begin searching out and actively considering unfavorable comments, abandon their preoccupation with avoiding confrontation, and challenge the status quo.

The use of self-report measures, which may result in response bias (e.g., social desirability, mood state) and in overstatement of the relationships between the examined constructs (Podsakoff et al., 2003), does serve as limitations of the study. Furthermore, the adopted cross-sectional research design of our study renders difficult any interference about the causative nature of the examined relationships. Other limitations of our study concern the collection of data from one hospital center and the relative brevity of the measures used.

Conclusion

Without a doubt, emotional intelligence is a desirable and highly adaptive quality, and it's logical that humans prefer a high emotional intelligence over a low emotional intelligence. Obsessing over high emotional intelligence, on the other hand, will breed a workforce of emotionally stable, pleasant, and diplomatic individuals who will potter along and enthusiastically accept norms rather than drive change and innovation. They will make excellent followers and managers, but do not anticipate visionary leaders or change agents from them. Thus, from this study clearly shows that in order to achieve the psychological well-being, every trait needs to be executed in moderation.

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