

Emotional Intelligence and its Relationship with Conflict Management and Occupational Stress: A Meta-Analysis

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Abstract

The current study used meta-analysis to examine the relationship between Emotional Intelligence (EI) and Conflict Management (CM) and emotional intelligence and Occupational Stress (OS). A total of 14 studies examining the relationship between on EI and CM and 39 studies on EI and OS were considered. For Emotional Intelligence and Conflict Management, total sample size consisted of 5,371 participants, yielding 58 effect sizes and for EI and OS, total sample size consisted of 9,930 participants, yielding 53 effect sizes. The studies that had been published from 2002 to 2017 were selected. To identify relevant studies for meta-analysis, a computerized bibliographic keyword search using Elsevier, Science Direct, Emerald Insight, Sage Publications, Taylor & Francis, PubMed, Springer, EBSCOhost and Social Science Citation Index was conducted. Internet search was done using Google Scholar. The results of the present study supported the hypotheses that there is significant and positive relationship between EI and conflict management and significant and negative relationship between EI and occupational stress.

Keywords: Conflict Management, Occupational Stress, Emotional Intelligence, Meta-Analysis

Introduction

“Emotional intelligence” (EI) is a term which has created 'buzz' in the field of management. It has even attracted a lot of attention among organizational psychologists in recent years. Modern organizations are vibrant, highly unstable and demand higher productivity. Tasks cannot simply be accomplished individually or by working with others in routine ways. Jobs in the present scenario require understanding, communication, empathizing with and learning from team members. Highly challenging work environment of today demands a high degree of intellectual ability as well as emotional intelligence. Knowledge and skill may help someone get in to the position, but it takes an emotional understanding of oneself and those around to emerge as a winner. During 1990s, Peter Salovey and John Mayer were leading researchers on the concept of Emotional intelligence and used this term for the first time in their article “Emotional Intelligence”. They defined EI as “the subset of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one's own and others feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use the information to guide one's thinking and action” (Salovey &

Mayer, 1990). In 1997, they further revised EI as “the ability to perceive accurately, appraise, and express emotion; the ability to access and/or generate feelings when they facilitate thought; the ability to understand emotion and emotional knowledge; and the ability to regulate emotions to promote emotional and intellectual growth” (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). According to Goleman (1998) EI is “the capacity for recognizing our own feelings and those of others for motivating ourselves, and for managing emotions well in ourselves and in our relationship”. Bar-On (1997) referred EI as “an array of non-cognitive capabilities, competencies, and skills that influence one's ability to succeed in coping with environmental demands and pressures”. In line with Bar-On's (1997) ideas, other scholars regard EI as “a constellation of behavioral dispositions and self-perceptions concerning one's ability to recognize, process and utilize emotion-laden information” (Zampetakis et al., 2008). Van Rooy and Viswesvaran (2004) defined EI as “the set of abilities (verbal and non verbal) that enable a person to generate, recognize, express, understand, and evaluate their own, and others, emotions in order to guide thinking and action that success fully cope with environmental demands and pressures. According to Brackett et al. (2011), EI is “solving problems and making wise decisions using both thoughts and feelings or logic and intuition”. Martinez (1997, p.72) “refers to emotional intelligence as being: an array of non-cognitive skills, capabilities and competencies that influence a person's ability to cope with environmental demands and pressures”

Approaches of Emotional Intelligence: Some Empirical Evidences

Three main approaches of EI have been defined namely: ability approach, which focuses on how individuals process emotional information and the analysis of abilities required to process such information (Salovey, Mayor & Caruso, 2004); mixed approach, which combines emotional intelligence competencies and skills such as self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy/sensitivity, motivation/drivers and social skills (Goleman, 1998); and trait approach, which suggests that emotional intelligence is a perception of self of an individual's emotional abilities (Petrides et.al., 2007). This approach emphasizes on the notion that emotional intelligence includes self-perceived abilities and behavioral disposition, which is measured by self-report rather than actual abilities as in the case of ability approach. Morrison (2006) defined a model of EI where all three approaches fit. The model has two domains: intrapersonal intelligence (how well we interact with others) and interpersonal intelligence (how well we manage ourselves). Intrapersonal domain is further divided

into two sub-domains namely: self-awareness, the ability of individuals to recognize their strengths, emotions, worth and capabilities; and self-regulation, the ability of individuals to resist their emotional wishes (e.g. think before act). Interpersonal intelligence also has two sub-domains namely: social awareness refers to an awareness of other's feelings, needs and concerns and relationship management, concerns the skill or adeptness at including desirable response in others.

Mérida-López et al. (2017) conducted a study that examined the additive interactive effect of role stress and emotional intelligence for predicting engagement and revealed that emotional intelligence was a significant predictor of engagement. EI was positively associated with employee engagement. Lindeman et al. (2017) conducted a study to determine the relationship between burnout and personality type of physicians. Results of the study suggested that majority of resident physicians exhibited higher levels of burnout. However, emotional intelligence acted as a protective gear against physicians' burnout and thus was able to manage stress better. In their study, Kim and colleagues (2009) tested whether emotional competence influences work performance through mediating effect of proactive behaviors. The results of the study suggested that emotional competence was positively associated with proactive behaviors, and proactive behaviors were positively associated with both task effectiveness and social integration. Moreover, proactive behaviors significantly mediated the relationships between emotional competence and work performance. Jiang (2014) conducted a study whose aim was to examine the effect of emotional intelligence on career decision-making self-efficacy. Results of the study confirmed that as university students' emotional intelligence increases, their confidence in career decision-making increases. Ruiz-Aranda et al. (2013) suggested that emotional intelligence is an important predictor of well-being (life satisfaction and happiness). Kim et al. (2014) found emotional intelligence positively related to great rapport between parties, which nurtured trust and desire to work together again. Researchers have found strong negative association between EI and intentions to quit (Firth et al., 2004; Carmeli, 2003) and a strong positive association between EI and job satisfaction (Law et al., 2004; Tram & O'Hara, 2006; Lee & Liu, 2007). Researchers have also found strong connection between emotional intelligence and commitment of employees (Wong & Law, 2002; Nikolaou & Tsaousis, 2002). Individuals who score high on emotional intelligence develop good work relationships, have tolerance while facing emotional labour or emotional pressures, and can handle feelings and emotions without losing temper. Thus, employees who possess higher degree

of emotional intelligence tend to be more committed to the organizations (Shafiq & Rana, 2016). Skinner and Spurgeon (2014) conducted a study while examining the relationship between emotional intelligence (empathy) and leadership behaviour (transformational, transactional and laissez faire) and interpreted that all four empathy scales had significant correlation with transformational leadership score. Wang (2015) identified in his study that as EI increases, the ability of team members to engage with each other in information elaboration improves which in turn leads to better performance. Kumarasamy et al. (2016) conducted a study which showed that emotional intelligence is a significant predictor of work-life balance on the other hand Choudary (2010) revealed that emotional intelligence increases the work related outcome, increases patient-service performance, improves work place success, and also helps in achieving positive working climate. Quoidbach and Hansenne (2009) suggested in their study that higher emotional intelligence group is more cohesive than lower emotional intelligence group. Deshpande and Joseph (2009) stated that high level of emotional intelligence will be more likely to be engaged in ethical behavior. Sahafi et al. (2011) enlightened that emotional intelligence has significant positive impact on organizational citizenship behavior. Toyama and Mauno (2017) endorsed that emotional intelligence was directly positively associated with social support, work engagement and creativity.

In this paper, an attempt has been done to study an association of emotional intelligence with conflict management and occupational stress. Meta-analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between them and to develop a single conclusion that has greater statistical power than the analysis of any single study.

Emotional Intelligence And Conflict Management

Conflict has been identified as a major aspect in the field of management and organizational behavior. All sort of organizations are susceptible to conflict with no exception. Conflict means difference, which can be due to factors such as interests, values, understanding, styles or opinion. Wall and Callister (1995) defined conflict as “a process in which one party perceives that its interests are being opposed or negatively affected by another party”. Conflict management styles are the behavioral patterns that individuals employ when dealing with conflict (Moberg, 2001). Researchers have differentiated the styles of handling interpersonal conflict on two dimensions, concern for self and concern for others (Blake & Mouton, 1964; Rahim & Bonoma, 1979). Concern for self explains the degree to which individual attempts to satisfy his or her concern. Concern for others explains the degree to which

individual attempts to satisfy concern of others. These two dimensions together result in five different styles of handling conflict viz. integrating, obliging, dominating, avoiding and compromising. Integrating style has high concern for self and for others. This style involves exchange of information and examination of differences in order to reach an effective solution (Rahim et al., 2002). Those who use integrative style manage conflict in a cooperative manner. This style is associated with problem solving and is most effective style for conflict management (Henderson, 2006). Obliging style is concerned with low concern for self and high concern for others. The style is associated with leveling down the differences and emphasizing commonalities to satisfy the concern of other party (Rahim et al., 2002). Those who use obliging style face conflicts in a passive and accommodating way and follow the decisions of other parties (Chan, Sit & Lau, 2014). This style is used more often with superiors than with the subordinates or peers (Henderson, 2006). Dominating style has high concern for self and low concern for others. This style is associated with win-lose orientation or with forcing behaviour to win ones position (Rahim et al., 2002). Dominating style is used in competitive situations (Rahim, Buntzman & White, 1999). Avoiding style reflect low concern for self and for others. The style is used in situations like withdrawal, buck passing, or sidestepping. Compromising style reflect intermediate concern for self and for others. This style involves give and take wherein each party gives up something in order to make a mutually acceptable decision (Rahim et al., 2002). Appropriate conflict managing can improve performance of an organization (Ann & Yang, 2012).

Although numerous researchers have studied conflict in organizations (Shih & Susanto, 2010; Chan, Sit & Lau, 2014; Rahim, Buntzman & White, 1999; Ann & Yang, 2012), there is significantly less research in terms of link between emotions and conflict management. Nair (2008) emphasized that the literature on conflict has developed with almost a complete neglect of emotions. EI is an important antecedent for effectively managing conflicts. Emotionally intelligent people consider their own emotions and others emotion, discriminate among them and to use the information to guide one's thinking and action (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Regulation one's own emotion is of central importance in selecting from a wide range of conflict handling styles. Morrison (2008) suggested that EI can provide individuals the ability to deal with interpersonal conflict. It can help in dealing with conflict in a more constructive manner. EI is associated with superior conflict resolution skills, resulting in effective conflict management. Individuals high in emotional intelligence work to maintain interpersonal

relationships whereas those with lower levels of emotional intelligence tend to report greater use of negative conflict behaviors that may affect their interpersonal relationships. Depending upon the conflict, emotionally intelligent people may adopt numerous conflict resolutions styles. For instance, in their study Chan, Sit and Lau (2014) found higher usage of conflict handling styles such as integrating, obliging, compromising and dominating among nurses with higher levels EI. Jordan and Troth (2002) suggested that individuals with higher levels of emotional intelligence are more likely to engage in more collaborative conflict resolution styles. Shih and Susanto (2010) also found significant and positive association between EI and integrating and compromising conflict handling styles of government employees working in Indonesia. Hence, taken together, these contributions suggest that individuals are better able to manage conflict if they have higher levels of emotional intelligence. EI has been found to have positive effect on job performance (Lindeman et al., 2017; Kim et al., 2009; Iliescu et al., 2012), job satisfaction (Law et al., 2004; Tram & O'Hara, 2006; Guleryuz et al., 2008), and organizational commitment (Wong & Law, 2002; Nikolaou & Tsaousis, 2002; Carmeli, 2003) of employees. Conflicts are inevitable in the workplace and hence EI can facilitate individuals to select the most appropriate conflict management style.

Thus, the present study hypothesizes that “there is a significant and positive relationship between emotional intelligence and occupational stress” (Hypothesis 1).

Emotional Intelligence And Occupational Stress

Occupational stress also called as job stress or work stress has been recognized as a widespread problem in almost all the organizations worldwide. Every individual experiences some sort of stress in his or her jobs. Stress refers to the dynamic state caused by various physical, social and psychological demands, which is perceived by individuals as threatening or exceeding his/her coping resources (Chhabra & Chhabra, 2012). Occupational stress is an emotional and physical response of individuals to perceived harmful or threatening work place conditions. Researchers have identified several occupational stressors in the past. Cooper and Marshall (1978) group occupational stressors into six categories viz. factors intrinsic to the job (poor working conditions, long hours, shift work, travel, new technology, work overload); role in the organization (role ambiguity and role conflict); relationships at work (relationships with colleagues, superiors, and subordinates); career development (lack of job security and status incongruity); organizational structure and climate (lack of factors such as participation, sense of belonging, effective communication);

organizational interface with outside (family problems, life crises, financial difficulties, conflict with family demands, and conflict of beliefs. Rothman (2008) suggested that occupational stressors can be caused by factors viz. work over load, excessive demands, involuntary time, inflexible working hours, frequent changes and monotony. In addition, organizational structure can also be a source of stress (Anand & Monika, 2017). Moreover, previous studies have also related stress with socio-demographic factors like age, gender, education and work experience (Shukla & Srivastava, 2016), position held and marital status (Elahi & Apoorva, 2012).

Occupational stressors can have numerous consequences on the individual and the workplace. Occupational stress can reduce an individual's ability to control and manage physical strain, psychological strain and can lead to behavioral changes among individuals. Ability of individuals to manage their emotions as well as the emotions of others can increase their ability to manage psychological and physiological stresses. Inability to manage stresses can have significant impact on individuals' job performance (Wu, 2011), job satisfaction (Jick & Payne, 1980), absenteeism (Jick & Payne, 1980), self-efficacy (El-Sayed et al., 2014), quality of life (Min, 2014), and even health (Landa et al., 2007). Stress in the workplace can lessen the spirit and passion people have for their jobs, thereby resulting in impaired individual functioning, low motivation and decreased morale (Anand & Monika, 2017). Numerous researchers have identified EI as one of the measures to mitigate the effects of occupational stress (Wu, 2011; Ismail, 2009; Nikolaou & Tsaousis, 2002; El-Sayed et al., 2014; Cha et al., 2009). Scholars believe that EI and occupational stress are inter-related constructs. Emotional intelligence has been considered as a protective factor against stress (Landa et al., 2007). Individuals who have higher levels of EI are more capable in understanding and handling stressful situations. Such individuals tend to be more adept at identifying when they begin to feel overwhelmed by stress (Min, 2014). This awareness allows them to look into the factors leading to their stress, thus enabling them to develop strategies to cope and manage their emotional reaction to such stressors.

Thus, the present study hypothesize that “there is significant and negative relationship between emotional intelligence and conflict management” (Hypothesis 2).

Methodology

Literature Search

From the review of literature of 90 studies, 14 studies on emotional intelligence and conflict management and 39

studies on emotional intelligence and occupational stress, were identified. The studies that had been published from 2002 to 2017 were selected. To identify relevant studies for meta-analysis, a computerized bibliographic keyword search using Elsevier, Science Direct, Emerald Insight, Sage Publications, Taylor & Francis, PubMed, Springer, EBSCOhost and Social Science Citation Index was conducted. Internet search was done using Google Scholar. The studies were identified using the search term as follows: “emotional intelligence AND conflict management”, “emotional intelligence AND conflict resolution”, “emotional intelligence AND conflict”, “emotional intelligence AND occupational stress”, “emotional intelligence AND job stress”, “emotional intelligence and perceived stress”, “emotional intelligence and stress”, “emotional intelligence and work stress”.

Selection Criteria

While reviewing the studies, only the studies that examined the relationship of emotional intelligence with conflict management and occupational stress were included. The studies that clearly did not appear to measure the relationship between emotional intelligence and conflict management and emotional intelligence and occupational stress were eliminated. Only those studies that reported correlation coefficient $-r$ were considered for meta-analysis. Studies that reported other measures of association that cannot be converted to correlation were eliminated. All the studies included in the meta-analyses were in English. Studies written in other languages were ignored for pragmatic reasons. The calculated correlation coefficient r (meta-analysis index) of each study was transformed to effect size score by using Comprehensive Meta Analysis (CMA) software.

Meta-analytic Procedure

Meta-analysis was conducted to estimate the correlations

between emotional intelligence and conflict management and emotional intelligence and occupational stress. Independent variable in the present study was emotional intelligence. Dependent variables consisted of conflict management and occupational stress. Conflict management is the behavioral patterns that individuals employ when dealing with conflict. Individuals employ different styles of handling conflict viz. integrating, obliging, dominating, avoiding and compromising, vigilance, procrastination, collaborating, withdrawing, forcing, smoothing, bargaining, problem solving, and controlling. Occupational stress is an emotional and physical response of individuals to perceived harmful or threatening work place conditions. Various occupational stressors can be poor working conditions, long hours, shift work, travel, new technology, work overload, role ambiguity and role conflict, relationships with colleagues, superiors, and subordinates, lack of job security and status incongruity. The list of articles on the relationship between EI and conflict management and EI and occupational stress was compiled systematically. Priori approach was used for classification of conflict management styles and occupational stressors.

Results

Results for the overall meta-analysis are presented in Table 1. For emotional intelligence and conflict management, total sample size consisted of 5,371 participants, yielding 58 effect sizes. For emotional intelligence and occupational stress, total sample size consisted of 9,930 participants, yielding 53 effect sizes. The correlation coefficients were compiled from each of the studies. These coefficients were entered in Comprehensive Meta Analysis software (CMA 2.0). The software was used to perform descriptive analyses and to determine the overall strength and consistency of the effect.

Table : Correlations of EI and CM and EI and OS

Emotional Intelligence	K	No. of studies	Mean Fisher's Z	p-value for Fisher's Z	Standard Error	Q	p-value for Q
Conflict Management	58	14	.23	.000	.01	922.5	.000
Occupational Stress	53	39	-.17	.000	.01	1686.89	.000

Note: K- Number of effect sizes; Fisher's z- mean weighted effect sizes; Q - homogeneity tests

As depicted in Table 1, overall emotional intelligence was strongly associated with conflict management (Fisher's $Z = .23$, $p < .01$). Thus, hypothesis 1 is supported. The results of the homogeneity tests revealed significant heterogeneity among the effect sizes ($Q = 922.5$, $p < .01$). A significant Q-statistic indicates the likelihood that moderators explain variability in the correlation. In addition, from the results of the table 1, overall emotional intelligence was strongly associated with occupational stress (Fisher's $Z = -.17$, $p < .01$). Thus, hypothesis 2 is supported. The results of the homogeneity tests revealed significant heterogeneity among the effect sizes ($Q = 1686.89$, $p < .01$). A significant Q-statistic indicates the likelihood that moderators explain variability in the correlation.

Conclusion

The meta-analysis in the present study examined the relationship between emotional intelligence and conflict management. The study found significant relationship between emotional intelligence and conflict management, supporting hypothesis 1. Employees, who score higher on emotional intelligence, are better able to manage the workplace conflict. The results of the present study are consistent with the findings of the study by various researchers (Shih & Susanto, 2010; Nair, 2007; Morrison, 2008) who found significant role of EI in conflict management. Emotional intelligence provides employees the ability to deal with interpersonal conflict in a more constructive manner. Depending on the type of conflict, employees with high emotional intelligence may adopt various styles such as dominating, avoiding, integrating, etc. to manage conflict. The study also reported significant relationship between emotional intelligence and occupational stress, such that employees scoring higher on emotional intelligence experience less stress. Thus, hypothesis 2 is supported. The results of the study corroborate the results of the study by Wu (2011), Ismail (2009), and Nikolaou & Tsaousis (2002) who reported EI as one of the measures to mitigate the effects of occupational stress. Individuals who score high on EI are more capable in understanding and handling stressful situations. Thus, emotionally intelligent individuals are able to manage conflict more effectively as compared to individuals scoring less on EI.

Limitations

The present study has various limitations. For instance, the studies on the relationship between emotional intelligence and conflict management were low in number. Another limitation is the study did not do a separate analysis for various sub-dimensions of emotional intelligence (e.g., managing one's own emotions, managing other emotions)

and its relationship to conflict management and occupational stress. Lastly, the study did not explore the role of moderators in the relationship between EI and conflict management and EI and occupational stress. Future studies may examine the relationship between various sub-domains of EI and its relationship to various sub-domains of conflict management and occupational stress.

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