

Investigating the Role of Emotional Intelligence in Workplace Stress Management, with a Focus on the ITES Sector

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Abstract: IT-enabled services (ITES) are the outsourcing services that use information technology in the processing and delivery of the service.. ITES related professionals are at a constant pressure to deliver services efficiently and have to be cost effective. Employees working in ITES industry are prone to develop a lot of health problems due to continuous physical and mental stress of their work.

A good knowledge of one's own and others emotions and ability to manage them can also help a person to cope up with job stress in a work environment. Individuals with high emotional intelligence are more capable of understanding and managing their emotions, which allows them to adjust to their surroundings and become more tolerant to challenging conditions, including stress. Because stress is a perceived concept, emotional intelligence plays a role in the mental process of determining the source of the stress.

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence, ITES, Stress

1. Introduction

In the era of globalization where there is high cultural, scientific, economic and social exchange the success of a person depends on many personal factors. This includes attitudes, parental support, good education, social network, financial support and so on. Even with all of these, there can be failure in success when the root cause for this was searched it points towards EI. The present world demands higher level of interrelationships, mutual understanding and greater productivity at workplace. A good knowledge of one's own and others emotions and ability to manage them can also help a person to cope up with job stress in a work environment.

IT Enabled services (ITES) are the outsourcing services that use information technology in the processing and delivery of the service. Services are typically delivered through a telecommunications or data network, or other electronic media.

Often the business processes are information technology-based, and are referred to as ITES. Knowledge process outsourcing (KPO) and legal process outsourcing (LPO) are some of the sub-segments of business process outsourcing industry.

IT Enabled Services (ITES), also called web enabled services or remote services or Tele-working, covers the entire gamut of operations which exploit information technology for improving efficiency of an organization. These services provide a wide range of career options that include opportunities in call Centre, medical transcription, medical billing and coding, back office operations, revenue claims processing, legal databases, content development, payrolls, logistics management, GIS (Geographical Information System), HR services, web services etc.

ITES related professionals are at a constant pressure to deliver services efficiently and have to be cost effective. Employees working in ITES industry are prone to develop a lot of health problems due to continuous physical and mental stress of their work. The reason for choosing particularly ITES employees is

that the level of stress these employees face is comparatively higher than other employees. Any kind of a job has targets, and an employee becomes stressed when he or she is allotted with unachievable targets and are unable to manage a given situation.

Emotional intelligence (EI) is one of the biggest factors that contribute to the success of individuals who assume various tasks and roles in modern life. It is also important in determining how individuals cope with the stress. By developing EI one can build a bridge between stress and better performance.

Need for study

Intelligence quotient (IQ) is an important factor that determines the success of person but beyond a level it is emotional quotient that matters more than IQ in coping with stressful situations in work environment.

1. Administration of EI abilities can help employees to control impulses, prevent negative emotions and accurately perceive emotions of self and others.
2. Stress at work may affect the work life and vice-versa, which has direct implication on quality at work as well as personal life. EI helps in understanding and dealing with job stress.
3. Various studies has been carried out to understand the impact of EI on job stress however, relatively little research has been conducted in examining the role of EI in moderating job stress

2. Problem Statement

The 21st century is an era of stress. Individuals face stress in their organizational and daily lives. Although society has a set of legal regulations to help individuals live in a healthy manner, these regulations do not eliminate stress. Thus, a completely stress-free life is impossible. The widespread nature of stress in ITES has given rise to the term 'techno-stress', which is used to explain the phenomena of stress arising due to usage of computers. Thus, there is a strong need for systematic research on stress among IT/ITeS professionals. Individuals with high emotional intelligence are more capable of understanding and managing their emotions, which allows them to adjust to their surroundings and become more tolerant to challenging conditions, including stress. Because stress is a perceived concept, emotional intelligence plays a role in the mental process of determining the source of the stress.

3. Literature Review

Concepts of Emotional intelligence and Stress

The foundations of emotional intelligence are based on Thorndike's social intelligence concept, which is defined on the ability to understand and manage individuals based on their social behavior. The phrase EI was first used by Payne(1985) and was considered to be the person's ability to relate to fear, pain and desire. Goelman(2005) considered EI as an individual's analysis of own emotions and understanding of others emotions and use of there analytics and understandings to enrich one's persona life.

Martinez(1997) asserts that EI is the ability to use accurate reasoning about one's own and other's emotions as well as the ability to facilitate this reasoning to enrich thinking and deciding.

Salovey and Mayer(1990). EI is a type of social intelligence that includes both the ability to analyze a person's own and others emotions and the ability to exploit these analyses to guide one's own and other's actions.

In addition to EI the present study also focuses on stress. Job Stress is "any condition or situation that elicits a negative emotional response such as anger/frustration or anxiety/tension". Stress to a certain level is mandatory to raise the quality of work and have a positive orientation in this regard. But stress originating due to hostile circumstance leads to in competent or mediocre performance at all the levels.

It blocks the constructive thinking of the knowledge worker. Conflicts due to stress may lead to blame games, stone walling and poor teamwork. Stress is one of the leading factors in workforce inefficiency of stress leads to one's striving for excellence.

Emotional Intelligence and Job Stress

When psychologist began research on intelligence, they focused on non-emotional aspects such as thinking, cognition, intellect, memory and problem solving (Intelligence Quotient). However, there were researchers who recognized early on that, emotional aspects such as feelings, moods and non-cognition were equally important (EQ).

Constantly changing organization impose new rules and duties on their employees who want to handle new roles and duties need to have a good intelligent quotient and a good emotional quotient (EQ) in the process

of decision making and problem solving.

Abraham (2000) in his studies assessed that the social skills component of EI is related to positive interpersonal relationship and it increase the feeling of job satisfaction and decreases occupational stress.

4. Challenges faced by employees of ITES sector:

ITES industry in India got tremendous boost in the past decade due to factors like liberalisation and globalisation of the Indian economy coupled with favourable government policies. This sector of the sunshine industry brought a new work environment and sea changes in the employment trends. The challenges in this field are-

- Service providers have to adhere to strict deadlines set by the customers.
- Working in different time zones.
- Interdependency in teams.
- Increased interaction with offshore clients.
- Professionals are constantly under pressure to deliver the services efficiently as well as to remain cost effective.
- Customer expectation in terms of skills required for processing jobs keeps changing and forces professionals to upgrade/adapt very fast to their demands.
- Contemporary industries face new competition requiring employees to work for longer hours under competitive time bound deadlines
- Lifestyle in the young BPO workers lead to health hazards at the workplace and lifestyle leading to heart attacks and other major ailments.

These working conditions lead to high stress in the professionals. Organisations have started recognising high stress as a worthy area to address growing attrition rate prevalent in this sector. Prolonged exposure to such stressful situations leads to a depletion and exhaustion of resources in the mind and body; with dysfunctional effects on job performance and overall organizational effectiveness. The Indian ITES industry is a fast paced service industry that is characterized by such stressful work situations and related outcomes

5. Stressors that lead to Occupational stress among ITES employees

- Personality
- Role Overload
- Role Ambiguity
- Work relations in the Organisations
- Perceived lack of career progress
- Mismatch between personality and the task demands of the job.
- Workplace violence
- Graveyard timings (Night shifts)

These stressors result in the following outcomes-

- Behavioural outcomes-Dissatisfaction, Poor performance, Absenteeism, Turnover, Accidents etc.,
- Cognitive outcomes – Poor decision making, lack of concentration, Forgetfulness etc.,
- Physiological outcomes- Increased blood pressure, Heart diseases, Gastrointestinal disorders, gynecological problems in women employees., etc

6. Role of EI in understanding and managing Job Stress

Emotional Intelligence (EI) addresses the emotional, personal, social and survival dimensions of intelligence. The five domains of EI helps us in understanding the significance of EI in managing stress-

1. Self Awareness
2. Self Regulation
3. Motivation
4. Empathy
5. Social skills



	Definition	Hallmarks
Self-Awareness	the ability to recognize and understand your moods, emotions, and drives, as well as their effect on others	self-confidence realistic self-assessment self-deprecating sense of humor
Self-Regulation	the ability to control or redirect disruptive impulses and moods the propensity to suspend judgment – to think before acting	trustworthiness and integrity comfort with ambiguity openness to change
Motivation	a passion to work for reasons that go beyond money or status a propensity to pursue goals with energy and persistence	strong drive to achieve optimism, even in the face of failure organizational commitment
Empathy	the ability to understand the emotional makeup of other people skill in treating people according to their emotional reactions	expertise in building and retaining talent cross-cultural sensitivity service to clients and customers
Social Skill	proficiency in managing relationships and building networks an ability to find common ground and build rapport	effectiveness in leading change persuasiveness expertise in building and leading teams

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The major stress signs are in the form of behavioural and emotional signs. EI helps in understanding the emotions of oneself and also others. The fundamental aspects of EI are

Dimensions	Self	Other
Identification	Identify my emotions	Identify others' emotions
Understanding	Understand my emotions	Understand others' emotions
Expression	Express my emotions	Listen to others' emotions
Regulation	Regulate my emotions	Regulate others' emotions
Use	Use my emotions	Use others' emotions
	Intrapersonal EI	Interpersonal EI

The following is the list of emotions, the understanding of which helps us to avoid stressful situations and cope up with job stress.

Emotions that will have a negative impact-Unless they are well managed	Emotions that are likely to create a positive productive work climate
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frustration • Anger • Insecurity • Uncertainty • Pessimism • Disappointment • Unhappiness • Resentment • Jealousy • Bitterness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determination • Motivation • Confidence • Optimism • Resilience • Happiness • Hope • Excitement • Empathy • Acceptance

Conclusions

The rapid growth of ITES-BPO and IT industry as a whole is having a deep affect on the socio-economic dynamics of the country. IT/ITES sector has led to the creation of IT workforce which has its distinct forms of work, employment, organisation, and management along with its distinct work culture that have emerged which has its affect on lifestyle, sociality and identity that are taking place within this new global workforce. The daily impact of IT on our lives continues unabated. As innovations and computer capacities increase this influence will continue to grow in the coming years at an increasing rate. As technology advances, there is also increased stress that is associated with it called as “technology stress.” IT is here to stay. Thus there is an increasing significance of the role of emotional intelligence in understanding and managing stress. The awareness of one’s emotions and the knowledge of how to manage these emotions helps an individual to cope up with inevitable stressful situations. The development of EI skills is also very important because it is an area that is generally overlooked when skills development programs are designed.

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