

## **Stress and Emotional Intelligence: A Study among Software Professionals in Chennai**

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### **Abstract**

Stress is a subject of interest to individuals and organizations. Stress is an intrinsic part of work and a critical element of achievement, without a certain amount of which one would never perform at all. But when the stress exceeds the level and persists for a long time, it affects the individual. On the personal side, stress is exhibited physically, psychologically and behaviorally. On the organizational side, stress results in lower productivity and increased absenteeism. Emotional intelligence is identified to be influencing occupational stress. Stress is conceived mainly as an emotional reaction (usually negative) to various environmental stimuli. This paper aims to identify the impact of emotional intelligence on stress experienced by software professionals. Primary data were collected from 200 software professionals working in Chennai, the state capital of Tamilnadu, India. Stress is measured using Occupational Stress Index scale developed by Srivastava and Singh. Emotional Intelligence is measured using Emotional Intelligence Scale developed by Bar-On. The results prove that emotional intelligence has an impact on the stress experienced. All the dimensions of emotional intelligence are found to be influencing the dimensions of stress. Many researches have proved that emotional intelligence can be developed. So the training modules on stress management can incorporate emotional intelligence as a part.

**Key Words: Stress, Emotional Intelligence, Software Professionals, Information Technology Industry**

## Introduction

Stress is a universal human experience. Both pleasant and unpleasant experiences can have stressful components. The interpretation of what is stressful and the relation to sources of stress will be different for each individual. Every human being is stressed at one time or another. Stress is an intrinsic part of work and a critical element of achievement, without a certain amount of which one would never perform at all. People are constantly pressured to accomplish more and more in less and less time. Stress occurs when people are faced with events that they perceive as endangering their physical and psychological well-being. These events are usually referred to as stressors and people's reaction to them as stress responses (Mathews, 2005). The way one reacts will depend upon his / her vulnerability. It is also the result of their genetic make-up, childhood experiences and environment. Stress is also dependent on the way in which individuals perceive the emotions.

A wide range of emotions are experienced by most of the individuals irrespective of the environment in which they live, the nature of work they do etc. But the only difference is that the intensity of emotions experienced varies. Although the study of emotions in work settings is not uncommon, researchers of organizational behaviour are increasingly recognizing the importance of emotions in everyday work life. People having high Emotional Quotient (EQ) are found to be less stressful and highly successful. Research also suggests that success on the job can be achieved through the management of emotions and emotional displays (Arvey et al., 1998; Fisher and Ashkanasy, 2000; Diefendorff and Richard, 2003).

The software industry is one of the fastest growing industries. It plays a major role in the economic development of the country. Because of the abundant employment opportunities, attractive compensation and career growth, increasing number of persons are entering into the software industry. But the human resource issues and challenges have important implications on the industry. The project teams comprising of different groups of clients, developers, programmers, designers, testers and project managers are facing challenging demands for quality improvement on their products and services. In order to survive in such a competitive market, they need to work hard and update their knowledge. So the software professionals work for longer hours to meet out the deadlines. The situation is worst during project completion time where the professionals work round the clock. They can also be seen in the office on weekends and holidays. Due to long working hours and concentration involved in the work, the software professionals are prone to stress. The software industry involves total mental activity. The functions of the brain are thinking, understanding, remembering and emotions which are the important traits for the professionals.

Mind is an important portion of the body which gets strained by over work in terms of long hours or unusual timings. The result of all these is termed as emotion which sets ill conditions in the brain. So managing emotions can reduce stress and improve performance at work leading to success in job and career. This paper aims to identify the impact of Emotional Intelligence (EI) on stress experienced by software professionals.

## Review of Literature

There are three basic components involved in the conscious experience of emotion. First is the stimulus factor, which is the input to the brain from external stimuli. Second is the psychological factor, which is the input to brain from the internal organs or skeletal muscles. Third is cognitive factor, which is the memory of past experience and appraisal of current situation that give rise to additional inputs (Mukherjee and Puri, 2002).

Emotional Quotient (EQ) has been found to be directly responsible for 80 percentage of job success (Srinivasan, 2003). Bar-On (1997) defined Emotional Intelligence as "an array of non-cognitive capabilities, competencies, and skills that influence one's ability to succeed in coping with environmental demands and pressures". EQ-i scale developed by Bar-On is divisible into five broad categories. First is interpersonal EQ, which further divides into emotional self-awareness, assertiveness, self-regard, self-actualization and independence. Second is interpersonal EQ, which divides into empathy, interpersonal relationship and social responsibility. Third is adaptability EQ, which divides into problem solving, reality testing and flexibility. Fourth is stress management EQ, which divides into stress tolerance and impulse control. Fifth is general mood EQ which divides into happiness and optimism (Bar-On, 1997).

More specifically, Weisinger (1998) suggest that there is a direct link between emotional intelligence and success at work. Another area of study where the effect of emotional intelligence might be influential is occupational stress. Since stress is conceived mainly as an emotional reaction (usually negative) to various environmental stimuli (Selye,

1956), Emotional Intelligence can be used as a framework within which the individual could learn how to cope with it and how to control strong emotions (Nikolaou and Tsausis, 2002).

A study among managers revealed that the respondents with high emotional intelligence experienced less subjective stress. They are also found to have better physical and psychological well being and better in job performance (Slaski and Cartwright, 2002). Another study on emotional intelligence between two occupations with high levels of occupational stress namely police officers and paraprofessional personnel in mental health and child care reveals that police officers scored high on EQ. This high EQ ensures the ability of the police officers to be more aware of themselves and of others and makes them more adaptable to stressful events, and with better coping strategies (Bar-On et al., 2000).

The results reveal that emotionally intelligent individuals appear to experience significantly less stress at work than the less emotionally less intelligent counterparts. Medical and psychological personnel scored significantly higher in EQ and lower in occupational stress than the paraprofessional and administration personnel. The former group possesses EQ skills like empathy, impulse control which are necessary for the successful completion of their work tasks. Through the increased control and positive use of their own and other's emotions, these professionals seem to be able to deal more effectively with their feelings, leading directly to decrease in the levels of occupational stress. Organizations that offer a combination of EQ and stress management to their employees provide them the opportunity to acquire the necessary skills, in order to deal with the

requirements of their job more effectively (Nikolaou and Tsausis, 2002).

Similar are the findings of Martin Adams who identified that Emotional recognition and expression and emotional management contributed reliably in stress appraisal. The individuals, who consider themselves to be more conscious of their emotions fluently to others and better able to maintain a positive mood in them when faced with negative circumstances, are less likely to appraise situations and events in their lives as being stressful. Also, individuals who consider themselves to be more capable of perceiving and expressing emotions and consider that they are better able to effectively manage emotions in themselves and others, are likely to experience greater psychological well being. The moderating effects of EQ on the relationships between stress and strain, suggests that high EQ employees may be more resilient to stress in the workplace. By identifying the employees at high risk of occupational stress and strain, efforts can be made at early intervention through stress management programs (Adams and Lobb, 2008).

## Objectives

The main objective of this paper is to analyze the impact of emotional intelligence on the stress experienced by software professionals. An attempt is also made to study the influence of the dimensions of emotional intelligence on the dimensions of stress.

## Methodology

Primary data were collected from 200 software professionals working in two Multi-National Companies located in Chennai by adapting convenience sampling method. 70 percent of the

respondents are male and 30 percent are female. The respondents are in the age group of 26 to 45. The sample includes software engineers, system analyst, project leaders and project managers. Stress is measured using Occupational Stress Index (OSI) scale developed by Srivastava and Singh, 1981. The OSI scale measures stress in twelve dimensions namely role overload, role ambiguity, role conflict, unreasonable group and political pressure, responsibility for persons, under participation, powerlessness, poor peer relations, intrinsic impoverishment, low status, strenuous working conditions and unprofitability. Emotional Intelligence is measured using Emotional Intelligence Scale developed by Bar-On, 2000. The scale measures Emotional Intelligence in ten dimensions namely emotional self-awareness, assertiveness, self regard, empathy, interpersonal relationship, reality testing, problem solving, flexibility, stress tolerance and impulse control. Canonical Correlation is used to explore the relationship between stress and emotional intelligence.

## Operational Definitions of Variables Measuring Stress

Role Overload is a feeling when much more is expected from the role than what the occupant can cope with. Role Ambiguity is the lack of clarity about expectations of others from the role, or lack of feedback on performance as regarded by others. Role Conflict refers to the conflict among the various roles that an individual plays in an organization. Unreasonable Group and Political Pressures mean the stress caused when the individual has to do some work

unwillingly owing to certain group/political pressure. Responsibility for Persons becomes stressful when the responsibility for the efficiency and productivity of many employees is thrust upon him. Under participation creates stress when the individual's co-operation is frequently not sought in solving the administrative or industrial problems at a higher level. Powerlessness is a situation of the stress where an individual perceives that he is not provided with adequate power to discharge his responsibilities. Poor Peer Relations makes the individual feel stress when his colleagues do not cooperate with him voluntarily in solving administrative and industrial problems. Intrinsic Impoverishment is a situation of stress for an individual, because he feels that no opportunity is given to him to utilize his abilities and experience independently. Low Status is the stress caused, as the individual's self in an organization is not respected and his job doesn't give him social status. Strenuous Working Conditions becomes stressful when an individual perceives his job as tense, risky and complicated. Unprofitability is a situation of stress for an individual in an organization, when he/she feels that he is seldom rewarded for his hard labour and efficient performance.

### **Operational Definitions of Variables Measuring Emotional Intelligence**

Emotional Self Awareness is the ability to recognize one's feelings. Assertiveness is the ability to express feelings, beliefs and thoughts and defend one's right in a non-destructive manner. Self-Regard is the ability to respect and accept oneself as basically good. Empathy refers to the ability to be aware of, to understand and to appreciate the feelings of others.

Interpersonal Relationship is defined as the ability to establish and maintain mutually satisfying relationship that is characterized by intimacy and by giving and receiving affection. Reality Testing is the ability to access the correspondence between what is experienced and what objectively exists. Problem Solving refers to the ability to identify and define problems as well as to generate and implement potentially effective solutions. Flexibility is the ability to adjust one's emotions, thoughts and behavior to changing situations and conditions. Stress Tolerance refers to the ability to withstand adverse events and stressful situations without "falling apart" by actively and positively coping with stress. Impulse Control is the ability to resist or delay an impulse drive or temptation to act.

### **Result and Discussion**

Canonical Correlation is used to explore the relationship between Occupational Stress and Emotional Intelligence. Canonical correlation is a powerful technique for exploring the relationship between multiple dependent and independent variables. Results obtained from a canonical analysis suggest answers to questions concerning the number of ways in which the two sets of multiple variables are related, the strength of the relationships, and the nature of the relationships defined.

Stress variable consists of 12 dimensions and Emotional Intelligence variable consists of 10 dimensions. Hence, a maximum of 10 canonical correlation variates is possible. However, the number of significant dimensions may be even smaller.

## Eigen Values and Canonical Correlations of Emotional Intelligence

Root no.	Eigen Value	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage	Canonical Correlation	Sq. Cor
1	0.42	41.03	41.03	0.61	0.325
2	0.21	18.36	59.38	0.49	0.178
3	0.11	11.25	70.63	0.31	0.117
4	0.12	10.38	81.01	0.30	0.109
5	0.10	7.32	88.33	0.25	0.079
6	0.06	5.77	94.10	0.28	0.064
7	0.04	3.91	98.01	0.19	0.044
8	0.01	1.44	99.45	0.15	0.017
9	0.00	0.48	99.93	0.05	0.006
10	0.00	0.07	100.00	0.01	0.001

From the Table 1, it can be inferred that the first five canonical correlations seem to be good enough to predict the relationship between the two sets. The dimension reduction analysis also

confirms that the first five canonical dimensions or canonical variates are sufficient for further analysis and the results are shown in table 2.

Table 2  
Dimension Reduction Analysis of Emotional Intelligence

Roots	Wilks Lamda	F Hypothesis	DF	Error DF	Sig of F
1 to 10	0.30	3.06	120.00	2552.60	<0.01*
2 to 10	0.54	2.27	99.00	2324.50	<0.01*
3 to 10	0.60	1.95	80.00	2095.23	<0.01*
4 to 10	0.70	1.79	63.00	1864.69	<0.01*
5 to 10	0.83	1.52	48.00	1632.72	0.012*
6 to 10	0.86	1.29	35.00	1399.03	0.119
7 to 10	0.92	0.95	24.00	1162.91	0.522
8 to 10	0.95	0.52	15.00	922.43	0.931
9 to 10	0.97	0.27	8.00	670.00	0.975
10 to 10	0.99	0.09	3.00	336.00	0.961

The table 2 infers that the first two dimensions are significant as  $p < 0.05$ .

**Table 3**  
Raw Canonical Coefficients for Stress Dimensions (Dependent Variables)

Variable	1	2	3	4	5
Role Overload	-0.08	-0.12	-0.16	0.10	-0.06
Role Ambiguity	0.13	-0.10	0.14	0.22	0.02
Role Conflict	0.16	-0.08	0.21	0.05	-0.04
Unreasonable Group and Political Pressure	0.02	-0.05	-0.19	-0.08	0.09
Responsibility for Persons	-0.07	0.11	0.06	0.12	-0.02
Under Participation	0.00	-0.13	-0.21	-0.05	0.08
Powerlessness	-0.02	0.19	0.10	0.06	-0.13
Poor Peer Relations	0.05	0.02	-0.03	-0.06	0.05
Intrinsic Impoverishment	0.18	-0.04	0.03	-0.16	0.08
Low Status	-0.03	0.39	-0.26	0.34	0.09
Strenuous Working Conditions	0.08	0.10	-0.05	0.21	-0.32
Un Profitability	-0.06	0.18	0.16	0.02	-0.19

It is clear from the table 3 that there exist five types of relationships between the dependent variable stress and the independent variable Emotional Intelligence. These relationships are also called as canonical variates. The canonical coefficients are interpreted in a manner analogous to interpreting regression coefficients. The table 3 shows that for the

variable intrinsic impoverishment, a one unit change in intrinsic impoverishment, results in 0.18 increase in the first canonical variate of set 1 with the other predictors held constant. Similarly for the variable role conflict, a unit change in role conflict leads to 0.16 increase in the first canonical variate of set 1.

**Table 4**  
Standardized Canonical Coefficients for Stress Dimensions (Dependent Variables)

Variable	1	2	3	4	5
Role Overload	-0.31	-0.47	-0.62	0.40	-0.20
Role Ambiguity	0.32	-0.29	0.36	0.61	0.05
Role Conflict	0.42	-0.21	0.58	0.15	-0.12
Unreasonable Group and Political Pressure	0.08	-0.11	-0.47	-0.22	0.22
Responsibility for Persons	-0.19	0.28	0.13	0.26	-0.06
Under Participation	0.01	-0.31	-0.54	-0.14	0.21
Powerlessness	-0.10	0.41	0.21	0.12	-0.26
Poor Peer Relations	0.18	0.07	-0.11	-0.19	0.14
Intrinsic Impoverishment	0.45	-0.11	0.08	-0.44	0.21

Low Status	-0.06	0.72	-0.49	0.65	0.18
Strenuous Working Conditions	0.19	0.29	-0.14	-0.52	-0.77
Un Profitability	-0.13	0.32	0.29	0.03	-0.34

It can be inferred from the Table 4 & 5 that for the first relationship, the seven dimensions of stress namely intrinsic impoverishment, role conflict, role ambiguity, role overload, poor peer relations, low status, and strenuous working conditions are found to be contributing. Similarly for the second relationship i.e. for the variate 2, five dimensions of stress namely low status, role overload, powerlessness, unprofitability and strenuous working conditions are identified to be contributing in the order of decreasing

importance. For the third relationship i.e. variate 3, seven dimensions of stress namely role overload, role conflict, unprofitability, low status, unreasonable group and political pressure, role ambiguity and strenuous working conditions are contributing. For the variate 4, six dimensions of stress are contributing namely low status, role ambiguity, strenuous working conditions, intrinsic impoverishment, role overload and role conflict. For the variate 5, strenuous working conditions, unprofitability and role overload are influencing

Table 5  
Correlations between Dependent and Canonical Variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5
Role Overload	0.07	-0.45	-0.43	0.40	-0.49
Role Ambiguity	0.60	-0.22	-0.08	0.51	-0.18
Role Conflict	0.60	-0.22	0.21	0.30	-0.25
Unreasonable Group and Political Pressure	0.31	-0.27	-0.31	0.08	-0.19
Responsibility for Persons	-0.21	-0.02	0.18	0.29	-0.18
Under Participation	0.20	-0.07	-0.42	-0.10	0.02
Powerlessness	0.15	0.22	-0.17	-0.05	-0.02
Poor Peer Relations	0.52	0.20	-0.24	-0.07	0.14
Intrinsic Impoverishment	0.79	0.14	-0.18	-0.10	0.11
Low Status	0.49	0.62	-0.37	0.42	0.13
Strenuous Working Conditions	0.44	0.13	-0.33	-0.16	-0.78
Un Profitability	-0.02	0.14	0.09	0.21	-0.59

From the table 6, for the canonical variate 5 for the second set i.e. emotional intelligence, for the variable problem

solving ability, a unit increase in problem solving ability will result in an increase of 0.24.



Table 6  
Raw Canonical Coefficients for Covariates (Independent Variables)

Covariate	1	2	3	4	5
Self Regard	-0.05	-0.00	-0.01	-0.03	0.01
Interpersonal Relations	-0.01	-0.02	-0.01	-0.03	0.05
Impulse Control	-0.05	-0.07	-0.18	-0.10	0.13
Problem Solving Ability	-0.04	-0.13	-0.08	-0.05	-0.24
Emotional Self Awareness	-0.05	-0.04	0.10	-0.08	0.03
Flexibility	0.08	0.03	0.11	-0.10	-0.04
Reality Testing	-0.06	0.09	0.14	-0.02	-0.05
Stress Tolerance	-0.01	0.02	0.12	0.15	0.03
Assertiveness	-0.10	0.19	-0.17	0.10	-0.05
Empathy	-0.02	-0.06	0.04	0.13	0.15

Table 7  
Standardized Canonical Coefficients for Covariates (Independent Variables)

Covariate	1	2	3	4	5
Self Regard	-0.34	-0.03	-0.08	-0.20	0.04
Interpersonal Relations	-0.06	-0.10	-0.08	-0.17	0.24
Impulse Control	-0.23	-0.32	-0.79	-0.45	0.57
Problem Solving Ability	-0.18	-0.62	-0.36	-0.23	-1.12
Emotional Self Awareness	-0.23	-0.17	0.41	-0.35	0.14
Flexibility	0.44	0.14	0.53	-0.53	-0.22
Reality Testing	-0.20	0.31	0.49	-0.06	-0.21
Stress Tolerance	-0.03	0.13	0.69	0.86	0.19
Assertiveness	-0.44	0.82	-0.71	0.44	-0.23
Empathy	-0.11	-0.27	0.16	0.57	0.66

From the tables 7 and 8, it can be inferred that for the variate 1, all the dimensions of emotional intelligence are contributing. For the variate 2, three dimensions are contributing namely

assertiveness, problem solving ability and empathy are influencing.

Table 8  
Correlations between Covariates and Canonical Variables

Covariate	1	2	3	4	5
Self Regard	-0.76	-0.23	0.17	-0.01	-0.02
Interpersonal Relations	-0.61	-0.23	0.15	-0.21	0.01
Impulse Control	-0.53	0.01	-0.11	-0.36	0.46
Problem Solving Ability	-0.62	-0.52	0.03	0.10	-0.52
Emotional Self Awareness	-0.61	0.14	0.31	-0.35	0.08
Flexibility	-0.37	0.21	0.33	-0.37	-0.07
Reality Testing	-0.62	0.20	0.46	-0.25	-0.01
Stress Tolerance	-0.56	0.01	0.42	0.28	0.08
Assertiveness	-0.70	0.56	-0.21	0.07	-0.15
Empathy	-0.54	-0.50	-0.06	0.37	0.13

For the variate 1, the seven dimensions of stress namely intrinsic impoverishment, role conflict, role ambiguity, role overload, poor peer relations, low status, and strenuous working conditions all the dimensions of emotional intelligence are contributing. For the variate 2, five dimensions of stress namely low status, role overload, powerlessness, unprofitability and strenuous working conditions and three dimensions namely assertiveness, problem solving ability and empathy are identified to be contributing. For the variate 3, seven dimensions of stress namely role overload, role conflict, unprofitability, low status, unreasonable group and political pressure, role ambiguity and strenuous working conditions and seven dimensions of emotional intelligence namely Impulse Control, Problem Solving Ability, Emotional Self Awareness, Flexibility, Reality Testing, Stress Tolerance, Assertiveness are contributing. For the canonical variate 4, six dimensions of stress are contributing namely low status,

role ambiguity, strenuous working conditions, intrinsic impoverishment, role overload and role conflict and six dimensions of emotional intelligence namely stress tolerance, empathy, flexibility, impulse control, assertiveness and emotional self awareness are contributing in the order of decreasing importance. For the variate 5, three stress dimensions namely strenuous working conditions, unprofitability and role overload and three emotional intelligence dimensions namely problem solving ability, empathy and impulse control are influencing. It can be inferred from the canonical analysis that the stress dimensions namely responsibility for persons and poor peer relations are not contributing in any of the canonical variates. So the software professionals are not experiencing any stress due to these dimensions. In the independent variable, all the emotional intelligence dimensions are influencing. The moderating effects of Emotional Intelligence on the relationships between stress and strain, suggests that

high emotional intelligent employees may be more resilient to stress in the workplace (Adams and Lobb, 2008). The ability to manage feelings and handle stress is another aspect of emotional intelligence that has been found to be important for success (Amar, 2008). The overall Emotional Intelligence is negatively correlated with all perceptions of the job which in turn suggests that emotionally competent employees feel less distressed at work (Nikolaou and Tsausis, 2002). Much of the emotional competence training consists of techniques to deal with emotions in the work pace, especially negative ones (Vikas, 2007).

### Conclusion

The analysis between stress dimensions and emotional intelligence dimensions reveal that responsibility for persons and poor peer relations are not influencing. But all the dimensions of emotional intelligence are found to be influencing. The ten dimensions of emotional intelligence namely emotional self-awareness, assertiveness, self regard, empathy, interpersonal relationship, reality testing, problem solving, flexibility, stress tolerance and impulse control are having a negative relationship with the stress variates. An increase in emotional intelligence reduces the stress experienced by the software professionals. The results prove that emotional intelligence has an impact on the stress experienced. Many researches also proved that emotional intelligence can be developed. So, software companies can incorporate emotional intelligence as a part of stress management training modules.

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