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Emotional intelligence (EI) and self-efficacy: how beneficial are they within a transactional model of occupational stress?

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Abstract

The purpose of this research was to assess the relationships between emotional intelligence (EI), self-efficacy, cognitive stress appraisals, coping strategies and affect responses based on Lazarus and Folkman's (1984), transactional model of stress.

The study consisted of 89 employees from three organisations of the private sector in New Zealand. The participants completed a web-based survey which included self-report questionnaires of Cognitive Appraisal Scale (CAS), the Brief COPE, the workplace Swinburne University Emotional Intelligence Test (workplace SUEIT), the General Self-efficacy Scale and the Job Related Affective Wellbeing Scale (JAWS).

The research findings indicated that there were associations between threat appraisal, maladaptive coping (i.e., avoidance) and negative affect. Associations were not found in the positive pathway of the model (i.e., challenge appraisal, adaptive coping, e.g., task focused and emotion approach coping, and positive affect). Associations were also found between emotional intelligence, task focused coping and positive affect. Similarly self-efficacy was found to be an effective resource factor in task focused coping and positive affect. Self-efficacy significantly related positively with challenge appraisal and negatively with threat appraisal. Both EI and self-efficacy associated negatively with emotion approach coping which included seeking instrumental and emotional support. There was a strong association found between EI and self-efficacy which supported previous empirical findings that cognition and emotion play an inter-connected role in the stress process. Surprisingly, EI and self-efficacy did not mediate between challenge appraisal - adaptive coping and adaptive coping - positive affect responses respectively.

Future implications of the study are that both emotional intelligence and self-efficacy should be considered as efficient positive personal resources in organisations. Since both these strengths can be learnt and developed, it was recommended that close consideration should be given to enhance these skills among employees of varied job roles.

Effective use of emotional intelligence and self-efficacy are likely to create happy, optimistic, engaged workers who will be equipped with healthy leadership styles, manage relationships better, will be cooperative and work well in teams.

This study extends prior research that has identified relationships between cognitive appraisal, coping and affect in a transaction model of stress. It also explored the relationship of emotional intelligence and self-efficacy within this stress model. It addresses the effective use of two human strengths which will enhance adaptive coping strategies to experience positive psychological states in demanding situations. Consistent with the recent escalating investigations and approaches in the field of positive psychology, this study gives rise to focus on developing positive strengths in employees in the workplace – which may prove more rewarding than attempting to repair or minimize their weaknesses.

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