THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE IN MANAGING STRESS AMONG HEALTHCARE EMPLOYEES

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Abstract

Healthcare is one of the largest sectors of India. This sector consists both private and public management. Like any other sector healthcare involves major human resources on the side of employees as well "customers" here it is termed as "patients". These kinds of employee- customer direct interaction is termed as emotional labour industries. Sectors like hotels, tourism, television actors and hospitals are majorly involving "emotional labours" for serving to the nation in a better way. Emotional labour is the labour involved in dealing with other people's feelings, a core component of regulation of emotions. Now a days as the facilities in medical and hospitality department are increased as well as job stress and emotional turmoil is also increased. On the other side, population ratio is kept on increasing. All these together forces an employee of healthcare to be on the hot seat of their work environment. These kind of work environment leads to job stress and burnt-out. Hence, it is important to find out sources of job stress and various techniques for overcoming job stress in an emotionally intelligent way.

Key words: healthcare, human resources, emotional labour, stress, burnt- out, emotional intelligence and work environment.

Introduction

Job stress and Burnt-outs are twin babies. Healthcare employees are working 24 hours a day, 07 days i a week, and 365 an year. So it is a usual thing for them to feel stress often in their job. Particularly when they work under night shifts and emergencies they feel more job stress. Hence, in this study we focus on the role of emotional intelligence in managing job stress of healthcare employees such as physicians, nurses, technicians, clerical employees and supportive staff.

Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence (EI) refers to the ability to perceive, control and evaluate emotions. Some researchers suggest that emotional intelligence can be learned and strengthened, while others claim it is an inborn characteristic.

Since 1990, Peter Salovey and John D. Mayer have been the leading researchers on emotional intelligence. In their influential article "Emotional Intelligence," they defined emotional intelligence 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 this information to guide one's thinking and actions" (1990).

The Four Branches of Emotional Intelligence

Salovey and Mayer proposed a model that identified four different factors of emotional intelligence: the perception of emotion, the ability reason using emotions, the ability to understand emotion and the ability to manage emotions.

- **Perceiving Emotions:** The first step in understanding emotions is to accurately perceive them. In many cases, this might involve understanding nonverbal signals such as body language and facial expressions.
- **Reasoning with Emotions:** The next step involves using emotions to promote thinking and cognitive activity. Emotions help prioritize employees attention and to react; Healthcare employees respond emotionally to things that garner their attention.
- **Understanding Emotions:** The emotions that employee perceive can carry a wide variety of meanings. If someone is expressing angry emotions, the observer must interpret the cause of their anger and what it might mean. For example, if your boss is acting angry, it might mean that he is dissatisfied with your work; or it could be because he got a speeding ticket on his way to work that morning or that he's been fighting with his wife.
- **Managing Emotions:** The ability to manage emotions effectively is a key part of emotional intelligence. Regulating emotions, responding appropriately and responding to the emotions of others are all important aspect of emotional management.

Measuring Emotional Intelligence

"In regard to measuring emotional intelligence – I am a great believer that criterion-report (that is, ability testing) is the only adequate method to employ. Intelligence is an ability, and is directly measured only by having people answer questions and evaluating the correctness of those answers." --John D. Mayer

- **Reuven Bar-On's EQ-i**
  A self-report test designed to measure competencies including awareness, stress tolerance, problem solving, and happiness. According to Bar-On, "Emotional intelligence is an array of noncognitive capabilities, competencies, and skills that influence one's ability to succeed in coping with environmental demands and pressures."

- **Multifactor Emotional Intelligence Scale (MEIS)**
  An ability-based test in which test-takers perform tasks designed to assess their ability to perceive, identify, understand, and utilize emotions.
- **Seligman Attributional Style Questionnaire (SASQ)**
  Originally designed as a screening test for the life insurance company Metropolitan Life, the SASQ measures optimism and pessimism.

Emotional intelligence consists of four core abilities

- **Self-awareness** – The ability to recognize employees own emotions and how they affect their thoughts and behavior, know their strengths and weaknesses, and self-confidence.
- **Self-management** – The ability to control impulsive feelings and behaviors, manage your emotions in healthy ways, take initiative, follow through on commitments, and adapt to changing circumstances.
- **Social awareness** – The ability to understand the emotions, needs, and concerns of other people, pick up on emotional cues, feel comfortable socially, and recognize the power dynamics in a group or organization.
- **Relationship management** – The ability to develop and maintain good relationships, communicate clearly, inspire and influence others, work well in a team, and manage conflict.

Occupational Stress

Occupational stress is stress involving work. Stress is defined in terms of its physical and physiological effects on a person, and can be a mental, physical or emotional strain. It can also be a tension or a situation or factor that can cause stress. Occupational stress can occur when there is a discrepancy between the demands of the environment/workplace and an individual's ability to carry out and complete these demands.

Selye published in 1975 a model dividing stress into eustress and distress.[19] Where stress enhances function (physical or mental, such as through strength training or challenging work), it may be considered eustress. Persistent stress that is not resolved through coping or adaptation, deemed distress, may lead to anxiety or withdrawal (depression) behavior.

The difference between experiences that result in *eustress* and those that result in *distress* is determined by the disparity between an experience (real or imagined) and personal expectations, and resources to cope with the stress. Alarming experiences, either real or imagined, can trigger a stress response. Signs of stress may be cognitive, emotional, physical, or behavioral.

Cognitive symptoms

　　Memory problems, Inability to concentrate, Poor judgment, Pessimistic approach or thoughts, Anxious or racing thoughts, Constant worrying are the cognitive symptoms of the job stress.

Emotional symptoms

　　Moodiness, Irritability or short temper, Agitation, inability to relax, Feeling overwhelmed, Sense of loneliness and isolation, Depression or general unhappiness are the emotional symptoms of the job stress.

Physical symptoms

　　Aches and pains, Diarrhea or constipation, Increased frequency of urination, Indigestion, Changes in blood glucose, Nausea, dizziness, Chest pain, rapid heartbeat, Loss of sex drive, Frequent colds, Irregular periods are the physical symptoms of the job stress

Behavioral symptoms

　　Eating more or less, Sleeping too much or too little, Isolating oneself from others, Procrastinating or neglecting responsibilities, Using alcohol, cigarettes, or drugs to relax, Nervous habits (e.g. nail biting, pacing) are the behavioral symptoms of the job stress.

Relationship Between Emotional Intelligence and Job Stress

　　There is a high positive correlation between the stress and the emotional intelligence. The management of workplace stress becomes essential to shine. The causes for the increase work-related stress may be because of stress created by organizational changes, reallocations of roles and responsibilities, and the accompanying job insecurities. So these everyday stressors are likely to impact the management students such as working with difficult people and managing increased workloads. The ability to absorb high levels of stress and pressure is governed largely by emotional maturity and personal well being, which to an extent are reflected in the EQ model.

　　Today organizations are stressing people out with multitasking demands over time. It becomes necessary to reduce the intensity of emotional reactions to stress on increased workload. This is because the emotional impacts of work stress are underestimated and the devastating effects it can have on cognitive functioning and on physical health are also not considered. The interventions can be used to improve individual capacity and to reduce stressors in the work environment, which thereby will increase population health and economic development. But it is important to remember that people work in places, situated within complex organizations, and these in turn are embedded in economic, political, and social systems. Today there are many empirical evidence, mainly accumulated in capitalist societies, which shows that lack of control in decision making, in choosing work scheduling and work methods (Karasek & Theorell, 1990), a lack of control over emotional expression, and a lack of meaning in work are major contributors to poor well-being, illness, and death.

II. Sources of Job Stress in the Healthcare Employees

Excess Workload

Excess work load is the main reason of employee burnout in the healthcare sector. A healthcare employees performs many responsibilities at the same time which leaves him/her totally exhausted. A doctor has to meet patients, counsel them, conduct clinical trials and, in some cases, needs to counsel the relatives of the patient. All these activities consume a lot of time. As a result, healthcare workers feel guilty when they don't find any time for their family and personal life. The excess work load problems, if not solved in time, can give rise to the problem of employee burnout.

Work Environment

The healthcare employees have to work in a 24*7*365work environment, which is tough. The healthcare employees work in shift schedules. The changing shifts take a toll on an employee's health. This makes employees depressed and dissatisfied. For a healthcare worker who is working in shifts, a strong motivation is needed.

Emotional Involvement

The healthcare job involves a lot of emotional involvement from the employees side. During a clinical trial process, generally a healthcare worker gets emotionally attached to the patient. Such kind of emotional involvement leaves a healthcare employees stressed when the patient leaves the hospital after recovery or death. In case of patient's death, sometimes it takes a long time for an employee to recover from the loss.

Exposure to Infection

Healthcare employees work in an environment where they are continuously exposed to many types of infections. Patients come with different types of diseases and sometimes they transmit these diseases to the healthcare employees. An infected healthcare employees may get into depression if the infection remains for a longtime.

Occupational Allergies

In the healthcare profession, various occupational allergies are involved. While treating a patient or because of the hospital atmosphere, sometimes healthcare workers come into contact with various kind of allergies. These allergies make healthcare workers stressed and if they keep on getting allergies at regular intervals, it makes them stressed and depressed.

Violence towards Healthcare Employees

Violence towards healthcare employees is another reason of stress. The healthcare professionals are involved in matters of life and death. If a patient dies in abnormal conditions in the hospital or the patient's relatives think that the patient died because of the negligence of the hospital, sometimes the patient's relatives become violent; they abuse doctors and nurses and, in some cases, also start manhandling doctors. All these types of incidents push healthcare workers into a deep depression that ultimately leads to burnout.

Work Organization and Health

The way in which work is organized in hospitals has a significant impact on the health of healthcare employees. Work organization refers to the manner in which work is structured and managed. The work organization includes: management style, work scheduling, job characteristics such as complexity, diversity and number of tasks and control over decision making. If work organization is not proper in a hospital, the employees' health suffers.

Lack of Rewards and Recognition

Lack of rewards and recognition for good work is also a reason of employee burnout in the healthcare sector. When the top management of the hospital does not recognize and reward the good work of Employees, they may feel that they are not doing anything good for the organization. This is why the organization is not doing anything good for them. When this feeling is continuously repeated, may manifest itself in the form of depression.

III.Symptoms of Job Stress Among Healthcare Employees

Low Productivity

When a healthcare employee is depressed and dissatisfied, naturally his productivity deteriorates and the quality of his work suffers. He will not be able to provide the right kind of service to patients.

Poor Employee Morale

Employee burnout leads to poor employee morale; which ultimately has an impact on employee performance.

High Employee Turnover Cost

A depressed employee quits earlier than a satisfied employee. The burnout is the major factor in high turnover cost. Mostly, nurses and other junior level employees quit sooner because of depression and excess workload.

Excessive Absenteeism

When a disciplined healthcare employee suddenly starts taking excess leaves or starts reporting late for work, this could point either to his professional or personal problems.

Lack of Quality and Quantity in Work

When a healthcare employee feels depressed or dissatisfied with his work, both the quality and quantity of his/her work decreases.

Lack of Interest

When a dedicated healthcare employee leaves the hospital on time without finishing his tasks, it clearly shows his/her negligence towards the job.

Misbehaviour

Sometimes, dissatisfied and depressed healthcare employees start misbehaving with patients and fellow workers.

Complaints by Employees

Dissatisfied healthcare employees puts forward many complaints to the HR department regarding salary, working conditions, employee benefits, working hours, etc.

IV. Coping Strategies of Job Stress with Emotional Intelligence

Hospital employee satisfaction is coming under the spotlight, as healthcare leaders start to realize that organizational culture is directly tied to patient satisfaction, financial results and clinical quality. The stresses and strains of working in the healthcare industry can take their toll uneven the strongest personality. From persistent patients to strict regulations, healthcare workers are constantly facing challenges big and small, physical and emotional.

Talk to Out

Expressing feelings of employee in healthcare will help them to get the route of their problem. There may be a deep-seeded issue that they aren't aware of yet, and a licensed therapist can help them to come out of their problems. However, sharing generalized frustrations with peers can be very helpful. Maybe co-workers of the healthcare employees are experiencing similar feelings, or they may be able to give advice if they have dealt with the same issues previously. Bottling up employees feelings only creates more pressure, and a healthcare employee under pressure is likely to explode.

Recharge emotions positively

There are retreats for any and all healthcare workers, as well as get-always only open to those holding certain titles. Typically located in relaxing rural settings, retreats encourage healthcare workers to recharge in the company of their peers. Many retreats feature fun activities such as rock-climbing, meditation, and horseback riding along with time to talk your issues with professionals.

Create a Stress-Free Zone

Creating a 'Stress-Free Zone' at work is an important thing in healthcare.. Put up a sign declaring that area 'Stress-Free' and add to the atmosphere by including fresh flowers, yummy food, or peaceful photographs. Employee happiness is becoming important to employers, knowing that job satisfaction relates to job performance.

Art of saying "NO"

Art of saying "NO" is the major quality of assertive behavior. As a passion to care for others some of the people involved in healthcare activities. So they should probably find it difficult to turn someone down when they ask for a favour, no matter how big. However, if employee in healthcare can't say "NO" they are going to end up feeling burned out fast. Being polite and honest is important when they tell someone "NO".

Formulate a Career Plan

Having a career plan will help the healthcare employee to look forward of their future. Especially for doing a great job. A clear career plan will help the healthcare employee to overcome the feel of burned out and create a path of advancement.

Rational on Relationships

Many healthcare workers deal with clients and patients every day. These are people they may see on a weekly basis, or they may never cross the employees' path again. Nurture the relationships with patients and clients is an important thing of healthy relationships. Healthcare employees may be the medical secretary, the home health aide, or the pediatrician. Having high-quality and rational relationships with patients will lead to stress free work.

Providing Education

Physicians, nurses and healthcare administrators are all educated in entirely separate systems that teach very specific, job-related skills without touching on the roles of other employees in the hospital. If healthcare professionals could start their careers with a common "orientation" course, they would be able to communicate much more easily about problems. "Then we graduate and they throw us together in a patient care environment and ask us to go work together," Dr. Lerner says. "There is no common language amongst healthcare practitioners other than clinicians."

Expecting Staff and Management to Work with Minimal Breaks

Many hospitals are struggling to improve employee satisfaction and hospital culture because of financial pressures. If hospital is forced to freeze or even lower salaries because of the current healthcare climate, we should not expect employees to work for days, months and years with limited time off. Vacation or breaks during the workday can be just as powerful as a raise or bonus because they allow employees to take a mental breather.

Technological Awareness

Few things are more frustrating than a department that won't answer emails or an electronic system that doesn't properly process orders. Don't let bureaucratic or technological hold-ups frustrate your staff. Make sure to conduct an employee satisfaction survey on a regular basis to determine areas that could be improved.

Visible Leadership

The traditional hierarchy of an organization like a hospital meant that upper-level leaders were relatively invisible to the front-line workers. Employees want to know who they're working for and will work harder if they have a personal relationship with hospital management. Interaction between employee and management should start as soon as an employee joins the hospital.

Right Person for the Right Place

The hiring process can be stressful for an understaffed, cash-strapped hospital, and many organizations rush to fill vacancies to make sure patient care continues as usual. But hiring staff members who don't fit the organization's mission, vision and values can have a severe negative effect on the hospital in the long term. Employees who don't fit the culture are more likely to complain, shirk their responsibilities and have disagreements with other workers, creating a negative atmosphere and dragging other workers down with them.

Opportunities for Involvement

It simply means consistently reaching out to employees and then following up with an answer to their question or a solution to their problem.   If employees are not encouraged to give input on hospital initiatives, they may feel that the administration doesn't care about the issues that affect them on a day-to-day basis.

conclusion

The Indian healthcare sector comprises of many segments, which includes hospitals, medical infrastructure, medical devices, clinical trials, outsourcing, telemedicine, and health insurance. Healthcare is a high-demand, high-stress, high-risk industry. It operates in the 24*7*365 manner and mostly healthcare workers are involved in matters of life and death. Healthcare workers have to continuously work with other people at the emotional level. Healthcare workers get attached emotionally to the patients when they treat them for a long time. Healthcare employees' environment include an enclosed atmosphere, time pressures, excessive noise or undue quiet, sudden swings of from intense to mundane tasks, no second chance, unpleasant sights and sounds, and long standing hours. Every organization should assess the magnitude of stress and analyze it to recognize the need for action. This is also called a "stress audit." Earlier, stress was viewed as a personal problem to be tackled at an individual level with palliative or remedial measures. Now, the approach is to be proactive, with emphasis on prevention and elimination rather than treatment. Improving the quality of work life of healthcare employees may go a long way to decrease attrition. All hospitals should feel responsible for the well-being of their workforce as it proportionately improves safety standards of their patients. Employees' positive attitude to their work markedly increases patient satisfaction and patient loyalty. Downsizing as a remedy to cutting costs can adversely affect healthcare delivery and contribute indirectly to the soaring costs of treatment.

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