

Effect of Meditation on Emotional Intelligence and Perceived Stress in the Workplace: A Randomized Controlled Study

Laurent Valosek, Janice Link, Paul Mills, Arthur Konrad, Maxwell Rainforth, Sanford Nidich.

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Abstract

According to the World Health Organization, psychological stress is one of the most common occupational health problems affecting workers worldwide. Psychological stress, including perceived stress, adversely affects organizational commitment, work engagement, and productivity, as well as contributes to poor mental and physical health.

Emotional intelligence has gained considerable attention in the workplace because of its positive association with mental and physical health and with social-emotional competencies. Emotional intelligence refers to the ability to perceive emotions in oneself and others, and to understand, regulate, and use such information in productive ways toward successful environmental adaptation and problem solving.

It is linked to organizational effectiveness, social-emotional competencies such as the ability to manage stress, organizational awareness, and self-confidence associated with work productivity and effective leadership.

Recent developments in neurocognition reveal that decisions and actions cannot be undertaken without engaging both the emotional and thought-processing areas of the brain. Research on decision making and brain functioning supports the notion that emotional-social intelligence is distinctly different from cognitive intelligence. Emotional intelligence can be developed over time through training programs, coaching, and psychosocial therapy. Emotional intelligence is also associated with better recovery from work-related stressors and better mental health in clinical populations.

The impact of self-development and mind-body programs such as the practice of meditation has been studied in the fields of health and management. One such program that has received wide attention is the Transcendental Meditationa (TM) program, a neuropsychological technique for mind-body integration. This traditional form of meditation is generally described in the research literature as an automatic self-transcending technique for brain integration.

Research on TM has shown that practitioners of TM achieve a high level of brain integration both during and after practice. Practice of the TM technique shows increased electroencephalographic alpha coherence and synchrony, especially in the frontal area of the brain, responsible for cognition related to emotional self-awareness and stability. In randomized controlled research, increased structural and functional connectivity between brain areas and decreased reactivity to stress are observed in those practicing the TM technique compared with controls.

On the basis of prior research, a randomized controlled study was conducted to evaluate the effects of the TM program on emotional intelligence and perceived stress in administrators and staff. It was hypothesized that there would be a significant decrease in perceived stress and an increase in emotional intelligence resulting from TM practice compared with controls during a 4-month intervention period.

DISCUSSION

Recent research highlights the importance of emotional intelligence as a predictor of important work-related factors such as stress management, job performance, negotiation, leadership, emotional labor, trust, and work-family conflict. Emotional intelligence further adds incremental predictive validity beyond general mental abilities and the Five-Factor Model of Personality regarding job performance.

CONCLUSION

The results of this study indicate decreased perceived stress and improved emotional intelligence in administrators and staff associated with practice of TM. Total EQ and stress management, general mood, intrapersonal, adaptability, and reality testing composite scales of the EQ-i were found to significantly improve in the TM group compared with controls. These results have implications for organizations interested in improving the mental health and social-emotional competencies of employees.