Workload, Emotional Intelligence and Professional Stress Level among Employees of Private Commercial Companies in Abidjan

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Abstract

This study allows us to assess the stress level of employees in private commercial enterprises in Abidjan, based on workload and emotional intelligence. To this end, a sample of sixty employees selected by the onsite sampling method was subjected to a questionnaire. Processing the results using the student "t" technique for independent samples indicates that employees with a high workload have a high level of stress compared to their counterparts with a normal workload. Also, employees who do not have the ability to use their emotional intelligence have a high level of stress compared to their emotionally intelligent colleagues. This study will enable managers of these private commercial companies to best manage the stress of their employees by taking into account the workloads entrusted to them and the implementation of their emotional intelligence.

Keywords: Workload, emotional intelligence, professional stress.

1. Introduction

In recent times, the profit motive has increased in private commercial enterprises. This situation upsets the environment and the mode of management at work. These companies are forced to improve their responsiveness and adaptability. Thus, employees all become performance actors. The employment relationship once based on trust and loyalty is now subject to judgment on competence. We are thus witnessing a reorientation of strategies at the national level, which has a direct impact on human resource management policies. Goal setting takes a new turn. These new working conditions are a source of stress for employees, as the resulting pressure is difficult to manage.

The National Institute for Research and Security (INRS, 2009, P. 6), defines stress as, "a state that occurs when there is an imbalance between the perception of constraints and that of the resources to deal with them. Although the assessment process is psychological, the effects affect physical, mental health and productivity". From this definition, there are three components. The first is the work situation to which the individual is exposed. The second is his reaction. The third takes into account the observable effects on the physical and mental health of employees, but also on their productivity in the company. Thus, the manifestation of

stress generates direct and indirect costs. These can be identified through medical costs, absenteeism and the financing of substitute resources.

In the private companies of Abidjan, its presence is revealed by the numerous industrial accidents, absenteeism, hypertension and cardiovascular diseases. Indeed, according to the National Social Security Fund (CNPS, 2015), there were 5,498 work accidents in 2000 compared to 4,800 in 2012. As for high blood pressure, the World Health Organization (WHO, 2008) indicates that it affected 34% of populations aged 25 and over. Cardiovascular diseases represent the primary causes of death with 15% of recorded cases. Referring to a survey conducted by Sultan- Taïeb (2005), stress is responsible for 2,300 suicides, 3,600 cardiovascular accidents and 3.5 million days off work. The social cost is estimated between 1.2 and 2 billion euros per year. These figures ¬show the seriousness of the consequences caused by professional stress. However, several factors can be the cause.

Thus, many studies have focused on stress and the factors likely to influence it. But none include the effect of workload and emotional intelligence on this variable. We therefore propose to evaluate professional stress through two factors, which are workload and emotional intelligence. Indeed, companies pursue ¬objectives that are difficult to reconcile, such as making the most profit, being increasingly competitive on the market and being able to offer the best products and customer service. These perspectives lead these companies in a perspective of innovation and perpetual search for new ideas, in order to attract and keep customers. This innovation effort involves enormous changes in the way tasks are carried out. Employees must master the new work processes and tools, causing them to adapt. We then witness a change of attitude, a total upheaval which the worker must face and be able to adapt to. This situation is likely to cause stress at his level. Because according to Chanlat (1999), it is the imbalance between the excess of commitment and the restricted capacities of individuals, which exposes them to stress. It postulates that the efforts to surpass themselves required of employees can exacerbate their level of stress, despite the availability of means.

Thus, the intensification of the burdens addressed to the workers and the difficulty in implementing emotional intelligence in the private commercial companies of Abidjan, can constitute sources of stress, because of the climate of competitiveness and the tough competition, on the job market. Employees must use new work techniques and maintain a service relationship with their customers. The latter, being at the heart of their concerns, the processing of requests does not only consist of technical solutions. But also, taking into account the unique history of each. In addition to these interactions, employees need to brainstorm to come up with new ideas and more appropriate services. As a result, they do not necessarily manage to control and channel their emotions. They find it difficult to manage their emotional intelligence. It therefore seems important to us to take into consideration the influence of workload and emotional intelligence on professional stress, given the pressure undergone by the employees of these ¬private commercial enterprises and the challenges they have to pick up on a daily basis. Which brings us to the next point, to develop our objectives and working hypothesis. The interest of this study is to help companies to better manage the staff. Thus, this study could allow at the level of the employees a better management of the work tasks and the stress which results from it. Company managers could also, through this study, understand the

implication of the pressure and pace of work on the mental health of their employees and find more flexible methods to facilitate their work.

In order to achieve these objectives, we formulate the following hypotheses:

• ***Hypothesis 1:*** Employees facing a high workload have a high level of stress, compared to their counterparts with a normal workload.

• ***Hypothesis 2:*** employees who do not have the ability to implement their ¬emotional intelligence present a high level of stress, in comparison to their colleagues demonstrating emotional intelligence.

Our working hypotheses having been clarified, we move on to the methodology.

2. Methodology

Our study examines the link between workload, emotional intelligence and job stress. We thus have two independent variables which are the workload and the emotional intelligence and a dependent variable which is the professional stress. The work in this part therefore consists of describing and analyzing these different variables, indicating the sampling technique, the data collection instruments used and the resulting statistical processing.

2-1. Independent variables

The first independent variable is "workload". Leplat (1997), describes the workload as being the result of the relationship between constraints and direct effect on the organism. It can be understood by this definition that the workload does not only gather the requirements, but also takes into account the repercussions on the organization. We can therefore say in the context of our study that the workload refers to the level of demands of a task at the time of its execution and to its repercussions on the organization. It is quantitative in nature. These modalities are high workload and normal workload. High workload can be defined as a large amount of work to be done, causing the worker to feel unwell. The normal workload, on the other hand, highlights less of a task that the individual manages to carry out without difficulty.

The second independent variable is "emotional intelligence". Salovey and Mayer (1990) define emotional intelligence as the ability to identify, access and control one's emotions. For them, emotional intelligence is a type of intelligence that is made up of a series of abilities to understand one's own emotions and those of others. In this study, we conceive it as a set of several ¬personal and social emotional skills, which allow the subject to control his emotions in order to face the challenges that present themselves to him and to better manage the emotions of others. It is a quantitative variable. These modalities are: not having the ability to implement emotional intelligence and demonstrating emotional intelligence. Employees who lack the ability to use their emotional intelligence are those who, under pressure, find themselves overwhelmed. Thus, they can no longer control their emotions, concentrate and find the calm necessary for the implementation of personal and social skills. Skills considered favorable for good management of tasks and customers. On the other hand, employees who demonstrate emotional intelligence are those who manage to control their emotions, while remaining focused and using the personal and social skills useful for good task and customer management.

2-2. The dependent variable

The dependent variable is "work stress". For Collective Labor Convention No. 72 (1999), occupational stress is a state perceived as negative by a group of workers, accompanied by complaints or dysfunction at the physical, psychological or social level. In our work, it is understood as a response by employees to solicitations likely to destabilize them. It is a quantitative variable. These modalities are: high level of stress and low level of stress. High stress is stress related to over-stimulation. Low stress level is stress about under-stimulation. Following the description and analysis of the variables, we move on to the sampling technique used to collect the data.

2-3. Sampling

2-3-1. Attendees

Our study concerns the employees of private commercial enterprises in Abidjan. The ¬sample was drawn up using the on-site sampling technique. This makes it possible to construct samples from individuals belonging to the population. They are interrogated at the workplace precisely, during break hours or at the time of disembarkation. Thus, we are sure to meet the population concerned by the survey. The advantage of this technique is that it does not generate high financial cost and it is easy to administer. It consists for the interviewer in going to the places frequented by the subjects of the population and in intervening during their free time. The main thing is to obtain an appropriate sample, adapted to the needs of the survey. We selected according to this method, in the super -markets, the agencies of telecommunications and the pharmacies, our sample. It includes 60 employees including 30 men and 30 women. The constitution includes 20 employees working in the field of telecommunications, 20 employees of supermarkets and 20 employees working in pharmacies.

2-3-2. Data collection equipment

The data collection material is the questionnaire, because it allows the quantification of the phenomenon studied. 11 consists of three questionnaires. One measures workload, the other emotional intelligence, and the last job stress. For workload, we used Karasek's questionnaire (1979), which we modified according to the needs of our field of study. The Karasek questionnaire consists of 26 items. In our work, we retained 23 of them. It should also be noted that we measured the reliability of the tool. The items concerning emotional intelligence were taken from the questionnaire of Goleman et al (2002). This questionnaire includes 18 items, structured around 18 skills, divided into 4 areas. The occupational stress items are 10 in number and come from the questionnaire of Cohen et al (1983).

2-3-3. Administration of data collection equipment

The filling was done in two phases. The first round was used to check the reliability of the workload-related questionnaire. It was administered on the spot at the workplace of the employees, during their break hours in our presence, without any intervention on our part. This was given to employees who kindly filled it out. The great difficulty encountered was that some employees demanded to know all the details before filling. Our silence engendered a disengagement on their part. However, we managed to get 60 questionnaires completed. In the

second stage, we worked with the same sample, but this time we used the three questionnaires which are the final questionnaire on workload, the emotional intelligence questionnaire and the professional stress questionnaire. The filling was as for the previous one. We have not been faced with any difficulties, since a first contact has already been made with these people.

2-3-4. Data analysis

Counting was done by completed questionnaire. Scores from 1 to 4 were assigned based on the responses given, for the workload scale. Those for emotional intelligence and job stress were assigned scores from 1 to 5. Then they were added together to find the score totals for items related to workload, emotional intelligence, and job stress. Professional stress for each employee. The workload scale reveals that when the total score obtained by the employee is less than or equal to 42, he has a normal workload. When it is above 42, then the workload is high. Regarding emotional intelligence, when we have a total of scores less than or equal to 54, the employee does not have the ability to implement his emotional intelligence. On the other hand, when the total score is greater than 54, the employee demonstrates emotional intelligence. For occupational stress, when the total score is less than ¬or equal to 27, the stress level is low. When it is above 27, we have a high level of stress.

2-3-5. Statistical data processing

The information collected on each employee using the questionnaire was transferred to the spss software. At the workload level, the stress averages of employees with normal workloads were compared to those of their counterparts with high workloads. As for emotional intelligence, we compared the average stress of employees who do not have the ability to implement their emotional intelligence, to the average stress of their colleagues who demonstrate emotional intelligence. All of these comparisons were made using Student's 't' test for independent samples. These processes allowed us to have results that were presented, analyzed and interpreted.

3. Study results

3-1. Workload and stress

The study of professional stress according to the workload among employees of private commercial companies in Abidjan allowed us to record the following table:

Table 1: Comparison of job stress averages between employees with a normal workload and those with a high workload

Workload and Occupational Stress	Effective	Mean	Tde student	Significance
Employees with a normal workload	30	34.3 704		
Occupational Stress		23.0 370	7,920	Significant at threshold 05
Employees with a high workload	30	46.0 908		
Occupational Stress		29.3 325		
Total	**60**			

In the table, we see a significant difference between the stress means of the two groups, which are 23.04 for the average for employees with a normal workload and 29.33 for employees with a high workload. For student's "t" test, we got a "t" calculate that is equal to 7.920. This "t" is therefore greater than the theoretical "t" (1.6716) read in the table with 58 degrees of freedom and at the probability threshold of 05.

These results confirm the hypothesis that employees facing a high workload have a high level of stress, compared to their counterparts with a normal workload. Karasek's theory (1979) allows us to explain this result. According to this, the most stressful activities are those where the worker has a lot of work to do and a low capacity for decision-making. So, when workloads overwhelm employees' abilities, they feel overwhelmed and look for a quick fix. The possibility of including their own strategies in the work is beneficial, but they must follow the pre-established rules. We find that this is the situation that prevails in private commercial enterprises in Abidjan. Indeed, employees find themselves faced with loads that exceed their capacities. Unable to make ¬decisions to reorganize work in their own way, they are forced to adapt. Thus, when these loads intensify, employees feel more tension and pressure to achieve, due to the deadlines imposed for results. On the other hand, when the normal workloads do not cause a high level of stress in the latter, because the employees do not feel too much pressure in their accomplishment.

High loads also cause the working hours to increase. The employee finds himself forced to work all the time, even during his periods of leave. We are witnessing the disappearance of spatio-temporal limits with salaried work transformed into a mission with obligations of result. This situation requires increased commitment from employees and amplifies stress. However, the results are not only limited to workload, but also relate to emotional intelligence. This leads us to present the results related to this factor, to analyze them and to interpret them.

3-2. Emotional intelligence and stress

Examination of the effect of emotional intelligence on occupational stress among ¬employees of private commercial enterprises in Abidjan leads us to establish the table below.

Table II: Comparison of occupational stress averages between employees who lack the ability to implement their emotional intelligence and those who demonstrate emotional intelligence.

Emotional Intelligence and Occupational Stress	Effective	Mean	Tde student	Significance
Workers without the ability to use their emotional intelligence	30	52.1 312		Significant at threshold 05
Occupational Stress		29.4055	8,435	
Emotionally intelligent workers	30	55.7 510		
Occupational Stress		25, 1922		
Total	**60**			

This table shows a significant difference between the occupational stress means of the two groups. We have 29.41 as the average occupational stress of employees who do not have the ability to implement their emotional intelligence. As for those showing emotional intelligence, we record 25.19. According to student's "t" test, the "t" to calculate is equal to 8.435. It is therefore greater than the theoretical "t" that we read in the table, 1.6 716 at 58 degrees of freedom and at the probability threshold of 05. This confirms the hypothesis, according to which employees who do not have the ability to put implement their emotional intelligence, have a high level of stress, in comparison to their colleagues demonstrating -emotional intelligence. The theoretical model of emotional intelligence by Coleman (1998) gives us more detail on this result. This shows that emotional intelligence is based on a set of emotional and social skills that contribute to managerial performance. Thus, every employee needs to implement this intelligence to successfully manage their emotions and be effective in their work. This emotional intelligence also allows him to manage the emotions of clients, to demonstrate lucidity and open ¬-mindedness in the execution of his tasks. The difficulty in implementing this intelligence is therefore a source of stress, because the employee cannot manage his emotions and those of the customer ¬, because of the pressure linked to the demands of the tasks and the deadlines set for their accomplishments. .

Indeed, private commercial enterprises in Abidjan are part of a logic of competitiveness and profitability. So, workers need great lucidity to accomplish the tasks entrusted to them. Thus, workers who demonstrate ¬emotional intelligence are able to control their emotions, be focused, show empathy towards customers and be more efficient. They are therefore less stressed. Moreover, when they do not have the ability to implement their emotional intelligence, it becomes increasingly difficult for them to manage their emotions, because of the pace of work and the resulting pressure. So they have no choice but to suffer this stress.

4. Discussion of Results

This study aims to show that there is a relationship between workload, ¬emotional intelligence and professional stress. The results obtained largely confirm our working hypotheses. They show, firstly, that employees faced with a high workload have a high level of stress, compared to their counterparts with a normal workload.

Therefore, Décarie (2010) carried out a cross-sectional study to show the influence of - commitment to work on psychological distress. The data was collected by a questionnaire administered to a sample of 283 employees. He obtained from this survey that the most committed employees develop great psychological distress. Investment in work is therefore a source of psychological suffering, because the employee who always wants to give more, deteriorates his mental health. On the other hand, the stress coming from the devotion to work, is less. Constraint commitment has even more effect. The worker feels compelled to do so, for fear of activating the sanction that may follow. This conflict pushes him to put aside his feelings and emotions, forcing him to work constantly. It behaves like a machine designed to produce results. The consequence that follows is professional burnout. This result supports ours by showing that work investment, through the high workload and the resulting pressure, causes ¬harmful consequences at the employee level, such as burnout.

It is in this sense that Bakker et al (2006) argue that burnout is associated with a high level of work commitment. The results of his study confirm this hypothesis and specify that these people are confronted with depressive and anxious symptoms. The commitment of the employee is therefore not always an asset for the company, but often presents itself as a danger, because the more the worker makes efforts, exhaustion occurs constituting a risk for his psychological development. It is no longer of any use and the organization thus loses its workforce. This result confirms ours insofar as it shows that high workload causes employees to experience psychological distress, depressive symptoms and burnout.

Villeneuve (1992) asserts that the more the workload increases and the time to accomplish it is limited, the more the individual feels a feeling of emptiness and emotional overload. Bonde (2008) confirms that a high level of psychological demands is predictive of poor mental health. In this way, four work-related stressors increase ¬psychological distress. These are too competitive spirit at work, emergence of too much responsibility, too long working hours and time pressure (Shigemi et al., 1997). From all these studies, it appears that a high work pace, with a large number of loads to perform, is harmful to the mental health of employees, which is not the case for a normal workload. In this way, these works contribute to the explanation of our result.

Secondly, the results also show that workers who do not have the ability to implement their emotional intelligence have a high level of stress, compared to their colleagues who demonstrate emotional intelligence.

Mikolajezak et al. (2007) indicate that emotional intelligence significantly moderates the impact of stress, both on psychological and neuroendocrine response. At the psychological level, emotional intelligence is associated with less deterioration in mood and stable emotional reactivity. Biologically, the observation is that individuals with a high emotional intelligence

score show a lower peak in salivary cortisol in response to a stressor, compared to their peers whose level of emotional intelligence is low. Therefore, Schutte et al. (1998) reveals that high emotional intelligence is associated with a higher level of optimism and a lower level of depression. Along the same lines, Mikolajezack et al. (op. cit.) mention that high emotional intelligence is associated with a weaker reaction to stress, both psychologically and biologically. Thus, these studies support ours by showing that the implementation of emotional intelligence is associated with a low level of stress. On the other hand, employees who fail to put it into practice feel a higher level of stress. Also, individuals capable of implementing their emotional intelligence are friendlier in their relationships with others and take into account the management of their emotions.

Petrides and Fumhan (2003) explain that individuals with high emotional intelligence identify other people's expressions more quickly and better distinguish their moods. Baron (2000) reports that people with above-average emotional intelligence are better at coping with environmental demands and pressures. He adds that a deficiency in emotional intelligence can prevent success and reflect the existence of psychological problems. Thus, these studies justify our result by showing that emotional intelligence is essential in the practice of tasks and the care of clients. When employees manage to put it into practice, it ensures their fulfillment and good customer management. But, when they fail to implement it, they find themselves overwhelmed by their emotions and those of others. They can therefore be exposed to stress, due to the pressure of the work environment. Workload and emotional intelligence are therefore factors to be taken into account in the management of professional stress. This study thus contributes to the enrichment of the work chaired in this direction.

5. Conclusion

The general objective of this research work is to show that there is a relationship between workload, emotional intelligence and professional stress among employees of private commercial companies in Abidjan. To respond to this initiative, we made two specific hypotheses, that employees facing a high workload have a high level of stress, compared to their counterparts with a normal workload. Similarly, employees who do not have the ability to implement their emotional intelligence, have a high level of stress, compared to their colleagues who demonstrate emotional intelligence. The data was collected in telecommunications companies, supermarkets and pharmacies using three questionnaires, on a sample of sixty employees. The results enabled us to confirm these different ¬specific hypotheses. So we can make those recommendations. Companies should take into account in their management policies, difficulties in adapting employees to new workloads and work tools. This will allow them to set up training seminars concerning their master's degrees in order to facilitate their exercise. These structures would also benefit from hiring a greater number of agents, so as to reduce the pressure related to the pace of work, to allow workers to more easily apply their emotional intelligence. However, stress being a complex phenomenon, workload and emotional intelligence are not enough to explain it. Therefore, to better understand it, other determinants may be the subject of further studies.

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