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EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE IN THE WORKPLACE: EXPLORING ITS EFFECTS ON OCCUPATIONAL STRESS AND ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT

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The purpose of the present study is to explore the relationship between emotional intelligence and sources of occupational stress and outcomes on a sample of professionals in mental health institutions. A total of 212 participants were administered the Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire as well as the Organizational Stress Screening Tool (ASSET), a new organizational screening tool, which measures workplace stress. The results were in the expected direction showing a negative correlation between emotional intelligence and stress at work, indicating that high scorers in overall EI suffered less stress related to occupational environment. A positive correlation was also found between emotional intelligence and organizational commitment, which according to the ASSET model is considered as a consequence of stress, suggesting a new role for EI as a determinant of employee loyalty to organizations. Finally, the relationship between EI, job stress, and various demographic variables such as gender, age, and education was investigated and results are discussed in the light of the organizational framework.

Emotional intelligence (EI) has become of widespread interest to psychological research in recent years. Goleman (1995) made the concept widely popular with the publication of his influential book *Emotional Intelligence*. However, it was Salovey and Mayer (1990) who first introduced the term "emotional intelligence," describing it as "a type of emotional information processing that includes accurate appraisal of emotions in oneself and others, appropriate expression of emotion, and adaptive regulation of emotion in such a way as to enhance living" (p. 773). More

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recently, they amended the above definition (Mayer, Caruso, & Salovey, 2000) and conceptualized EI as "an ability to recognize the meanings of emotions and their relationships, and to reason and problem-solve on the basis of them. Emotional intelligence is involved in the capacity to perceive emotions, assimilate emotion-related feelings, understand the information of those emotions, and manage them" (p. 267).

Today, it seems that there are two approaches in studying EI. On the one hand, there is the *information-processing EI,* proposed by Mayer et al., (2000), who argue that EI exclusively describes abilities, and use performance tests, such as the Mayer-Salovely-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCIT; Mayer, Salovey. & Caruso, in press) to measure it. On the other hand, there is the *trait EI,* mainly proposed by Goleman (1995) and Bar-On (1997), who argue that all EI abilities involve some degree of skill in the affective domain, along with skill in whatever cognitive elements are also at play in each ability, and use self-report measures, such as the Bar-On Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQ-I) (Bar-On, 1997) to measure it. These models do not necessarily contradict one another, but it seems that they do take somewhat different perspectives on the nature of EI.

In recent years, there has been an increasing interest in how EI affects everyday life transactions. For example, it has been claimed that EI is an important factor in determining life success and psychological well-being (Bar-On, 2001; Goleman, 1995). Fitness (2001) argues that EI plays an important role in intimate relationships and marriage. Flury and Ickes (2001) provide evidence regarding the relationship among EI, friendship, and dating relationships, while Mayer, Caruso, Salovey, Formica, and Woolery (2000) report negative correlations between EI and violent as well as trouble-prone behavior among college students.

Moreover, many studies using measures that in retrospect seemed to reflect EI—for example measures of emotional balance and empathy—provide evidence which support a direct link between EI and academic achievement (Nowicki & Duke, 1992; Shoda, Mischel, & Peake, 1990). Among the areas with the strongest connections to EI is the occupational environment. More specifically, Weisinger (1998) suggests that there is a direct link between EI and success at work. Moreover, Dulewicz and Higgs (1998), comparing the contribution of cognitive competencies and EI competencies to work performance, have found that EI accounted for 36% of the total variance in organizational achievement whereas IQ accounted for 27%, suggesting that EI contributes slightly more to career advancement. Cooper and Sawaf (1997) argue that EI plays an important role in leadership behaviors. Another study by Palmer, Walls, Burgess, and Stough (2000) has also shown significant correlations between EI and three aspects of transformational leadership (idealized influence, inspirational motivation, and individualized consideration), while Rice (1999) suggested that EI plays a role in certain aspects of effective team leadership and team performance.

Another area of study where the effect of EI might be influential is occupational stress. Since stress is conceived mainly as an emotional reaction (usually negative) to various environmental stimuli (Selye, 1956), EI could be used as a framework, within which the individual could learn how to cope with it and how to control strong emotions.

The most common definitions of stress may be categorized into three types (Beehr & Franz, 1987). The first type is *stimulus-based,* which views stress as a situational or environmental based stimulus, impinging upon the person. The second type is *response-based,* defining stress as an individual's psychological or physiological response to environmental/situational forces. The third definition, which is adopted for the purposes of the present study, applies an interactive approach which has often been called the *stressor–strain* approach. It brings together the concepts put forward in the first two definitions in the sense that it defines stress as both the stimulus (source of stress or stressor) and the response (outcome or manifestation of stress or strain). Theories based upon this definition are usually considered to be superior since they offer a more "complete" view of the dynamics of stress and can account for documented differential experiences within a single situation (Arnold, Cooper, & Robertson, 1998).

In one of the very few studies exploring this issue, Slaski and Cartwright (2002) have found that managers high in EI suffered less subjective stress, had better physical and psychological well-being, and demonstrated higher-in-role job performance. In another study, which also explored the relationship between EI and occupational stress, Bar-On, Brown, Kirkcaldy, and Thome (2000) investigated the differences in EI between two distinct occupational groups, both of which suffered high levels of occupational stress; police officers and paraprofessional personnel in mental health and child care professions (Bar-On et al., 2000). The results of their study indicated that police officers scored significantly higher than either of the care worker practitioner groups on most of the primary measures of EI, suggesting that the ability of police officers to be more aware of themselves and of others makes them more adaptable to stressful events, and with better coping strategies (Bar-On et al., 2000).

A concept that the stress model used in the present study considers as a consequence of occupational stress is organizational commitment. Salancik (1977) defined organizational commitment as a state of being, in which an employee becomes bound by his actions and through these actions to beliefs, which sustain them. He argued that commitment concerns the process by which individuals come to develop a sense of psychological ownership of their actions and hence a commitment to following those actions. This approach has his roots in Festinger's (1957) theory of cognitive dissonance, which describes people's tendency to reconcile internal inconsistencies—for example between actions in one situation and actions in another. A recent approach in clarifying the concept of organizational commitment has taken two distinct directions. The first claims that the relationship between an employee and an organization can take various forms (i.e., multidimensional approach), whereas the second involves the distinction among specific entities within the organization to which the employees become committed (Meyer, 1997).

The topic of organizational commitment is often considered as one of the most researched employee attitudes in organizational settings (for an excellent review see Meyer, 1997). As an example, Reilly (1994) in a study using a similar project sample (hospital nurses), identified negative, although weak, correlations

between organizational commitment and burnout, a construct which is related to occupational stress.

The aim of the present study is to explore the relationship between EI and occupational stress as well as its consequences in organizational commitment on a sample of professionals in mental health institutions. Professionals working in mental health settings are considered amongst the most distressed occupations (Cooper, Cooper, & Eaker, 1988), and therefore a negative correlation between EI and sources of stress is expected. Furthermore, a positive correlation is anticipated between EI and organizational commitment, which according to the Organizational Stress Screening Tool (ASSET) model is composed of two aspects: commitment of organization to employee and commitment of employee to organization. Moreover, we will explore the relationship between EI, occupational stress and various demographic variables such as gender, age, and education in an attempt to investigate the impact of these variables within this context.

Finally, we will explore the effect of job type among the three major occupational groups participated in this study (i.e., medical/psychological personnel, paraprofessional personnel, administration personnel) on EI scores. According to Schutte, Malouff, Hall, Haggerty, Cooper, Golden, and Dornheim (1998), it is expected that medical/psychological personnel will demonstrate higher levels of EI, since they have been trained to effectively express, manage, and use their own and other people's emotions.

Method

Participants and Procedure

Two-hundred and twelve professionals from mental health institutions participated in this study. Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics (gender, family status, educational level, and job description) of the participants.

The majority of the participants were married females, with a university degree working in paraprofessional positions (e.g., social workers, nurses, etc.). The mean age for the sample was 36.14 years ($SD = 7.76$).

Participants completed a self-report questionnaire pack, which incorporated the measures of emotional intelligence and occupational stress. In addition, personal and demographic data relating to age, gender, marital status, educational background, employment history and lifestyle habits were also collected. Half individuals completed the EI measure first and half second, in order to control for order effect. Researchers informed the participants about confidentiality issues and that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time and any stage.

Measures

The questionnaire pack contained the following measures: The Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire (EIQ) (Tsaousis, 2003). This self-report questionnaire comprises of 91 self-referencing statements and requires individuals to rate the extent to which each statement is representative to them on a 5–point scale (1 = Not representative at all . . . 5 = Very representative). The EIQ is based on the theoretical model proposed by Mayer and his associates (Mayer, Caruso, &

Salovey, 2000; Mayer & Salovey, 1997; Salovey & Mayer, 1990) and measures four independent dimensions of EI: perception and appraisal of emotions, control of emotions, understanding and reasoning of emotions, and use of emotion for problem solving. EIQ provides also an overall EI score based on the sum of responses from all subscales. EIQ demonstrates very good internal consistency and test-retest reliability indices, while validation studies with other EI tests as well as other theoretically related constructs (e.g., empathy, alexithymia, mood, etc.) justifies its ability to measures what it claims it measures (Tsaousis, 2003).

Table 1
Demographic Characteristics (Gender, Family Status, Educational Background, and Job Description) of the Participants

Variables	*N*	%
Gender		
Males	57	26.9
Females	155	73.1
Family status		
Married	105	49.8
Single	93	44.1
Living with mate	13	6.2
Educational background		
High school graduate	39	18.4
Further education institute	25	11.8
University degree	132	62.3
Postgraduate degree	16	7.5
Job description		
Medical/psychological staff	40	20.1
Para-professional staff	128	64.3
Administration	31	15.6

Workplace stress was measured with Organizational Stress Screeing Tool (ASSET) (Cartwright & Cooper, 2002), a new organizational screening instrument which is the advanced form of the well-established and extensively used Occupational Stress Indicator (OSI) (Cooper, Sloan & Williams, 1988). However, OSI is primarily intended for use with white collar and managerial workers and is very long and time consuming to complete. Therefore ASSET has been developed, which is shorter and applicable to all occupations. It has already been used successfully in health care organizations with adequate evidences of construct and discriminant validity (Johnson, 2001; Johnson & Cooper, in press). According to the authors, ASSET is a very effective tool in diagnosing occupational stress, combining both the sources and the effects of stress. ASSET conceptualizes occupational stress as influenced by a variety of sources (each of them consisting

an independent subscale), such as work relationships, work-life balance, overload, job security, control, resources and communication, pay and benefits, as well as an evaluation of the employee's perception of the potential sources of stress that relate to the fundamental nature of the job itself (e.g., physical working conditions, type of tasks and the amount of satisfaction from the job, etc.) named "Your Job." All the above stress indicators are called within the ASSET framework "Perceptions of Your Job." Finally, an overall Job Stress Index was calculated and used for the purposes of the current study, based on the sum of all the stress indicators described by ASSET.

A high score in the "perceptions of your job" subscales indicates an increased perception of the stressors associated with high stress levels. Simultaneously, it is recognized that occupational stress affects directly organizational commitment as well as physical health and psychological well-being. These are the outcomes of occupational stress. In the current study, we will focus only on organizational commitment. ASSET divides organizational commitment in two subscales: commitment of the organization to the employee (COE) and commitment of the employee to the organization (CEO). High score in both scales indicates increased commitment. The former measures the extent to which individuals feel that their organization is committed to them, whereas the latter measures the degree that employees feel loyal and committed to the organization.

The original ASSET model was translated into Greek by the two authors and then back-translated into English by two occupational psychologists. Differences between the original English and the back-translated version were discussed, and mutual agreements were made as to the most appropriate translation. This procedure tries to balance the competing needs of making the translation meaningful and naturally readable to the native participants, while preserving the integrity of the original measure and its constructs (Brislin, 1980), and has been regarded as a compromise between completely "etic" and "emic" approaches to cross-cultural psychology (Church, 2001).

Results

Descriptive Data

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics along with the reliabilities for the EI scales, the job stress variables as well as the two commitment variables used in this study.

All EIQ subscales were reliable in the present sample ($M_{\alpha} = .90$). Similarly, most of the ASSET subscales used in this study demonstrated good internal consistency. One of them (resources & communication), showed moderate but similar to that reported in the Manual internal reliability (.64) but one (work-life balance) did not work adequately in our sample, since it was very low (.40). Based on the results, it was decided to exclude this subscale from the subsequent stages of the analysis. Additionally, since all participants in this study had permanent job contracts (i.e., it is impossible to be laid off for poor job performance), the subscale job security could no longer be considered as a stress indicator. For this reason, the authors decided to exclude it from the subsequent analysis. After the exclusion of

these two subscales, the mean alpha for the ASSET scales was .74. Finally, the pay and benefit subscale has no reliability index since it is a single item scale.

Table 2
Means, Standard Deviations and Alphas of Main EI and Work Stress Variables

Measure	*Mean*	*SD*	α
Emotional intelligence measures			
Perception and appraisal	50.05	9.44	.81
Control of emotions	93.10	22.13	.94
Use of emotions	83.87	20.24	.95
Understanding and reasoning	99.70	13.25	.90
Total EI	326.73	46.54	.95
Job Stress Indicators			
Work relationships	22.40	7.94	.83
Work-life balance	12.96	4.30	.40
Overload	10.46	4.32	.72
Job security	10.38	4.84	.69
Control	12.79	5.28	.83
Resources & communication	12.63	4.64	.64
Pay & benefits	3.26	1.76	–
Your job	28.11	7.21	.70
Overall job stress index	89.67	24.12	.89
Organizational commitment variables			
Commitment of the organization to the employee	19.46	6.15	.88
Commitment of the employee to the organization	14.66	5.00	.86

Note $N = 212$

Emotional Intelligence, Occupational Stress, and Demographic Data

Table 3 shows the relationships of the EI subscales and occupational stress indicators with demographic variables such as gender, age, and education as well as with job type. In order to investigate whether gender affects both EI and stress at work, independent *t*-tests were conducted. As can be seen in Table 3, there were no significant differences between males and females in terms of the overall EI score. This trend between males and females is confirmed by results in other studies (Bar-On et al., 2000; Slaski & Cartwright, 2002). Regarding the EI subscales, there were also no gender differences in all but one subscale (Perception and Appraisal), where females performed better than males. This result, is also supported by findings from other studies (Ciarrochi, Chan, & Caputi, 2000; Wertlieb, Weigel, & Feldstein, 1987; Wierzbicki, 1989). As far as occupational stress is concerned, no significant differences between males and females were found.

Table 3
Correlations Between Emotional Intelligence, Occupational Stress, and Demographic Variables

Measure	Sex	Age	Education (in years)	Job type
Statistical Criterion	*t*	*r*	*r*	*F*
Emotional intelligence measures				
Perception and appraisal	–3.50**	–.07	.20**	1.84
Control of emotions	0.24	–.19**	.23**	10.52**
Use of emotions	0.76	–.12	.27**	9.58**
Understanding and reasoning	–1.75	–.17*	.20**	1.65
Total EI	–0.72	–.20**	.32**	12.63**
Job stress indicators				
Work relationships	0.34	.16*	–.24**	6.37**
Overload	–.14	.13	–.19**	11.88**
Control	1.35	.21**	–.27**	10.85**
Resources & communication	–0.33	–.03	–.20*	6.54**
Pay & benefits	1.04	.21**	–.10	3.78*
Your job	1.24	.08	–.16*	2.93
Overall job stress index	0.79	.17*	–.27**	10.56**

Note: $N = 212$.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

As regards the relationship between age and all EI and occupational stress variables is concerned, Pearson correlation coefficients were estimated (see Table 3). In terms of EI, significant but low negative correlations were found only between age and control of emotions (–.19), age and Understanding and Reasoning (–.17) and age and overall EI score (–.20). In terms of occupational stress, positive but low correlations reported between age and work relationships (.16), age and Control (.21), age and pay and benefits (.21), and age and overall stress index (.17). These results contradict the results reported by Slaski and Cartwright (2000), who found that there is no relationship between age and EI, but were consistent with the results reported in other studies (Bar-On et al., 2000; Goleman, 1995).

Pearson correlation coefficients also revealed that all EI variables correlated significantly with the years of education. Regarding occupational stress, it seems that years of education are negatively correlated with most of the stress indicators, although these correlations are low. Only pay and benefits are not correlated with years of education.

Additionally, a series of one way ANOVAs were conducted, in order to investigate whether professional specialization (i.e., job type) affects their EI and stress levels. In terms of EI, it was found that job type affects overall EI score [$F(2, 196) = 12.63$, $p < .001$]. More specifically, medical/psychological personnel scored significantly higher on EI than both paraprofessional personnel and

administration personnel. Moreover, paraprofessional personnel performed better than administration personnel. The same pattern occurred in all but two (perception & appraisal and understanding & reasoning) EI subscales, where no effect of job type occurred.

In terms of occupational stress, it was also found that job type affects overall job stress index [F (2, 196) = 10.56, $p < .001$]. More specifically, medical/psychological personnel experienced less stress related to work conditions than paraprofessional and administration personnel. No differences between paraprofessional personnel and administration personnel were found The same pattern of results also corresponds to individual stress indicators, such as work relationships, control, and resources and communication. Only in the overload subscale, a significant difference between paraprofessional personnel and administration personnel regarding occupational stress was reported.

Correlations among Emotional Intelligence, Occupational Stress and Organizational Commitment

The intercorrelation matrix among measures derived from EIQ and ASSET instruments is reported in Table 4. As expected, overall EI was negatively correlated with all "Perceptions of your Job" subscales suggesting that emotionally competent employees feel less distressed at work. The subscales of EI also tended to correlate negatively with all the occupational stress measures. Further, the positive correlations between four of the five dimensions of EI and both types of commitment suggest that employees with high scores in EI tend to show increased levels of organizational commitment. This might be explained from the fact that emotionally competent employees may be offered by the top management increased occupational opportunities and/or simultaneously they are better equipped to identify and effectively use them for their own benefit, resulting in increased organizational commitment.

High EI versus Low EI

Further analysis was conducted by separating the sample into two groups around the mean, a high EI group and a low EI group. Using independent t-tests, these groups were then compared with the various stress indicators. Results are presented in Table 5. As can be seen, there were significant differences between high and low EI groups in all stress indicators. The results suggest that emotionally intelligent individuals appear to experience significantly less stress at work than their less emotionally intelligent counterparts. These results are in line with those found by other researchers (Bar-On, 1997; Bar-On et al., 2000; Ciarrochi et al., 2002; Slaski & Cartwright, 2002).

Table 4
Pearson Correlations Between EI, Occupational Stress, and Commitment Measures

EIQ Scales	WR	OV	CL	RC	PB	YJ	OJSI	CEO	COE
Total EI	–.52**	–.50**	–.55**	– 43**	–.29**	– 37**	– 59**	.53**	.46**
Perception & Appraisal	–.19**	–.18**	–.19*	– 23**	–.29**	–.11	– 23**	–.03	.10
Control of Emotions	–.45**	–.50**	–.48**	– 40**	–.21*	–.36**	–.54**	.42**	.37**
Use of Emotions	–.52**	– 40**	–.54**	– 35**	–.10	–.37**	–.55**	.58**	.53**
Understanding & Reasoning	–.14*	–.17**	–.19**	–.14*	–.30**	05	–.19**	.25**	.26**

Notes: N = 212, WR = Work Relationships, OV = Overload, CL = Control, RC = Resources & communication, PB = pay & benefit, YJ = Your job, OJSI = Overall job stress index, CEO = Commitment of the employee to the organization, COE = Commitment of the organization to the employee.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

Table 5
Differences Between High and Low EI Scorers Regarding Stress Indicators

Occupational Stress Variables	Low EI	High EI	t
Work relationships	25.32	19.56	5.68**
Overload	12.00	8.97	5.44**
Control	14.88	10.77	6.15**
Resources & communication	13.94	11.36	4.21**
Pay & benefits	3.75	2.79	4.14**
Your job	30.19	26.09	4.31**
Overall job stress index	100.09	79.54	6.86**

Note: $N = 212$.
**$p < 01$.

Predicting Occupational Stress from Emotional Intelligence and Organizational Commitment

A hierarchical regression analysis was conducted in order to examine the extent to which EI scales as well as both forms of commitment (from organization to employee and from employee to organization) could be used as predictors of individuals' occupational stress. Table 6 depicts the results from the hierarchical regression using overall job stress index as the criterion variable.

Table 6
Hierarchical Regression Analysis, Regressing Organizational Commitment and EI Scales on Overall Job Stress Index

Variables	R^2	Adj R^2	ΔR^2	ΔF	β
Step 1					
Commitment of employee to organization					.04
Commitment of organization to employee	.65	.42	.43	77.84**	−.52**
Step 2					
Perception & appraisal					−.22**
Control of emotions					−.20**
Use of emotions					−.16*
Understanding & reasoning	.74	.54	.12	14.40**	.09

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

We first entered in the equation the two commitment scales. Thus, any statistically significant contribution of EI above and beyond the organizational commitment scales would indicate the added value of using the emotional intelligence measure in predicting occupational stress. The first result to note is that the COE contributes significantly to the prediction of occupational stress as opposed to the CEO, suggesting that employees feel less distressed when they feel that their organization values them and is committed to them, rather than the opposite. Further, emotional intelligence makes a significant contribution, since three out of four EI subscales (perception and appraisal, control of emotions, and use of emotions) predicted occupational stress beyond the effect of organization's commitment to employee, stressing the significance and unique contribution of EI in predicting occupational stress.

The multiple regression model with these variables revealed an overall multiple R (.74) that was significant, $F(4, 208) = 63{,}72$, $p < .0001$, indicating that these variables accounted for 55% of the variance in predicting occupational stress.

Discussion

The aim of the present study was to explore the relationship between emotional intelligence and sources and outcomes of occupational stress in a sample of professionals in mental health institutions. The most significant finding in this study is the strong link among EI, occupational stress, and organizational commitment. Although the research design and the nature of the study do not allow generalization and detection of causal effects, the implications of these results for research and practise are quite significant.

Implications for Management

The results of the present study indicated that the relationship among EI, occupational stress and organizational commitment was towards the expected direction. Employees high in EI scored lower in the parts of the ASSET assessing stressors and also scored higher in both types of commitment measured (commitment of organization to employee and of employee to the organization). Although the former finding was not surprising, the relationship of EI to organizational commitment confirms the importance of the former to organizational settings. This might be explained by the fact that EI employees feel more valued at their positions, and also less distressed, which increases feelings of loyalty and commitment both from and to their organization.

An interesting finding of the present study is the moderating effect of the job type in the relationship between EI and occupational stress. It was found that medical/psychological personnel scored significantly higher than other occupations within the mental health context (i.e., paraprofessional and administration personnel) in EI and significantly lower in occupational stress. This finding implies that this type of occupation focuses on managing their own and other people's feelings and also in using this ability effectively. It seems that medical/ psychological personnel possess EI skills (e.g., empathy, impulse control) necessary for the successful completion of their work tasks. Through the increased control and positive use of their own and others' emotions, these professions seem to be able to deal more effectively with their feelings, leading directly to decreased levels of occupational stress.

Considering the findings of this study from a practical perspective, the identification of EI as a moderator in the stress process might have a significant potential as a stress management technique. EI training is well established and widely used in Western countries, mainly as part of executive development programs. Nevertheless, its use as part of an organized stress management program may have additive effects in maintaining and increasing work-life balance for all employees, and not only for executives. Organizations that offer a combination of EI and stress management training to their employees, provide them the opportunity to acquire the necessary skills, in order to deal with the requirements of their job more effectively. For example, a study of store managers in a retail chain found that the ability to manage feelings and handle stress predicted net profits, sales per square foot, sales per employee, and per dollar of inventory investment (Lusch & Serpkenci, 1990).

Moreover, the relationship between EI and occupational stress may also be examined under the frame of various human resources practices. For example, including an EI questionnaire in a battery of tests used in recruitment and selection seems to be a very promising technique in order to improve the predictive validity of the selection method. Although there is lack of a well-established and widely-researched instrument of EI (Dulewicz & Higgs, 2000) recruiting and selecting employees with high levels of EI, especially in highly stressful positions, as shown in the current study, may have a positive influence on their performance at work, since they will be able to deal with stress at work more effectively.

In terms of retention with the organization, the current study identified the significance of EI in organizational commitment. The significance of this finding especially for managerial positions is very important, especially due to the fact that organizational commitment predicts turnover in most occupations (Tett & Meyer, 1993). Nowadays, when the "war for talent" has become a very significant issue for any organization, keeping productive employees within the organization is of major concern for almost every human resources professional. Subsequently, emotional intelligence is an important factor in increasing organizational commitment and should be taken into account both when attracting and recruiting employees and when developing them, through management development programs.

Limitations and Directions for Future

A limitation of the current study is related to the unique characteristics of the work environment (i.e., mental health institutions) of the sample. As a result, generalizations should be treated with extreme caution. Nevertheless, the stress levels experienced by mental-health professionals may easily be compared with the occupational stress faced by middle-line managers and executives in a typical, contemporary organization. Moreover, the significance of organizational commitment for any organization is now widely acknowledged (Meyer, 1997). Subsequently, it would be inappropriate to consider the current findings as attributed to the specific occupational setting where the study has taken place. Although a future improvement of the current research design could have been to replicate it in a non-health related organization, the similar findings identified by Slaski and Cartwright (2002) exploring stress and EI in a large retail organization, suggest that EI is a significant predictor of stress at work. Further, the novelty of the new construct of EI requires continuous and extensive investigation of its practical and research implications, which are not considered sufficient at the current stage.

Another limitation of the research design could be that all measures originated from the same source resulting in possible contamination from common method variance. Common method variance, in this case refers to the problem that occurs when the same participant completes all the measures using the same type of paper-and-pencil response format. The correlation between the measures will be higher that it ideally should be because participants will apply the same biases to each task. However, the emergence of multiple factors in the results of the factor analyses (Cartwright & Cooper, 2002; Tsaousis, 2003) weighs against significant influence from common method variance (Begley, 1998). Further, even if it exists, there is no reason to expect that the differences in correlations among EI, occupational stress and organizational commitment are due to the effect of common method variance, since its presence would not be expected to exert differential bias on the observed relationships.

Further, the cross-sectional research design adopted in the present study, as opposed to a longitudinal or experimental methodology, does not allow affirmative causal explanations. Future studies would profit from use of additional measures to cross-validate findings of the relationship among EI (e.g., observers' ratings, 360 degree feedback), workplace stress (e.g., electro-physiological measures of stress) and organizational commitment (e.g., absenteeism, turnover, etc.).

Concluding, the current study contributes further to the significance of EI in applied settings. Although the study was limited to employees working in mental health institutions, the similarity of this professional group in terms of stress levels with other occupations facing similar anxiety/stress levels, offers a significant insight in understanding the effectiveness of EI. Further, the contribution of EI to organizational commitment and their joint effect in reducing occupational stress provide a major step in further understanding employees' behavior.

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