

The Linkage between Individual Differences and Stress

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Abstract: *Stress, which is described as the plague of the era, can cause many negativities in business and social life. Stress can result in focusing problems, increase in substance use such as alcohol and cigarettes and deterioration of social relationships and psychological health. In business life, decreasing productivity, increasing absenteeism, emergence of conflict and chaos environments, increasing intention to leave and decreasing loyalty and satisfaction are thought to relate to stress. When both physical and psychological negative effects of stress are considered, it is important to examine every factor that has the potential to affect stress and the causes of stress. Personality and individual differences are also important factors in perceiving, sensing and interpreting stress. The same stress factor may influence different individuals at different levels and intensity. The effects of personality and individual differences are emphasized especially in episodic acute stress type. The fact that stress is mostly subjective and based on differences in perception makes it necessary to examine the relationship of stress with individual differences in this context. In this study, it was aimed to investigate the linkage between individual differences and stress. Type A personality as a personality trait and emotional intelligence as an individual feature were both examined within the scope of individual differences in his study. A quantitative study was designed for the study purpose. The data required for the research were obtained by the survey technique and the sample of the study consisted of 459 participants working in different sectors. According to the findings, positive relationship between type A personality and stress ($r: .123, p < .01$) and negative relationship between emotional intelligence and stress ($r: .336; p < .01$) were found. Employees with type A personality who express a perfectionist, time-oriented, ambitious and competitive structure are exposed to more stress. However, it is observed that employees experience less stress as their emotional intelligence levels increase. People who are aware of their own and others' emotions and who can manage their emotions are less affected by the negative effects of stress than other individuals with low emotional intelligence. These findings empirically support the theoretical implications of the literature regarding the close linkage between individual differences and stress.*

Keywords: *Emotional Intelligence, Stress, Type A Personality*

1. Introduction

A growing body of literature has emerged today, particularly regarding stress that threatens both work and social life. Even though the moderate level of stress provides some advantages to individuals [1], it is seen that mostly the negative and destructive effects of stress have been emphasized in the literature [2]. Stress induces the conflict of individuals [3], increases their depressive tendencies [4], leads to neglect the social life and causes to inefficiency. The harmful effects of stress are also great in business life. Employees exposed to stress are becoming more exhausted [5], more absenteeism [6], behaving more cynically [7], and an environment of insecurity and confusion may arise in stress-dominated organizations. All these negative results necessitate a closer examination of stress. In this context, it is also important to identify the factors that cause stress. It is possible to mention about physical, organizational and individual factors affecting stress. Although these factors are frequently discussed in the literature, it can be argued that individual factors are one step ahead of other factors in the formation of stress [8]. For instance, the same stress factor creates stress in one individual and not stress in another. This situation reveals that stress differs from person to person and is a subjective phenomenon. It is known that the role of individual differences especially in episodic acute stress type is high and there is debate about this in the literature. In this context, in this study, apart from physical and organizational factors, it was aimed to examine the linkage between individual differences and stress. Type A personality which is a

personality trait and emotional intelligence which is an individual trait were considered within the scope of individual differences. Thus, it was aimed to examine the linkage between individual differences and stress. A quantitative research was designed for this purpose. First, the conceptual framework for stress, type A personality and emotional intelligence was given. Then, the method part, the findings of the research, and finally the conclusion and discussion part were included, and the study was terminated. The study is expected to contribute to stress, emotional intelligence and personality literature.

2. Conceptual Framework And Hypotheses

2.1. Individual Differences

Personality is the individual's distinct emotion, thought and behavior patterns that differentiate the individual from others. Personality, which is an important difference between individuals can affect many issues such as the way people perceive, attribute, and viewpoint to events [9]. Many theories and models have been developed until today, trying to explain personality. One of them is Type A versus Type B personality. In this study, type A personality, which is assumed to have a close connection with stress [10], was examined. Emotional intelligence is a characteristic that differs from individual to individual. It is stated that emotionally intelligent individuals are less exposed to stress than other [11] and are more able to cope with negative conditions [12]

Type A Personality

Common behaviors exhibited by individuals with type A personality include ambition, perfectionism, pessimism, distrust to the environment, high anxiety, competitiveness, hastiness and neglect of social life [13]. Type A individuals who hope to achieve more success in less time are those who act aggressively against every factor that has the potential to prevent their success [14]. Moreover, individuals with type A personality may be hostile to others because of their competitive spirit [15] and they can be aggressive. Type A individuals are increasing day by day in the society who have the characteristics of having an egocentric structure, desire to do more than one job at the same time, not being able to rest, being impatient, having tense facial features and willing to control everything [13]. It can be argued that unsatisfied motives, today's competitive business life, childhood and upbringing are effective in increasing type A individuals. In the literature, mostly the negative aspects of type A personality are mentioned, and it is stated that it is possible to avoid type A personality traits. In this way, it will be possible for the individuals to manage their environment effectively and to raise healthy individuals.

Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence, which is assumed to be both innate and acquired later feature, constitutes significant differences between individuals. Emotional intelligence, which emerges as a sub-branch of social intelligence [16], is defined as the ability to understand one's own and others' emotions, use and manage emotions [17]. Individuals who can control and manage their emotions are considered to be emotionally intelligent and are less affected by unfavorable environmental conditions. In the literature, it is suggested that emotional intelligence is the key to success in business and social life [18]. According to the research, individuals with high emotional intelligence are more successful, productive, more satisfied and psychologically healthier in both work and social life than others. Especially in negative situations such as stress, mobbing and conflict, emotionally intelligent individuals are affected less than other individuals. It can be argued that individuals who are aware of their own emotions, who are sensitive to others' feelings and who can manage their emotions are more effective in this context.

2.2. Stress

Stress, which is described as the plague of our age, is often described as a negative situation in the literature. Stress is defined as the state of tension experienced by the organism against internal and external demands. There are different classifications of stress in the literature. One of them is acute stress, episodic acute stress and

chronic stress classification [19]. Acute stress, which is the most common type of stress in social life, is usually short-term and occurs in unexpected situations [20]. Acute stress is often easy to manage and can be said to be less harmful than other types of stress. Episodic acute stress, on the other hand, is a type of stress where acute stress occurs frequently at regular intervals. Differences between individuals are thought to play an important role in the emergence of episodic acute stress. Chronic stress, on the other hand, is a type of stress that lasts for a long time and causes the individuals to consume their resources. The energy of individuals exposed to this stress is destroyed, idealism is lost, and many things become meaningless for the individuals [21]. Chronic stress is the most serious type of stress. In general, although moderate stress is thought to be an important tool to lead the individual to success, it is seen that mostly negative aspects of stress are discussed in the literature. Stress increases conflict between individuals, causes sleeping problems, induces major depression, and can cause blood pressure, skin, heart and stomach disorders [21], [22], [23]. It is possible to mention many individual, organizational and environmental factors that affect stress. Particularly, episodic acute stress is thought to be closely related to personality and individual characteristics. Although it is not possible to completely remove stress, it is suggested that it will be easier to manage stress by avoiding stress factors as much as possible.

2.3. Hypotheses

Two basic hypotheses have been developed based on the study purpose, which questions the link between individual differences and stress. It is foreseen that individuals with type A personality are impatient, work and speed-oriented, make efforts to do more than one job at the same time may cause more stress because of fear of failure to train or fail [24]. Competing type A individuals feel more time pressure and are exposed to more stress. Strong associations were found between stress and type A personality in previous research [25], [26], [27]. In contrast, a negative correlation was found between type B personality trait and stress. It is normal for individuals who are constantly anxious, impatient to desire to use every moment of time to experience more stress. The hypothesis developed for type A personality and stress in the context of the related literature is as follows:

H1: There is a positive relationship between type A personality and stress levels of employees.

Another individual difference examined in this study is emotional intelligence. It is stated in the literature that individuals who are emotionally intelligent are more successful in both work and social life [12]. The previous research indicates that emotional intelligence have positive associations with positive organizational outcomes such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, positive psychological capital, organizational trust [28]. On the contrary, emotional intelligence was found to be negatively associated with unwanted behaviors such as chaos, mobbing and conflict [29]. It is seen that individuals who are aware of their own and others' emotions, who can use and manage their emotions are more successful and productive. On the other hand, it is suggested that emotionally intelligent individuals are less affected by negative conditions than other individuals. In this context it can be said that emotional intelligence acts as a buffer [30]. The findings of previous research show that there are negative associations between emotional intelligence and its dimensions with stress [31], [32], [33]. The following hypothesis has been developed for the relationship between emotional intelligence and stress in the light of related literature.

H2: There is a negative relationship between emotional intelligence and stress levels of employees.

H2a: There is a negative relationship between the level of evaluation of employees' own emotions and their stress levels.

H2b: There is a negative relationship between the level of evaluation of the others' emotions and stress levels of the employees.

H2c: There is a negative relationship between the levels of managing emotions and stress levels of the employees.

H2d: There is a negative relationship between employee's level of using emotions and stress levels.

3. Method

3.1. Sample and Data Collection

The sample of the study consists of 459 participants working in organizations operating in different sectors. The survey technique is used to collect data. The questionnaire was sent to the participants via an online web site using social media channels. After some of the questionnaires were cancelled which were found to be sloppy, 459 questionnaires were thought as suitable for analysis.

3.2. Scales Used in Research

Type A Personality Scale: A short form of the Bortner rating scale was used to measure type A personality [34]. The scale was previously used by Yıldız and Özsoy [35]. The scale consists of 7 items.

Emotional Intelligence Scale: The scale developed by Wong and Law was used to measure emotional intelligence [17]. The scale consists of 16 items and 4 dimensions. The dimensions of the scale were evaluating one's own emotions, evaluating others' emotions, managing emotions and using emotions. The scale is 5-point Likert type.

Stress Scale: The 14-item scale developed by Cohen, Kamarck and Mermelstein was used to measure stress [36]. Validity of the scale to Turkish was done by Eskin, Harlak, Demirkiran, and Dereboy [37]. The scale is 5-point Likert type.

Some questions were reverse coded by the researcher. In addition, the original stress scale contains reverse coded items. At the end of the questionnaire, questions about gender, marital status, education level, age and income were added to determine the demographic characteristics of the participants.

4. Findings

4.1. Demographic Characteristics of Participants

When the demographic characteristics of the participants are examined, it is seen that the majority of the participants are male (61%), single (65.1%), have bachelor's degree educational level (42.9%), are 18-25 age interval (44%) and have 2050 TL or less monthly income. Findings related to participants are exhibited in Table 1.

TABLE I: FINDINGS RELATED TO PARTICIPANTS

Demographic Characteristics	Category	Frequency	Percent
Gender	Female	179	39
	Male	280	61
Marital Status	Single	299	65.1
	Married	147	32
	Other	13	2.8
Education Level	Primary School	14	3.1
	High School	141	30.7
	Associate Degree	79	17.2
	Bachelor	197	42.9
	Postgraduate	28	6.1
Age	18-25	202	44
	26-30	112	24.4
	31-35	47	10.2
	36-40	39	8.5
	41-45	21	4.6
	46 and above	38	8.3
Monthly Income (TL: Turkish Lira)	2050 and below	168	36.6
	2051-3000	89	19.4
	3001-4000	64	13.9
	4001-5000	51	11.1
	5001 and above	87	19

4.2. Descriptive Statistics and Reliability Analysis Findings

When the averages of the scales are examined, it is seen that individuals' type A personality levels and emotional intelligence levels are below than average and stress levels are moderate. However, since the internal consistencies of the scales are generally 0.80, it can be stated that the scales are reliable. Descriptive statistics and reliability values are presented in Table 2.

TABLE II: DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS AND INTERNAL CONSISTENCIES

Scales	Mean	S. D.	Cronbach's Alpha
Type A Personality	2.6	0.58	0.84
Emotional Intelligence	2.26	0.62	0.90
Evaluating one's own emotions	2.19	0.80	0.86
Evaluating others' emotions	2.08	0.79	0.88
Managing emotions	2.28	0.80	0.79
Using emotions	2.54	0.86	0.87
Stress	3.1	0.54	0.83

Note: n=459

4.3. Correlation Analysis

Correlation analysis was applied to test the hypotheses of the study. According to the findings, a low positive correlation was found between type A personality and stress ($r: .123; p < .01$). As the type A personality level of the employees increases, their stress level also increases. According to another finding, there was a negative relationship between emotional intelligence and stress ($r: -.336; p < .01$). As the emotional intelligence level of the employees increases, stress level decreases. However, the dimensions of evaluating one's own emotions ($r: -.306; p < .01$), managing emotions ($r: -.333; p < .01$) and using emotions ($r: -.328; p < .01$) had negative relations with stress, there was no significant relationship between stress and evaluating others' emotions ($r: -.046; p > .05$). The findings show that H1, H2a, H2c and H2d are fully supported, H2b is rejected and thus H2 is partially supported. Correlation findings are shown in Table 3.

TABLE III: CORRELATION ANALYSIS FINDINGS

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Type A Personality	-						
2. Emotional Intelligence	.28**	-					
3. Evaluating One's Own Emotions	.15**	.80**	-				
4. Evaluating Others' Emotions	.30**	.72**	.48**	-			
5. Managing Emotions	.30**	.78**	.51**	.42**	-		
6. Using Emotions	.12**	.74**	.46**	.31**	.45**	-	
7. Stress	.12**	-.34**	-.31**	-.05	-.33**	-.33**	-

Note: n=459. ** = $p < 0.01$.

5. Discussion And Conclusion

In this study, the possible linkage between individual differences and stress was questioned. In the study, relationship between stress, type A personality and emotional intelligence were examined. According to the findings of the study, as the type A personality levels of the employees increase, their stress level also increases. As expected, employees are feeling more stress who are competitive, ambitious, time-oriented, impatient, nervous and anxious. Individuals with type A personality are people who constantly look at the environment

with suspicion and distrust and are mostly cynical. These individuals' tendency to perceive and interpret events and conditions negatively is higher than other individuals, and this can be shown as the reason why they feel more stress. The positive relationship between type A and stress is consistent with the findings of other studies in the literature [25], [26], [27].

According to the other findings of the study, stress levels decrease as employees' emotional intelligence levels increase. The ability of socially intelligent individuals to use, manage and be aware of their emotions creates a stress-reducing effect. Individuals with high levels of emotional intelligence are less affected by negative conditions such as conflict, confusion, mobbing and violence than others. Lower exposure to stress to those who think positively, empathize and control their emotions seems normal in this context. As expected, all the dimensions of emotional intelligence except for evaluating the others' emotions were found to be negatively correlated with stress. However, evaluating the others' emotions was found to be unrelated to stress in the context of this study. The negative relationship between emotional intelligence and stress is consistent with the findings of other studies in the literature [31], [32], [33]. As a result, as discussed in the literature, individual differences have a close relationship with stress. This result proves that stress is a phenomenon based on subjective perception and interpretation.

In today's business life, although the number of individuals with type A personality is very large, arranging social activities by organizations seems to be important in terms of distancing employees from type A personality behaviors. On the other hand, it may be suggested that organizations should pay more attention to psycho-technical tests during the recruitment phase. Emotional intelligence makes employees less affected by negative conditions and contributes to becoming more successful individuals in both work and social life.

In this study, only emotional intelligence and type A personality traits were examined as individual differences. In future research, the relationship between stress and traits closely related to employee psychology such as psychological well-being, psychological capital, resilience, hope and self-efficacy can be examined. Both the concepts that emerged with the positive psychology movement and the stress are not outdated, new studies are still needed in the literature.

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