ADVERSITY QUOTIENT: STRESS BOUNCER FOR WOMEN EXECUTIVES IN BANKING SECTOR

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ABSTRACT

India is a country known for its rich heritage, diverse traditions and customs, irrespective of any religion, women holds a venerable position. A woman of today has immense potential and adequate skill sets to be in par with their male counterparts. After LPG of the economy, the demographics of employment have been changing in India, where women are represented in workforce in bigger numbers than ever before, holding elevated percentage of managerial and executive jobs wherein these roles demand a fat slice of time of women executives due to which work life balance becomes a challenging task. However, one who is able to balance work life is the winner. We notice that more number of women are joining banking sector and making their mark, due to rapid and striking changes taking place in this sector like policy changes, increased competition with private sector banks, introduction of new technologies etc. It also has provided new opportunities for women and nationalization has been a prime factor in countering some aspects of gender discrimination yet we witness that many women are still concentrated at the clerical level and only very few women employees are at the managerial level. Despite their work position they hold say be it women managers, officers and clerical groups in their banking career face common problems like work for
extra hours to gain recognition, burden of dual role, refusal of men to accept women as seniors, sexual harassment in workplace, continuous technology up-gradation and lack of solidarity among women, which contributes to increasing stress among women employees in banks. We live in the age of adversity and to be successful in life one needs both capability and cope ability. In the absence of either, the individual may fall back at such a rate that he/she is likely to drop out of the system. Hence developing human potential has become much more than a HR issue. Adversities come in many forms especially for working women therefore developing resilience deals directly with enabling a person to respond appropriately in the face of adversity. Absence of resilience can be the cause of stress in life. This study aims at assessing the effectiveness of Adversity Quotient Profiling, a measure of one’s ability to prevail in the face of adversity and emphasizes the causes of stress, how to combat and handle stress by working women’s of banking sector. The concept of AQ has been developed by Peak Learning Inc in USA, the team has developed and standardized an instrument called the Adverse Response Profile ARP, which is the latest and the most robust version in this assessment used for measuring respondents resilience by providing AQ score which is a quantitative measure. To conclude, the study helps to develop resilience of women employees of banking industry by bringing awareness, which in turn will encourage women employees to put forth their best efforts and to maximize their performance capabilities which may lead to better overall organizational performance with increase in ratio of working women towards banking sector to establish their challenging careers in today's competitive world.

Key Words: Adversity Quotient, Women, Resilience, Banking, Stress, Adversity, Performance.

Introduction

Being a woman of modern India, today’s society is demanding women to step out of their houses and is ready to accept them in any roles that show cases them as Professionals. Role of woman in modern India can be called as exceptional, as the transition of woman from the past to present is definitely worth mentioning as it is out of the ordinary. A woman who once was considered the masters of home making is now considered to be the key forces that will shape a country. Today many women are qualified and they are now into different professions, as they are passionate about the work they do and are opened to new dimensions in their life. They are aware of their rights to protest against assaults and discrimination on them also they know to take stringent and strict action against those who dare to abuse women. This drastic change has brought up a new brightness in the face of women and they have begun to compete with men in all sectors and industries and mark their presence in a more pleasing way. The educational empowerment has brought greater change in their outlook and keen focus on their career could bring up positive vibes in the vision of shaping new India. Thus, the position of women in modern India is now considered as one of the greatest social upliftment ever seen.

There was a major change seen not just in the lives of the women themselves but also in the perception of their roles and functions of the society. It has paved way for greater independence and expression of the individuality in Indian women. Work pressure is a part of one’s job profile that helps one to keep motivated in achieving their deadlines, but excessive pressure can cause poor performance leading to work related stress which is a state of condition having direct effect on thought process, emotions and physical conditions of an individual. Research studies have found that women face more stress than their male counterparts. With the revolution in IT we witness that banking sector has undergone rapid changes with regard to new policy changes, core banking, updated technology and increased competition with their competitors. Bank employees admit that due to these changes they are
experiencing an increasing level of stress which is affecting their jobs, health and family. Above all the volatility of the Indian market and economy has created a pressure to maintain profitability with an increase in accountability and responsibility in their job profiles are key causes of stress. Women empowerment should outshine and outdo gender discrimination and overcome all sorts of impediments that come their way and reach the whole of humanity to establish a matriarchal society and overcome the traditional Patriarchal based system with creativity and generative action. The future seems promising as “An enlightened woman is the source of infinite energy.” - Swami Vivekananda.

Background of the study

Adversity Quotient® (AQ) is a construct which evolved out of researches by Paul Stoltz and his team over two decades. AQ is seen as a quantitative measure of a person’s resilience. Research in resilience predates the use of the term AQ. Other synonymous terms that appear in literature include coping skills and hardiness. Resilience has been defined as the ability to bounce back after a set-back. Individuals as well as organizations demonstrate resilience, or its absence, when they are faced with difficult circumstances. The majority earlier research on resilience deals with people in various traumatic and extreme conditions and studies how they cope and rise out of their adverse conditions. A large number deal with correlating resilience and coping to social/environmental conditions and various psychological constructs. The main sources for the researcher’s conceptual understanding of adversity quotient and its correlates came from the two books by Stoltz and the website of Peak Learning, Inc. While the two books elaborate their own research and findings, the website provides leads to other research in the area as well as a summary of their own work in several different organizations.

The first book Adversity Quotient: Turning Obstacles into Opportunities elaborates the concepts of adversity response and adversity quotient® (AQ) as well as its dimensions. The theories on which AQ is based are explained and an analogy with mountaineers facing severe physical and naturally caused adversity on mountains is explained in great detail. All of these form the background on which this research is based. The book provides a version of the tool prepared to measure AQ along with a user’s manual and an interpretation of scores on total AQ and its four CORE dimensions. The last part of the book provides a sequence of strategies (The LEAD sequence) which can be practiced to improve one’s AQ level and move from quitting to camping to climbing. The sequence can also be used to help others improve their AQ and in creating a climbing culture in an organization. The steps in the LEAD sequence include Listening to your adversity response, Exploring all origins of the adversity and establishing ownership and responsibility for finding a solution to the problem, Analysing the evidence to understand your own reactions with respect to the dimensions and Doing something to gain control, limit the reach of the adversity and how long you allow it to endure. The author recommends doing this every time one faces an adversity, so that by force of habit one is led to continuously improve AQ.

The second of Stoltz’s books Adversity Quotient @ Work is a take-off from the first. It is more specific to the application of the concepts of AQ to the work place. A basic change is in the definition of the second dimension. Where earlier it was defined as Origin and ownership and written as O the two are now combined and it is referred to merely as ownership. The definition is now changed to the extent to which you take it upon yourself to improve the situation at hand regardless of the cause. This is the definition adopted in this research. The author provides a tool to measure the adversity quotient of an individual as well as of his team. This provides a picture of the organizational operating system and gives an idea of how the team and organization is handling adversity. The author then relates this to the quitters, campers and climbers in the mountain analogy explained in the first book. The tool Adversity Response Profile and its interpretation along with examples of real people with high and low adversity quotient and their reactions to adversity. He contends that persons with low AQ may be able
to perform with a certain measure of success, but in the face of severe adversity the price they pay is too high. A higher AQ would help them weather the inevitable storms more easily. He makes a case for an intervention programme to develop AQ. The author then provides a more thorough explanation of high and low scores on each of the dimensions and how the limitations can be overcome. The author recommends a continuous programme to improve one’s response ability and suggests entering a climbing school. The focus of the climbing school is to improve one’s AQ, one’s response ability and the overall culture of the organization. It emphasizes improving the CORE dimensions through use of an abbreviated version of the LEAD sequence and some newer methods and strategies. The climbing school operates at two levels. The first level aims at bringing about an awareness of the CORE dimensions. The second level uses the LEAD sequence as its strategy. Finally, it suggests how this sequence can be used by organizations to help nurture climbing and climbers. The book concludes by explaining how the concepts can be used at various levels and in various tasks within organizations.

Sinha, Wilson, and Watson (2000) studied stress and coping among students in India and Canada. In this cross cultural study of stress and coping, certain students in India and in Canada all aged between 16-25 yrs were compared with respect to stress, coping, and selected psychosocial variables namely locus of control, self-esteem, life orientation, and social support. The two main hypotheses postulated that, compared to the Canadian students, Indian students would experience more stress and they would prefer emotion focused coping strategies for dealing with stress. It was also predicted that the Indian students would have an external locus of control, low self-esteem, pessimistic life orientation, and greater social support satisfaction. The results reveal that the Indian students are less satisfied with social support when compared to Canadian counterparts. The findings of this study are important as it clears a lot of misconceptions around Indian school students in relation to stress, which is often perceived to be high.

Mohan (2007) published an article titled, ‘Workshop on Stress Management’ that discussed how stress affects each one of us at various stages of life. It identified three stages for the same viz Alarm, Resistance and Exhaustion. It discussed the various psychological, physiological and behavioral symptoms of stress. The paper also discussed the locus of control in relation to stress.

Naidu (2005) wrote an article titled, “Overcoming and Coping with Examination Stress”. In this article, the author takes a look at the child rights cell launched in Andhra Pradesh to provide counseling to the students taking the stressful SSC examination and details of various strategies that the students can adopt to well in their exams. The article provided information on the examination help lines in Andhra and the various strategies adopted by the online counselors to ease the stress faced by the students. The article is indicative of the fact that school students today face a number of stressors and that it is very important for schools to intervene at the right time to prevent harm to students.

Agrawal and Chahar (2007) examined the role of stress among technical students in India. This study explores the extent and types of role stresses present among the engineering and management students in India. The findings reveal that students are experiencing role overload, role stagnation and self role distance. Male students experience higher levels of role stagnation than female students. However, no significant differences could be observed on any of the role stressors between first year students and their seniors, or between management and engineering students. The findings of the research are important to the present study as it is indicative of the stressful social and educational environment prevailing in the country.

Problems of working women in Banking Sector

It is seen that female employees experience more discomfort, physical pain and fatigue increases quickly particularly in the fourth hour when compared to male employees as there is
continuous exposure to computer terminals and the radiation has its own effects especially has adverse
effects on the pregnant women. On a general count women employees by their inborn fragile health
suffer more from a stressful work environment like more psychological pressure, sitting position, poor
lighting, closed ventilation, dry air and noisy ambience. Deskbound nature of bank jobs makes the
women employees to suffer from severe headaches, strain in neck, shoulder, eyes, fingers and wrists
and susceptible to backaches and waist problems. Women executives most of the time forgo
promotions even after clearing officer cadre exams conducted by their respective banks with the fear of
transfers and dislocation from their family. The worry and thought of attending to their children distract
the attention of women who are in their mid thirties, which has an adverse effect on productivity at
work. In addition working with male executives and extracting work from them is difficult process, the
obedient nature of women allows them to get overloaded with the work of their superiors and they fail
to resist.

As executives like assistant branch managers, accountant, teller, cashier, loan officer, forex
officer, portfolio managers etc are not allowed to leave the bank without settling and tallying the
accounts, the family members of female executives suffer and the executives are prone to mental stress
and have adverse effect on their health when compared to male counterparts. Moreover, women
executives have to handle irate and hear to the verbal abuse of angry customers which upsets the
psychological well being and if male bigot happens to be a performance appraiser they show bias in
their appraisal exercise, if they happen to be subordinates they disobey the instructions of women
executives and extend the work deliberately and they do not get any cooperation from the peers of the
other departments of the bank due to male bigots attitude. If they insist for disciplinary action against
such misbehaving subordinates on the grounds of non performance or insubordination, women
executives step back and feel nervous to take penal action against them, this inefficiency syndrome
continues to tarnish the work efficiency of male subordinates. The public and private sector banks are
located in prime locality of a area while some are located at far off places, women executives find
strenuous commuting to and fro, leaving an unpleasant effect on physical and mental health, in addition
of hectic work load and schedule women find it challenging to strike the work life balance and
harmony. The inability to give up their prime obligation as a home maker cause additional stain on
women officers across the banks as they have to stay back from the family on various obligations like
inspection, audit, assignment and official meetings. All such inconveniences and discomforts are
suffered by women employees, these factors have the potential to influence the quality of work
performance and work efficiency while they head towards their professional journey.

Stressors faced by the Women Executives

Workplace stress can be defined as the harmful emotional and physical response that occurs
when there is mismatch in right person for a right job with regard to capabilities, needs and resources of
the employee leading to injury and poor health. Little bit of stress is good for all the employees as it
helps and motivates to learn new skills and master the job which are key ingredients for healthy and
productive work. Workplace stress is inevitable and leads to physiological and psychological demands
of an individuals.

There are two types of stressors:

External stressors - It includes physical conditions such as heat or cold, stressful psychological
environments such as working conditions and work ergonomics and abusive relationships like bullying,
sexual harassment etc
Internal stressors - It includes physical ailments such as infection or inflammation, or psychological problems such as worrying about something that has mental effect leading to poor performance and decreased efficiency.

The main causes of stress among women executives in the banks are explained as follows:

a) Poor Working Conditions

Poor working conditions causes stress among women employees who work in banks with poor lighting and ventilation, noisy and overcrowded atmosphere leads to unhygienic sanitation with prolonged working hours such inadequate facilities builds up stress among them.

b) Rotating Shifts

Women employees working in foreign banks have to incorporate shift timings in their routine which is leading to personnel and familial adjustments as there is change in body metabolism and coping with odd working times and delivering qualitative output is leading to stress, especially married women executives face lot of imbalances in maintaining their work life.

c) Work Overload

Most of the time, women executives are asked to multitask in very little time hence, they experience stressful situation. Work under load also leads to stress and work overload can be classified as quantitative and qualitative. In Quantitative overload one has to perform more number of activities in the given prescribed time whereas in Qualitative overload means one has to perform a complicated task which may be beyond the employee’s capability and capacity.

d) Role Ambiguity

The women executives do not know what they are supposed to do as their tasks and responsibilities are not clear due to poor job description and job classification during the recruitment process. This leads to confusion and cause job stress.

e) Lack of Participation in Decision making

Many women executives deliberately avoid and isolate themselves by not participating in the decision making process hence avoid invitations for membership regarding committee formations, consultation and ignore attending meetings as it may prolong the stay in the organization and they may have to work for extra hours, they are unaware that participation in board decision making will enhance their career growth and they build in stress of being ignored and neglected.

f) Change in Leadership Style

The leadership styles vary between male and female managers, as male managers mostly adopt autocratic leader style, where he will not involve or consult his subordinates and believes that he is always right. Whereas female managers mostly adopt participative and transformational leadership style which boosts the employee’s morale, increases job satisfaction, positive attitude and builds
organizational commitment among bank employees in India, hence women do not get adapted to their male boss and dislike their leadership style which causes a feeling of anxiety, irritation and tension leading to stress.

g) Lack of Social Support

Women executives do not find a strong support system who are cohesive, as sharing ones joys and worries with other group members they are likely to feel contended and absence of it leads to a stressful environment.

h) Transfers

Women executives resist transfers and to get promoted to next level one has to undertake transfers even in rural areas, as it disturbs ones family setup such postings are stressful and commonly seen in public sector banks it not only causes stress in migrating but also in dealing rural customers.

i) Poor Working Relationships

Women executives have to maintain extremely formal relationships with their superiors, colleagues and most men do not have positive attitude for their counterparts which results in strained relationships with the members in the banks causing negative vibes with the peers by which the environment turns hostile, unhealthy and conflicting organization such work related conflicts crates stress in the minds of women employees.

j) Technological Changes

Technology up-gradation causes stress as it requires female executives to constantly update their knowledge and undertake training and development with enthusiasm of re-skilling their skill sets as introduction of core banking causes fear of losing jobs if they don’t equip themselves with latest technology.
Cause and Effect Relationship Model for Employee Stress

The above figure clearly indicates that the women employees are at a disadvantageous position due to prolonged stress at work due to authoritarian style of top executives, role ambiguity, lack of delegation and in experience in new organizations etc. We have seen the various reasons due to which women executives experience stressful situation causing stressful environment which results in low morale and self esteem leading to various disorders.

Effects of stress on women executives

Women executives due to prolonged exposure to stressful situation produce serious physical, behavioral and psychological effects which are explained below:

a) Physical health

Medical verification strongly supports that there is a link between stress and physical health. For example there is a direct link between heart disease and stress. Stress also causes other problems negative to health like ulcers, headaches, eye problems, skin diseases, arthritis and constipation etc. The professionals and managers experience extreme fatigue like disturbances in their bodies due to peptic ulcers, hyper tension, fever, migraine headaches etc. However despite such disorders executives perform well and fare better than the lower level employees of the organization.
b) Psychological health

The change in employee behavior affects the job performance as high level of stress leads to anxiety, anger, tension, depression, boredom and nervousness which in turn affect self confidence, lowers concentration, reduces job satisfaction and lowers self esteem.

c) Behavioral effects

Adverse effects of stress results in defensive behavior like xenophobia, illusion and denial. Some of the women executives experiencing stress pretend to be busy by preoccupying themselves with routine work while some opt for VRS due to their inefficiency to cope up with the work load and technology upgradation, while some resort to drug abuse, alcoholism to escape from the ill effects of high level stress which are bound to have adverse effects on employees performance. Other way to measure stress is with rate of absenteeism, loss of production and work accidents as those dissatisfied with jobs tend to face stress which is likely to affect their career prospects.

Adversity Quotient the Stress Solution

Adversity Quotient is a measurement of a person’s resilience like how Intelligence Quotient is a way to measure a person’s intelligence, AQ tries to tell about an individual’s drive against obstacles obstructing one’s endeavors and how to become resilient during hard times, AQ is basically how one respond to life’s hard situations as it is a gauge to measure how you deal with obstacles like stress at home, to work, the small hassles and the big deals that come your way on a routine and rare basis. The simple logic is the more resilient you are the more constructively and effectively you can respond to and work through life difficulties while having this resilience this ability to handle adversity also makes life more fulfilling that you are not so easily dragged down by tough situations. Adversity is the one unavoidable aspect of our lives which truly defines us as people.

Stoltz categories most people in the work place as the following:

1. Quitters - Bitter, depressed, and emotionally numb
2. Campers - Satisfied with sufficing and not striving
3. Climbers - Have a strong faith in something bigger than themselves.

Stoltz goes on to compare these three categories in Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs:

- Quitters are often stuck on psychological and safety needs.
- Campers are focused on safety, belonging, and esteem needs.
- Climbers work their way up to self-esteem needs.

So, the employees have to judge and assess themselves in which category they belong to and how to climb up the corporate ladder of success, learn to change their goals, ambitions and thought process and how they will overcome all sorts of work-life related pressure and know to deal with situations in an easy going manner and be successful having healthy lifestyle.
Resilience through AQ a global best practice

- AQ is exceptionally robust whereby it can be validly and reliably measured for a broad range of contexts and purpose.
- AQ is scientifically grounded as it is based on the landmark breakthroughs in eight foundational sciences, drawing from more than 1,500 studies over 37 years and from applications with more than 5,00,000 people worldwide.
- AQ can be permanently rewired and improved, as many witness groups that complete AQ programs improve their AQ’s 11 to 23 percent on average a statistically significant gain and these gains stick over time.
- AQ is flexible as it can be easily adapted to a broad range of uses and enterprises.

The AQ Profile is the most robust instrument in existence for assessing resilience, the capacity to respond constructively to adversity and challenges of all sorts. AQ is the most scientifically robust and widely used method in the world for measuring and strengthening human resilience. Top leaders, industry leading companies, and governments worldwide use AQ to enhance or transform the following attributes to an increasing level like Performance, Productivity, Innovation, Agility, Change, Pace, Problem solving, Optimism, Engagement, Morale, Retention, Energy, Hiring, Development, Coaching, People, Leadership and Culture.

Conclusions

A person’s response to adversity doesn’t have to stay the same always, it can be changed immediately or gradually and improve the AQ level. Our brain is ideally formed to create habits and our habits need not be the same all the time, one can start to change them immediately by responding and dealing with habits in a new way as we generally respond to adversity in constant, subconscious patterns. One has to take up the AQ test realize your scores and it will tell a lot about yourself which you may have not known, as it provides with a transparent feedback and helps you to realize about yourself and how you respond to adverse situations which is building pressure and stress in dealing with real life situations and if it is left unchecked these patterns of poor responses will remain with you for life time so one has to seek honest and positive feedback and rectify your fixed response patterns. C2ORE is the ultimate tool to find out your Adversity Quotient:

- Control- How much control do you have over the adversity?
- Origin- Who or what is the origin of the adversity?
- Ownership-What part to I have in the adverse situation?
- Reach-How far will the adversity reach to other aspects of my life?
- Endurance -How long will the adversity last?

With this magic tool employees can change their thought process, change the dimensions of dealing with work life problems by attaining success, prosperity and stress free healthy life style.

References


