

## Emotional agility on working employees under Indian conditions

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### ABSTRACT

Emotional agility, not yet gained much importance in Indian context. The very term primarily coined by Susan David, a psychologist at Harvard medical school (2013) which has been categorised as, showing both negative and positive emotions are important part of human health growth and environment. This study examined the emotional agility of individuals in Indian context. The research aims to provide importance to every emotion in order to cope with situations during unpredictable circumstances for a full-fledged life. The sample (N = 12) under two age categories i.e., 20 to 30 years and 40 to 56 years, were asked to express themselves on semi structured questions based on emotional agility (being flexible with thoughts and feelings so that one can respond optimally to everyday situations) through a qualitative research for a period of 8 months. It has been expected that the working individuals would reflect a low emotional agility in the case of a new environment and thus seen in the research. The research though focused on the Indian context can't describe it on a whole, individuality may play an important role in case of limitation of the research. Nevertheless, the main role of the study is to spread awareness about the importance of every kind of emotion.

**Keywords:** *Indian context, emotions, agility.*

In the current running world around us, technology holds more importance than what humans have to say or feel. In the world where perfectionism is expected, one feels forced to reflect only positive even while facing the unwanted outcomes of life. Apart from this, where everyone understands emotion either as negative or positive and regard (others) or regarded (by others) accordingly. Hence, the most significant question to address is “what is Emotion?” As defined by American Psychological Association (APA, 2018), “emotion is a complex reaction pattern, involving experiential, behavioural, and physiological elements, by which an individual attempts to deal with a personally significant matter or event.”

According to the definition, the specific quality of the emotion (e.g., fear, shame) is determined by the specific significance of the event. Therefore, if the significance of the event involves threat, fear is likely to generate, if on the other hand involves disapproval from another, shame is likely to generate. Emotion typically involves feeling but differs from feeling in having an overt or implicit engagement with the world. The creators of Star

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Trek tried to project that Vulcans, an imaginary alien race that lacked emotions will be more intelligent than humans. However, Spock did not evolve due to lack of emotions. How important are every emotion for us to evolve as human beings from expressing every kind of emotion and not letting the fear of being judged hinder it. The theory of moral sentiments by Adam Smith (1759) said that emotions were the thread that wove together the fabric of society.

As understood agility can be said as the capability to adapt to changes. In the case of life or even our working space we cannot predict what we can encounter. That's what growing agility is all about ability to moderate our behaviour to upcoming endeavours. Change is a frequent entity of circumstances making us learn and grow with time. Coined by Mr. Taleb in his book *Anti fragile: Things That Gain from Disorder*, this term describes a certain state of a system, he says, "Some things benefit from shocks; they thrive and grow when exposed to volatility, randomness, disorder, and stressors and love adventure, risk, and uncertainty. Yet, in spite of the ubiquity of the phenomenon, there is no word for the exact opposite of fragile. Let's call it antifragile. Antifragility is beyond resilience or robustness. The resilient resists shocks and stays the same; the anti-fragile gets better." The term 'emotional agility' was first coined by Susan David and Christina Congleton in a Harvard Review article published in 2013. Emotional agility is a process that allows you to be in the moment, changing or maintaining your behaviours so that you can live in ways that align with your intentions and values.

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The concept of emotional agility is very new and still needs some more empirical and theoretical support to operationalize scientific exploration. In terms of available body of literature, only few reviews are available by the proponents of the very term "emotional agility". David and Congleton (2013) coined the term emotional agility through a case study method through qualitative research the aftermath of judging oneself for having bad emotions resulting in difficulty in daily peaceful life routine. Further, David (2016) conducted a survey on 70,000 people of different age categories through a questionnaire method, resulting in 1/3rd of the total participants being afraid to express their negative emotions.

### NEED OF THE STUDY

Emotions play a very significant role in the human life for successful survival because if people keep their emotions within themselves and don't express them chances of mental health related issues like stress, anxiety, depression, isolation and so on increases. The very concept of emotional agility is still in the growing stage and needs more empirical support to be operationalized. Additionally, all the emotional theories support the idea that emotions are universal and being equality felt and expressed by every human being on the earth. Hence, it becomes very essential for the people working in the field of psychology and community mental health to explore the phenomenon more, among people from all ages, from different backgrounds and from different ethnicities. Therefore, it was found worth full to try to do a preliminary qualitative study in Indian socio-cultural context to understand the phenomenon.

#### *Objective*

Hence, it is the preliminary investigation based on qualitative research. Therefore, the major objective of the study is 'to study and explore the phenomenon of emotional agility among working employees in Indian context.'

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### *Hypothesis*

In the light of available literature and the proposed objective of the current piece of research work it has been expected that ‘working employees would report low emotional agility.’

### *Design*

As an effort has been made by the investigators to understand the phenomenon of emotional agility from the Indian socio-cultural perspective, a qualitative research design was used for which phenomenological method was employed in specific.

### *Participants*

At the starting the sample of 25 was collected which later cut to 12 due to unfinished data. The participants who were working employees.

The participant would be selected on the basis of following inclusion and exclusion criterion:

Inclusion Criteria:

1. People who have been working for at least 2 years.

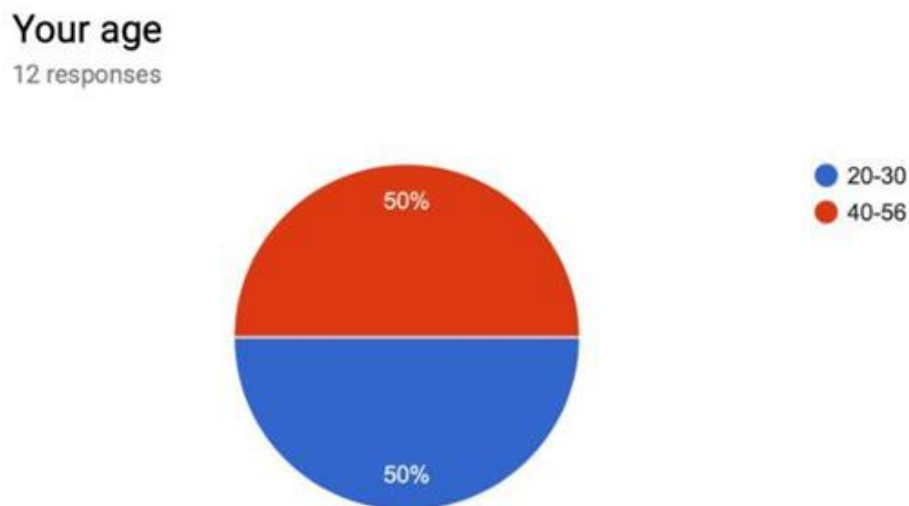
This section looks at the factors that are included in the present study.

Exclusion Criteria:

1. People who are not citizens of India residing in Bangalore, Karnataka.
2. People who are not working.

### *Sample*

N (12) sample size through a qualitative research on working employees’ measuring emotional agility.



*Figure 1. shows the sample size of working employees*

### *Tool*

To conduct and get the responses pertaining to the phenomenon of emotional agility a semi-structured questionnaire was developed on the bases of available literature and talks by the proponents about the concept.

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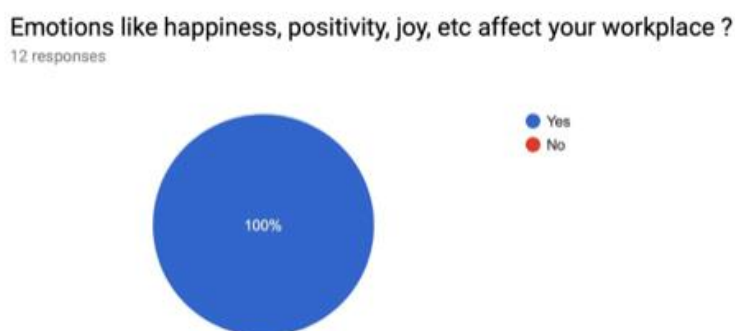
### Procedure

For the Phase-I, the semi-structured questionnaire along with the consent form was prepared through google forms. The same was shared with the potential participants to record their responses. Based on the responses of Phase-I, another semi-structured questionnaire was constructed for Phase-II of the investigation. Initially, about 17 people responded for Phase-I but for Phase-II only 12 people responded and hence only for them data was used to evaluate the responses on both the Phases. The entire process of data collection, coding, de-coding, analysis and interpretation took a duration of approximately 8 months.

### RESULT

The primary objective of the study was to assess the emotional agility of the working employee in Indian context. The study through a semi-structured questionnaire for a period of 8 months representing the data about the concept of emotions, different types of emotions, how it affects participants' (N = 12) in daily working situation. The questions were basic and easy for the participant to understand. The participants reflected low emotional agility proving the hypothesis.

Some of the statements focusing on the emotional agility aspects have been focused in the present study which are as follows:



*Figure 1.2 shows answer on a question related to emotion and workplace.*

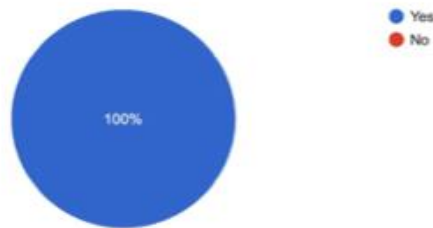
The above statement and the graph reveals that all the participants under the present research reported that they feel and experience significant effect of positive emotions (such as happiness, positivity, joy etc.) at their workplace. It is undoubted and even claimed by most of the investigators (Panwar & Malhotra, 2016) that employees' perceive positive attributes (organizational climate, spirit at work, sense of humor etc.) at workplace would be more productive and report better personal effectiveness. Additionally, positive work environment words as a reinforcing factor to express their emotions and share them with their colleagues.

The next statement talks about the experience of working employees about the effect of negative emotions at the workplace. The responses for this statement, as evident from graph clearly indicates that employees' experiencing negative emotions (such as anger, sadness, guilt, fear etc.) hinders their performance and may lead to the psychological outcomes like absenteeism and turnover. Similar to the positive emotions, experience of negative emotions is quite common at the workplace, but it an unavoidable fact that most of the people try to

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hide them in front of others because they might don't want others to know about their difficulties. Moreover, it is being observed that most of the people at workplace tries to make judgements about people experiencing negative emotions, which are baseless most of the times.

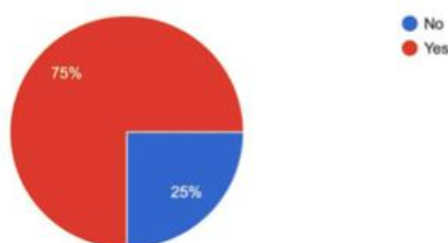
Emotions like anger , sadness, guilt, fear, health, etc affect on your workplace ?  
12 responses



*Figure 1.3 shows answers on question related to bias*

The next question in the series focuses on the experience of bias thoughts and their impact of the professional decisions at the work environment. The responses on this particular aspects revealed that around 75% of the participants reported that they experience bias thoughts and their professional decisions are being impacted by biases they hold. The reasons for holding the biases can be personal or can be learned over a period of time. On the other hand, only 25% denies the fact and claimed that they don't hold biases at work environment as well as don't influence their professional decisions. Form this trend it can be inferred that, majority of the employees just to avoid people make any judgement about them based on their current emotional state, use biases or it can be other way round too.

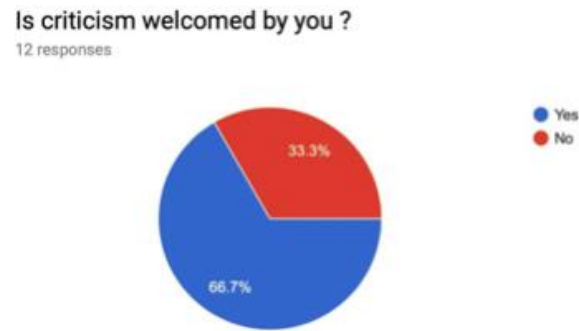
Does bias thoughts reflects in your professional decisions in any way ?  
12 responses



*Figure 1.4. shows reflection of bias in professional fronts of he participants*

In the series of statements, next statement highlights about the fact that whether any criticism by the colleagues are welcomed. In response to this statement it has been found that only 33.3% of the employees do not accept any kind of criticism at the work place whereas remaining 66.7% are in favour for the same. The trend indicates that most of the employees at workplace are positive towards criticism.

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*Figure 1.5. shows criticism outlook of the participant.*

The next question was about the extend to which false information about the employee's effect their functioning at the workplace. The obtained responses exhibited that 41.7% of the employees reported 'more likely' and 'most likely' and only 16.7% of the respondents reported 'somewhat likely' for the statement. These findings reveal that majority of the employees from the present sample reported that they are being significantly effected by the false information about them. Additionally, in can also be inferred that people make judgements about others' around them on the basis of information about them, which might be biased or false knowledge. Not only this, but these kind of information also has a significant impact of the emotions and mental heal of the working group that further leads to non-productivity at the workplace.



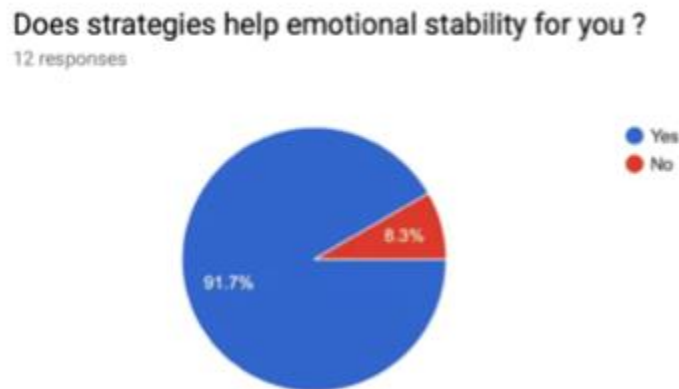
*Figure 1.6. shows effect of false information on participants.*

Finally, the statement pertaining to the use of strategies to help their emotional stability was asked. In response to this statement 91.7% of the participants revealed that use of strategies to handle emotions help them to stabilize their emotions which could be a significant factor to enhance their work efficiency. Additionally, it helps to express both positive and negative emotions, which help the employees to express their emotions properly and without experiencing any biases. This further indicates their understanding about the significance of emotional regulations abilities as well as positive outcome of the same.

With regard to the strategies used for emotional stability varied responses provided by the participants through narratives. For one participant, if it is giving less thought to negativity

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for another, trying best and focusing on positivity are the strategies. “Not share your emotions and feelings with others,” “To be aware of emotions” or “be cool and calm, and think twice with free mind from different perspectives before you react” are the commonly reported strategies by most of employee participants.



*Figure 1.7. showing if strategies help the participants to stabilize emotions.*

During the Phase - II of the current research, three of the major aspect focused to study were related to work place environment, working circumstances and handling oneself during heavy workload. These three segments were identified based on the information provided by the respondents during Phase – I. For addressing the workplace environment the statement asked was “What is new type of environment at work to you?” for which the respondents has given somewhat overlapping responses. Only one of the respondent find it “difficulty to adjust to new technology,” six of the respondent reported work environment as “stressful, difficult and challenging.” Three of the respondents found the new work environment “refreshing and exciting. And remaining two found the new work environment as “trapped, and feel more duties at the same time.” These kind of responses reveal that being an employee even if they do not find the work place environment more positive they simply do not express that and take the duties as their responsibilities. Therefore, there is a less scope for them for emotional agility.

In in order to understand the emotional aspect of the working employees’ the statement asked was, “What is the feeling experienced under strict circumstances at work?” for which again the respondents have given somewhat overlapping answers. One of the participant found the strict circumstances at work challenging while two participant reported it as stressful situation. While the rest six participants finds strict circumstances as tiring, bounded, sluggish, angry , not good and difficult, respectively. The remaining one participant believed it as a motivation and the other respondent tries to find root cause of setback and tries to find ways to fix issues.

Another segment, which focused on disturbance experienced in personal life with heavy workload and its effect. “Feeling experienced under personal turbulence while handling heavy work load ?” Out of which four of respondents indicated being stressful and disturbing in such a situation While the rest respondents were irritability, burden, anger, hectic , unfocused, focus on work while being experiencing heavy work load under personal turbulence.



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Hence, it could be concluded from the above data that majority of employees are aware about emotions (both positive and negative), emotional regulation strategies, their impact on their work performance. At the surficial level, the findings are in support of the hypothesis that working employees report low emotional agility. However, all the respondents reported that they understand the effect of positive and negative emotions, but expressing both equally is not always productive to them hence they express only positive as compare to the negative emotions.

### DISCUSSION

The study was conducted over a period of 8 months for the participants to understand and then answer the questions through their phases of reflecting it in their daily working life. The questions gave an insight to the participant of their self-awareness and some of them gave good feedbacks that just the questionnaire helped them through even in their daily life routine. Each question was based on different kinds of emotions with its impact through the participant's view. The process went on for 8 months until the participant answered the questions analyzing their daily work environment helping the participant everyday.

The findings of the present investigation are in line with the previous research which claims that employee at work place low on emotional agility due to one of the other reason they feel that they might be misinterpreted and based on their current emotion which might be negative in nature people at work place will make judgements about them. Hence it becomes important to educated people that every kind emotion is important part of human behaviour and an individual has to be provided support to express it in a fruitful way.

#### *Ethical Considerations*

1. An email was sent to the participant for collection of data and commitment for a long period of time.
2. Confidentiality is assured.
3. Informed consent was taken from the participant before taking any data.
4. Participants are allowed to withdraw at any time.

### CONCLUSION

The study helped in showing focus on the concept of emotional agility and its impact for the first time in Indian context. The result showed low emotional agility among working employees for a period of 8 months qualitative study in Indian context.

#### *Limitation*

The sample being small and specified does not prove an overall concept of emotional agility but gives a base for further study in this domain keeping in mind the Indian context.

#### *Suggestions*

With the help of better funding from a larger scale organisation a study can be done on Indian context keeping in mind different age grouping helping to develop a scale which can later help in removing the taboo of reflecting negative emotions and focus on stability and the better aspects of emotional agility.

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### ***Conflict of Interest***

The author declared no conflict of interest.

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