# The Analysis of the Relationship between Job Stress, Interpersonal Conflict, Emotion Regulation Ability and Performance: A Research in the Automotive Sector

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### **Abstract**

In this study, job stress, interpersonal conflict, emotion regulation ability and organizational performance perceptions of employees, working in the automotive sector in Diyarbakır, were measured using the questionnaire method. The primary objective of the study is to examine the mediating effect of emotion regulation on the relationship of job stress and conflict, and its effect on performance. To test the model 392 questionnaires were analyzed using the Structural Equation Model (SEM). As a result, a positive linear relationship was determined between job stress and conflict. Also, it was found that emotion regulation has a mediating effect on this relationship and has a positive relationship with performance. Besides these relations, some patterns were discovered pertaining to the demographic values in the questionnaires. Due to the originality of variables, relationships, sample, and method used, this study would contribute to the related literature.

**Keywords:** Automotive Sector, Emotion Regulation, Interpersonal Conflict, Job Stress, Performance, Structural Equation Model.

### 1. Introduction

In literature it is generally stated that job stress has a negative effect on performance and job satisfaction (Yozgat et al., 2013); (Nadinloyia et al., 2013). On the other hand, there are studies claiming an acceptable level of stress, pressure, anxiety, and fear is necessary for motivating the employees (Trivellasa et al., 2013). Job stress feeds the conflict atmosphere in organizations and conflict is accepted as one of the factors that increases the job stress as well (Haq, 2011). Besides, Mulki et al., studied the negative effect of interpersonal conflict and stress on emotion management. In the same study it is claimed that emotion management has a positive effect on organizational performance (2014). Although there are studies on the relationships of our basic variables with different variables, it was determined that there is an absence of studies that research for the mediating effect of emotion regulation on the relationship of job stress and interpersonal conflict.

To fulfill this gap, the hypotheses of the study were set, and a questionnaire including 29 questions was given to the employees in the automotive sector in Diyarbakır, Turkey. As a result of the study, the hypotheses were confirmed and it was determined that there is a positive relationship between job stress and interpersonal conflict, and that emotion regulation has a positive mediating effect on this relationship. It is also stated that as the emotion regulation ability increases, organizational performance increases. In this scope, it can be concluded that emotion regulation has a great importance for organizations since it affects the performance of the organization, especially for the sectors that have a high level of job stress and interpersonal conflict.

# 2. Literature Review

In this section, job stress, interpersonal conflict, emotion regulation, and organizational performance will be explained respectively.

#### 2.1. Job Stress

It is becoming more important to realize and look at the stress of employees in modern life and the stressors that cause negative effects on performance. That's why the number of researches about this subject and its effects are increasing progressively. The job stress is defined as 'an individual's reaction to the characteristics of the work environment that seem emotionally and physically threatening' (Arshadi & Damiri, 2013). There is research claiming that as the difference between the demands from employees and abilities of them increases, also the job stress increases (Yozgat et al., 2013). Besides this imbalance there are many stress drivers like physical environment, workload, career advancement, management style, working relationships, organizational support, work itself, rewards, job security, job autonomy, role conflict, ambiguity, etc. (Trivellasaet al., 2013). These stressors might lead to negative physical, psychological or physiological reactions (Haq. 2011).

# 2.2. Interpersonal Conflict

It is assumed that conflict is natural, functional, dysfunctional and an inherent concept of human and organizational relationships (Haq, 2011). It is possible to define conflict as incompatibility of aims, goals, demands or motives of two (or more) people or groups(Peker & Aytürk, 2002); (Koçel, 2011). In other words, conflict is contradiction, disagreement, opposition or the struggling of two or more people or groups (Simsek & Celik, 2008). In this sense it is impossible to eliminate conflict totally. The main types of conflict can be grouped under four topics; 1) intrapersonal conflict, 2) interpersonal conflict, 3) intragroup conflict, 4) intergroup conflict (Picard, 2002). In this study we will mainly focus on the interpersonal conflict of people in the organization. Interpersonal conflict occurs, when there is an incompatibility between two individuals. Some of the most frequent causes of this kind of conflict are different aims, methods, knowledge levels, abilities and culture or the roles of individuals in the organization. The symptoms of interpersonal conflict might differ and can manifest itself as hostility, jealousy, poor communication, frustration, and low morale (Liu et al., 2011). Interpersonal conflict is defined as a negative concept causing waste of time, money and energy, increasing job stress and decreasing job satisfaction and motivation. Contrarily in some studies positive effects of interpersonal conflict are also stated like supplying the necessary energy and motivation to succeed at a task, satisfying the aggressive compulsion and reaching the best alternative out of conflict of different point of views (Kıngır, 2006).

# 2.3. Emotion Regulation

Emotion has been a part of many different science theories since the 19th century (Callahan, 2000) but emotion regulation is a relatively new concept, especially in social sciences, and has just been studied in the last three decades (Lively & Weed, 2014). The quantity of research done on emotion regulation has increased gradually, as they claim that the emotional processes affects decision making performance (Fenton-O'Creevy et al., 2011) and so organizational performance (Moon, 2006). They assume that to learn from errors, emotional and cognitive selfregulation can affect the performance positively (Turban et al., 2013). Emotion regulation is most frequently studied in customer service settings (e.g., convenience store clerks, hospital and bank workers) and these researches have suggested that emotion regulation affects employees' health, strain, job satisfaction, and customer service performance. Due to these important impacts, many organizations have formal rules or norms regarding the expected emotional display of their employees (Kim et al., 2013).

Some of the emotion regulation literature seeks the most effective emotion management strategies (Thiel et al., 2013); suggests approaches for an effective emotion regulation (Akçay & Çoruk, 2012); explains sociological insight into what emotion management is, how, why, and to what end it occurs (Lively & Weed, 2014); aims to improve the practice of individuals by providing an intervention to develop emotion abilities and strategies (Wagstaff et al., 2013); examines determinants and consequences of emotional management (Turliuc & Bujor, 2013) and some focuses on whether emotion management is a skill that can be enhanced by training (Berking et al., 2010).

Wagstaff et al. defines emotion regulation as being 'capable of keeping emotions under sufficient control to allow for interpersonal relatedness and sociability, prosocial initiatives when appropriate, sympathy toward others, personal assertiveness when needed, and/or other indices of successful functioning(2013, 477). In this scope, the regulation of emotion term, defines two totally different facts. The first one is managing the emotional climate, which is composed of perceptions of the individuals in an organization and the other is self-regulation of emotions(Demir, 2013). Managing the emotional climate aims to develop a common sense, behavior and evaluation in an organization about a specific event, situation, or person (Akçay & Coruk, 2012). On the other hand, emotion regulation in personal terms is defined as attempting to bring one's experience or expression of her emotion in line with common feelings and display rules (Lively & Weed, 2014). So to be happy and successful, individuals should be aware of their power, could manage their emotions and behavior, and understand the emotions and thoughts of other people (Coruk, 2012); otherwise emotion dysregulation will lead to hopelessness and failure correspondingly (Vatan et al., 2014); (Walumbwa et al., 2010). To succeed at this, the individual should increase awareness of her inner feelings and to manage the situation appropriately, it is important to observe the moment in which the intensity of her feelings start to grow. Ciolacu claims that people become blind to solutions when they are under increased pressure, although the solution is right under their eyes. So if people can relax in hard situations, they can more easily solve the problems and this will be advantageous compared to someone who could not succeed in regulating their emotions (Ciolacu, 2014). That's why, emotion regulation is so important for companies that most of them pay their employees for controlling their feelings and emotional expressions, particularly for the sectors interacting with customers frequently.

Hochschild, who is one of the pioneers of emotion regulation research, named this fact as 'emotional labor' and suggested mainly two strategies to regulate their emotional displays; surface acting and deep acting (Hochschild, 1983). Surface acting means managing the expression of affect by hiding an undesired emotion and deep acting refers to changing the felt emotion (Lively & Weed, 2014); (Diefendorff et al., 2008). Shortly, surface acting can be defined as the change of external expressions while deep acting is changing the internal feelings (Kim et al., 2013). On the other hand according to Gross' process model, emotion may be regulated at five points in the emotion generation process; situation selection – selecting a situation from alternatives, situation modification – tailor the situation by modifying its impact, attentional deployment – selecting which aspect to focus on, cognitive change - selecting one from the many possible meanings and finally response modulation - attempting to influence these response tendencies. Besides defining the process, he suggests two strategies to down regulate emotion; reappraisal and suppression. Reappraisal aims at changing the emotional impact, while suppression involves inhibition of one's ongoing emotional expressive behaviors (Gross, 2001). In this study, we will focus on self-regulation of emotion of employees in the automotive sector. There are studies about emotion regulation of different professions, in which emotion regulation is vital, like police officers (Berking et al., 2010), call center employees (Koskina & Keithley, 2010) and airline employees (Hochschild, 1983) but there is not a detailed study about emotion regulation of automotive sector employees which cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression also have a great importance.

#### 2.4. Organizational Performance

Organizational performance defines the organization's priorities and goals parallel to its strategic plans, and involves evaluation of whether all employees from bottom to top are working for the success of these plans or not (Sancak, 2010). In some studies, the term organizational performance is used interchangeably with organizational effectiveness. In other studies, performance is defined as an indicator of effectiveness. So organizational effectiveness can be accepted as a broader construct that covers organizational performance, but with grounding in organizational theory that entertains alternate performance goals like reputation. Similarly, efficiency is seen as the measure of performance, having maximum output using minimum input (Draghicia et al., 2014); (Richard et al., 2009).

Indicators of organizational performance are basically grouped under financial performance, non-financial performance, and technical performance. Financial performance is measured by growth, profit and compatibility between the planned budget and realization. Since financial performance is expressed in terms of ratios, numbers and percentages, it has numeric indicators (Sancak, 2010). On the other hand, indicators like delivery schedule maintenance (dependability), product characteristic variation (flexibility), and product quality are used as measure factors for non-financial performance (Perara et al., 1997). Although these two concepts seem to be very different from each other, there are studies on leading effect of nonfinancial measures on financial performance (Ittner & Larcker, 1998). The third component of organizational performance is technical performance. Technical performance includes indicators like effectiveness, quality, innovation, etc. In this study, intangible assets will be taken into account covering non-financial and technical performance indicators like quality of work life, customer satisfaction, and employee satisfaction.

### 3. Methodology

## 3.1. The Universe of the Research and Sampling

To test the model 29 questions were asked, other than the demographic variables. The questionnaire was given to randomly selected employees from the sales and after sales departments of worldwide known automotive companies. 392 questionnaires were valid and used for analysis.

### 3.2. Collecting Data

Besides demographic questions, four measures were used to define the job stress, interpersonal conflict, emotion regulation and organizational performance levels of employees.

- Demographic Questions: To obtain descriptive data about the employees' age, gender, education level, marital status, experience, and department information.
- In all other measures a 5 point Likert Scale was used (1-Absolutely Don't Agree, 2- Don't Agree, 3- Partially Agree, 4- Agree, and 5- Absolutely Agree).
- All Skewness and Kurtosis values were between -/+1 and the distribution was normal.
- Job Stress Scale: This scale was composed of 15 questions, developed by Weiman(1978), called Weiman Occupational Stress Scale (WOSS), and was translated to Turkish by Özdevecioğluet al.(2012). The Cronbach Alpha coefficient of the scale was found to be 0.78.5. Some questions are omitted due to the low threshold value (4) and job stress is measured by the remaining 10 questions.
- Interpersonal Conflict Scale: This scale was developed by Mulkiet al. (2014) and is composed of 4 questions. The Cronbach Alpha coefficient of the scale was found to be 0.80.
- Emotion Regulation Scale: This scale was developed by Mulkiet al. (2014) and is composed of 4 questions. The Cronbach Alpha coefficient of the scale wasfound to be 0.81.
- Organizational Performance: This scale was developed by Bakiev(2011) by benefiting the measure of Nyhan(2000) and Şahin(2010). The measure is composed of 6 questions. The Cronbach Alpha coefficient of the scale was found to be 0.75. One question was omitted to increase the reliability.

### 3.3. The Analysis of Data

In the evaluation of data SPSS 18.0 was used and the results of Structural Equation Model (SEM) were analyzed with the help of AMOS 18.0 software. SEM is chosen to analyze the relationship of many variables at once and it is possible to take the measurement errors into account with this method (Byrne, 2006). To compare the variables ANOVA test were used. The statistical significance level was accepted as p<0.5.

#### 4. Findings

The frequency analysis of demographic variables is given in Table 1. As seen in this table 392 employee answered the questionnaire properly. The majority of the sample was composed of males, had 6-10 years of experience, at age 20-30, graduated from high school, married, and working in the after sales department. To analyze the relationship between the variables, which is in the scope of this study, a Structural Equation Model was developed as shown in Error! Reference source not found.. In the revised SEM model, all of the indicators showed meaningful relationship with the connected latent variables (p<0.001). A positive significant relationship was determined between job stress and interpersonal conflict (p<0.001). In this model, there was also a mediating effect of emotion regulation between job stress and interpersonal conflict.

Besides, a positive linear relation was found between emotion regulation and performance p<0.001. According to the SEM results, the standardized regression weight of the relationship between job stress and interpersonal conflict was found to be 0.49. The standardized regression weight of the mediating effect of emotion regulation to the relationship of job stress and interpersonal conflict was found as -0.25. The weight of the relation between emotion regulation and performance is 0.63. As a result, it was found that 27% of the variance in interpersonal conflict is represented by job stress and emotion regulation, and 39% of the variance in performance is represented by emotion regulation.

In addition, the results due to the demographic variables are as follows:

- Males reported higher job stress than females (p<0.05, t: 2,8).
- The ability of emotion regulation and performance perception of university graduates are higher than others (p<0.001, F: 9,5; p<0.001, F: 14,2).
- High school graduates reported higher interpersonal conflict compared to the university graduates (p<0.05, F: 44)
- High school graduates reported higher job stress than primary school graduates (p<0.05, F: 4,4).
- The employees at the age of 41-50, reported higher performance than the younger groups (p<0.05, F: 3,5).
- The employees having 1-5 years of experience reported higher conflict and stress compared to the more experienced employees (p<0.01, F: 4,9; p<0.01, F: 4,8).
- The employees working in the sales department reported higher emotion regulation ability compared to the after sales department's employees (p<0.01, F: 5,2).
- Employees from after sales department reported higher conflict than sales personnel (p<0.001, F: 16,9).

#### 5. Results and Discussion

In this study, the job stress, interpersonal conflict, emotion regulation ability and performance perceptions of employees from the automotive sector were measured, as well as the relations between them. Demographic variables were also examined. There are many studies towards these variables in the literature. Kingir (2006) has conducted studies on the positive effects of job stress and interpersonal conflict, on the other hand Haq (2011), studied on the negative effects of the same variables. In both studies, interpersonal conflict was assumed as one of the causes of job stress, but in our study, the subject is held in another point of view claiming that job stress is also a driver of interpersonal conflict. Also, an absence of study about the effect of emotion regulation on this relationship was detected in the related literature. This study, argues that as the job stress increases, the interpersonal conflict also increases; but this effect can be reduced by the regulation of emotions. It is also claimed that emotion regulation is a very important ability since it has a positive effect on organizational performance. Besides, the relations examined; the sample of the research is also original. There are studies on emotion regulation of police officers (Berking et al., 2010), call center employees (Koskina & Keithley, 2010)and airline employees (Hochschild, 1983), where this concept is very important for performance; but in this study the automotive sector was selected as the research area.

Detecting the differences of these variables due to the demographic properties sets us in a theoretical background to present suggestions to be implemented for success. For example, men stated higher job stress than women. In a research in the health sector, making mistakes, long working hours, conflicting duties, and expectations were stated as the most frequent sources of stress. In this study, men claimed that women are backed up due to their gender and roles in the family life. This perception might be one of the causes of high job stress of men (Antoniou et al., 2003). The emotion regulation ability and performance perceptions of university graduates were found higher and interpersonal conflict lower. This might be evaluated as education having a positive effect on these variables. A difference of job stress was also seen between the high school and primary school graduates. This high job stress of more educated employees might be due to being responsible for the same work and getting the same salary with less educated employees. Sales personnel stated higher emotion regulation ability and lower conflict level. In the sector, sales personnel have graduated from university while after sales personnel are generally from primary or secondary school. So it is seen that the same difference due to the education level is also valid for these two groups. In many studies it is claimed that work experience and, indirectly, age have a positive effect on performance (Wu, 2011); (Yozgat et al., 2013). Parallel to these studies it was found that the experienced employees having an age of 41-50 have higher performance than younger employees.

On the other hand, we concluded that inexperienced employees have higher conflict and job stress level, as supported by the literature saying experience has a negative relationship with stress (Mulki et al. 2014). This can be interpreted as experienced employees are less affected by the negative effects of stress and conflict factors like fear of making mistakes, anxiety of career path, work load, job security, etc. As a result, mainly it can be suggested that enhancing the emotion regulation of employees or hiring people already having this ability would decrease the negative effects of job stress on interpersonal conflict. This kind of employee would increase the organizational performance as well. Education has a positive effect on emotion regulation ability and performance perception; and negative effect on conflict. So the companies should give more importance to trainings and reserve more financial source for learning activities.

#### 6. Future Research and Limitations

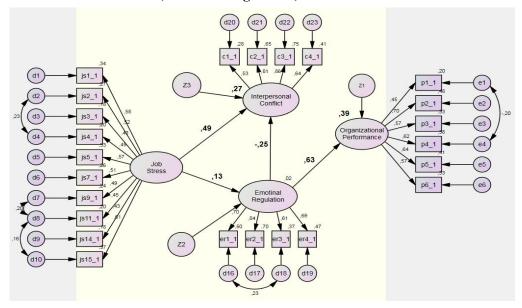
In this study, the mediating effect of self-regulation of emotion on the relationship between job stress and interpersonal conflict was examined. In future studies, mediating effect of new variables might be examined like management of emotional climate. The relationship of job stress and conflict with performance might also be another subject to be focused on. Including only a sample of employees in automotive sector and applying the questionnaire only in the city of Diyarbakır are some of the limitations in this study. Therefore the study might be repeated for another sector and/or city. As it is in other studies using questionnaires, this study is also based on perceptions of people, other than objective evaluations.

Table1:	Demograp	hic V	/ariables
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Variables	Frequency (%)	Variables	Frequency (%)	
Gender		Experience (years)		
Female	72 (18,4)	1-5	119 (30,4)	
Male	318 (81,1)	6-10	138 (35,2)	
Age		11-15	85 (21,7)	
20-30	188 (48)	16-20	27 (6,9)	
31-40	148 (37,8)	20 +	19 (4,8)	
41-50	42 (10,7)	Department		
50 +	11 (2,8)	Sale	67 (17,1)	
<b>Education Level</b>		After Sale	213 (54,3)	
Primary	102 (26)	Other	106 (27)	
High School	172 (43,9)	Marital Status		
University	107 (27,3)	Married	225 (57,4)	
Master/Doctorate	10 (2,6)	Single	165 (42,1)	

n=392

Figure 1: The Structural Equation Model Showing the Relationship between Job Stress, Interpersonal Conflict, Emotion Regulation, and Performance



CMIN/DF: 1.9, TLI: .90, CFI: .9.1, RMSEA: 0.48, PLCLOSE: .658, HOLTER: 237

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