

ADVERSITY QUOTIENT: ONE STOP SOLUTION TO COMBAT ATTRITION RATE OF WOMEN IN INDIAN IT SECTOR

Shivaranjani

Lecturer, Department of Management Studies, HKBK College of Engineering, Bangalore.

Abstract

We live in an 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 so developing human potential has become much more than a Human Resource issue today. Adversities come in many forms especially for a working woman as she is likely to play multifaceted roles in fulfilling her individual and societal obligations due to which she is likely to encounter organizational issues and career issues, so 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. In this context, it is interesting to examine the Adversity Quotient levels of women's in the software services sector through Adversity Quotient Profiling, a measure of one's ability to prevail in the face of adversity and also to bring awareness to women employees using Adversity Quotient Assessment tool to combat attrition rate and organizations can prevent talent leakage thereby influencing the not working category of women to get employed and contribute to the nation's economy.

Key words: *Adversity, Resilience, Attrition, Adversity Quotient, Information Technology Sector, Women.*

Introduction

The development of software industries is one of the most speculated achievements of the Indian economy, the employment in Bangalore is what makes it an IT HUB and it is nick named as the Silicon Valley of India like Silicon Valley located in California is a mega hub for IT companies in USA. The new recruitment drive in most of software industries is increasing the male to female Ratio for 75:25 in 2001 to 60:40 in 2009 as per NASSCOM analysis 2009. This ratio continues to increase for females and the credit goes to the pivotal role played by the software industries in bridging the gender divide by ensuring no bias while offering positions to woman candidates. Som Mittal, President, NASSCOM, holds that gender inclusivity is a must for the long term success of industry. He admits that India will play a key role in future transformation as women are a key and vital part of today's workforce and industry will continue to work towards creating a conducive environment and attract more women employees and leaders. Workplace diversity in industry gives it a leading edge in the marketplace, and is therefore of even greater importance in these times of economic recession and slowdown. Gender inclusivity is no longer corporate social responsibility but a business imperative. The characteristics of the software services industry in India and the nature of its work pose some unique challenges for professionals in the industry, especially for women. The organizations in the software industry in India are project based and as the industry has matured, more complex and strategic projects have been outsourced to India. This requires a strong operational and delivery focus in a 24/7 environment and it creates pressure on software professionals to work longer hours. This pressure is an outcome of two factors. Firstly, the time differences with the US and Europe which is the dominant trade partners in the industry, which necessitate employees to work evenings in India and maintain the concept of a 24-hour knowledge factory. Secondly, the project orientation of the industry, with rapid technology changes that make skills quickly obsolete, requires software professionals to frequently re-skill. Consequently, software professionals need to put in extra training and educational hours to cope up with these changes. Those women who aspire to play a bigger role in technology need to maintain a consistently high learning curve. The time required for professional development will have to come out of personal time of the employees. Long working hours, unpredictable workloads and the constant pressure of updating skills have a negative impact on work-family balance. The nature of the industry and the

fact that most women software professionals are in the crucial phase in women's lives i.e. 23 to 38 years, where women are drawn into marriage and motherhood, put increasing pressure on maintaining a work life balance in a transitioning society like India, where traditionally a woman's role is redefined in relation to herself, her family and society, the new and expanded role of women with a strong occupational identity is putting pressure on their persistence with their careers. Given this context, if organizations need to strengthen their talent pipeline of women within the organization, there is a need to ensure that more women to remain in the workforce. Only if significant number of women persisted in the workforce through the early career stages, would the talent pool of senior women leaders in organizations get strengthened.

Adversity Quotient

In the past few decades, researchers have devoted much of their attention to IQ-Intelligence Quotient and EQ-Emotional Quotient, which are believed to be determinants of success and excellent performance. Now, Paul Stoltz (2000) has introduced a new and fascinating concept Adversity Quotient (AQ), which tells how well one withstands adversity and his ability to surmount it. For employees and managers, AQ seems to be the missing factor to success. Today AQ becomes more and more important as the daily dose of adversity rises. The basis of organizational capacity lies with the capacity of each employee and every manager who handles the smallest unit in an organization. How they respond to adversity is the basis of consistently creating outstanding results. In this fast growing world where they are exposed to each day demands greater speed, capacity and capabilities. Managers face multifaceted tasks, it is inevitable for them to encounter hard times along with exposure to different people of different organizational levels in the company and their performance can be affected by many factors that surround them including people. In turn they also affect several employees above or below the organizational structure or even those in the same level with them. No one can deny that in the different stages of life, people encounter or face different hardships, difficulties, challenges, adversities, sorrows, or great losses, which are difficult to bridge. However, people do not respond in the same way to identical situations. There are some people who, despite of seemingly insurmountable odds somehow keep going, while others are pounded down by an incessant avalanche of change. These individuals are able to consistently rise up and break through being more skilled and empowered as they go. All this reflects one's self concept, confidence in one's abilities and courage to face adverse situations. This means, that there is some measurement to determine the ability of an individual to handle adversities, which is known as Adversity Quotient®. Resiliency comes from "the everyday magic of ordinary, normative human resources".

Adversity Quotient® (AQ) is the science of human resilience (Stoltz, 2000). Resilience in psychology refers to the idea of an individual's tendency to cope with stress and adversity. This coping may result in the individual "bouncing back" to a previous state of normal functioning, or simply not showing negative effects. Resilience is a dynamic process whereby individual exhibit positive behavioral adaptation when they encounter significant adversity. According to Stoltz (2000), Adversity Quotient measures one's ability to prevail in the face of adversity. It explains how one responds to adverse situations and how one rises above adversity. Stoltz (2000) said that life is like mountain climbing and that people are born with a core human drive to ascend. Ascending means moving toward one's purpose no matter what are the goals. AQ is the underlying factor that determines one's ability to ascend. The Merriam-Webster's Online Dictionary (2009) defines adversity as a state, condition or instance of serious or continued difficulty. Individuals continually encounter adversities. Adversities may be small or big, imagined or real, self created or brought on by others, but they are a part of life. It is believed that today on the average an individual may need to deal with as many as twenty three to thirty adversities on any one day (1997). Each adversity or challenge brings with it its own stress. Not everyone will, or can, deal with each situation with equal

equanimity. It requires a certain level of resilience (and Adversity Quotient ®) to use each adverse situation to one's benefit. Adversity quotient ®(AQ), a concept elaborated by Stoltz (1997), is a measure of how a person responds to adversity. It is a measure of his ability to bounce back and deal with a negative situation in a positive way (resilience). It is the consistent way in which he reacts, when faced with an obstacle to his functioning. The average number of adversities one may face in a day would be around. These may range from the very simple, to the very serious. How a person reacts to adversity has been described as his adversity response and is measured by his adversity quotient.

The concept of AQ arises out of considerations of related psychological theories which have a history of over three decades of research in related areas, such as theories of learned helplessness, resilience, hardiness and locus of control. The three building blocks of AQ ® are Cognitive Psychology, Neurophysiology and Psycho-neuroimmunology.

Cognitive Psychology informs us that people differ on a continuum in what adversity can do to them and this depends largely on how they react to adversity. People who feel helpless and unable to react constructively to adversity suffer whereas those who consider it as fleeting and limited and within their power to do something about are able to move beyond and above the adversity. Adversity can become their tool for progress and growth.

Neurophysiology indicates that man is a creature of habit and all habits are learned. New habits can replace old habits and over time old unused habits usually wither out. In the context of adversity, the ways in which an individual reacts to adversity is learned and over time becomes a habit. If one continues to react in a negative way to adversity, it is the negative habit which gets entrenched in the psyche and influences the way one reacts to the next adversity and vice versa.

Psychoneuroimmunology indicates that there is a direct link between one's response to adversity and health both physical and mental. One's ability to recover from severe body trauma such as surgery, for example, would not only depend upon the body's physical health but equally upon one's perception of being able to cope with the adversity. A weak pattern of response to adversity would most likely lead to a long recovery period and depression.

All three have contributed to the theory of Adversity Quotient and direct parallels can be drawn from them.

Stoltz contends that:

1. AQ can be measured reliably and validly
2. AQ can be used to predict performance and other critical variables
3. AQ can be rewired and strengthened
4. AQ can be applied to a variety of situations across cultures and industries

He draws an analogy with the life threatening, physical adversities that a mountaineer may face. On the basis of their response to the adversity people may be classified as climbers, campers or quitters.

Climbers are described as people who even in the face of severe adversity even when they seem to be almost wiped out will have the physical and mental strength to get up collect themselves make best use of their resources and move on to survive.

Campers on the other hand are the ones who when faced by an adversity will use all their resources to merely somehow hold on to the positions they are at without active effort to move on to a better position.

Quitters are the ones who give up. They will allow the adversity to overtake them and let the events take their own course without conscious and deliberate effort to do something about it.

The AQ framework is has been constructed for use in the organizational setting. The Adversity Response Profile and the training programme (The LEAD sequence), have all been formalized in the organizational setting. It could be adapted to other settings and that is what has been attempted in this research. An individual’s response to adversity is measured by a tool The Adversity Response Profile (ARP).

The ARP simultaneously measures the four dimensions of Adversity Quotient namely Control, Ownership, Reach and Endurance. The concept of AQ has been developed by Dr. Paul Stoltz at “Peak Learning Inc” in the USA. As a part of the research related to the concept of ‘AQ’ the team has developed and standardized an instrument called the adversity response profile (ARP) 9, which is the latest and most Robust version in this assessment used for measuring respondents resilience provides the AQ scores which is as quantitative measure of the respondents resilience. AQ has four “CORE” dimensions that describe your pattern of response to adversity.

Table 1: Dimensions of Adversity Quotient

Dimension	What it is	What it Determines
Control	The extent to which someone perceives they can influence whatever happens next	Resilience, health and tenacity
Ownership	The likelihood that someone will actually do anything to improve the situation regardless of their formal responsibilities	Accountability, responsibility, action and engagement
Reach	The extent to which someone perceives an adversity will “reach into” and affect other aspects of the situation or beyond	Burden, stress, energy and effort, it tends to have cumulative effect
Endurance	The length of time the individual perceives the situation / adversity will last or endure	Hope, optimism and willingness to persevere

Source : <http://www.peaklearning.com/about_aq-profile.php>

Researchers at Peak Learning, Inc. believe that low AQ is the result of learned helplessness (LH). If LH can be the result of environmental influences, the opposite must also be true. Their research studies in the organizational setting have shown that:

1. Individuals can be taught to expand their capacities and accomplish more.
2. Leaders can be helped to become more resilient.
3. Organizations can develop greater resilience leading to higher performance.
4. Individuals can be taught to become catalysts of change and become innovation leaders.
5. Being able to withstand adversity will encourage employees to stay on and face challenges.
6. The image of the organization will improve both, in the eyes of the employees and of the customers.

Stoltz (2000) further indicated that people who successfully apply AQ perform optimally in the face of adversity the challenges, big and small, that confront us each day. In fact, they not only learn from these challenges but they also respond to them better and faster. For businesses and other

organizations, a high Adversity Quotient workforce translates to increased capacity, productivity and innovation as well as lower attrition and higher morale. Siebert (2005) defines resiliency as the ability to adapt to life's changes & crises. It is the key to a healthy and productive life. Siebert believes that there is a science of resiliency and his research explains how and why some people are more resilient than others & how resilience can be learnt at any age. Siebert's book *The Resiliency Advantage* details five levels of resiliency and provides a programme of activities to increase resilience. The character traits at the two ends of the continuum that is resilience vs. vulnerability, such as resisting change vs. embracing change, acting morally vs. living morally, emotional stupidity vs. emotional intelligence, following role instructions vs. being an author of one's life story etc., are listed and the path to bringing about that transformation is charted out. The author relies extensively on a reflective approach in the activities suggested. Viscott (1996) in his book on *Emotional Resilience* deals with the bouncing back from an emotional setback. While one's work and career may take up most of one's time, it is relationships that take up most of one's life. Interpersonal relations and the emotions attached to them can have the deepest influence and endure for the longest when they disturb a person's emotional equilibrium. What one then needs is emotional resilience. The book guides one through the process of natural therapy so that one can deal better with the adversity. On the face of it the book appears to be meant for psychotherapists. The fact however that is any adversity affects one's emotions as every adversity has a feeling component and it is this effect which lasts for a long time in the form of anxiety, causing dysfunctionality when it diffuses to other areas of his life. Thus, when emotional resilience is taken care off then general resilience will automatically improve as well. The book is a detailed account of how one can help oneself out of an emotional trauma and back to emotional mental health. Reivich and Shatte (2002) (vice-presidents for research and development at Adaptive Learning Systems which offers Resilience Training) in their book *The Resiliency Factor - 7 Keys to Finding your Inner Strength and Overcoming Life's Hurdles* based on their research over fifteen years, outline the seven skills required, to becoming resilient. They emphasize that it is not what happens to a person but how he reacts to it that affects the trajectory of their life. This book provides information of a test to measure RQ (Resilience Quotient) and reaffirms that RQ can be increased. The seven skills for resilience, according to Reivisch and Shatte are:

1. Emotion regulation
2. Impulse control
3. Causal analysis
4. Optimism
5. Empathy
6. Self efficacy
7. Reaching out

This book acts as a guide to master and measure these seven skills. It provides exercises for practice and opportunities for reflection, to hone these skills. The authors help one understand one's own thinking style and propose that resilience can be increased by learning to circumvent a faulty thinking style and become more realistic in assessing what the adversity is does to one. Wolin and Wolin in their book *The Resilient Self (1993)* give a description of resilient individuals and resilient. Resilient Individuals (Those who survived childhood adversities) show,

1. Insight (awareness of dysfunction)
2. Independence (distancing self from troubles)
3. Relationships (supportive connections with others)
4. Initiative (self/other-help actions)
5. Creativity (self-expression, transformation)

6. Humor (re-framing in a less threatening key) and
7. Morality (justice and compassion rather than revenge).

Resilient Families (Families that cope well under stress) exhibit

1. Commitment
2. Cohesion
3. Adaptability
4. Communication
5. Spirituality
6. Conceitedness
7. Effective Resource Management and
8. Coherence

They create a climate of optimism, resourcefulness and nurturing which parallels the traits of resilient individuals.

Application of AQ Profile (8.1) for Employee Assessment

The AQ Profile (8.1) assesses an individual's Adversity Quotient. Leading organizations use it to screen job applicants and hire more resilient people. They also use it to develop leaders and a more resilient workforce. The AQ profile is based on 37 years of research and more than 1,500 studies worldwide. It is grounded in data from 500,000 individuals representing all industries and job levels across 51 countries. It is very quick and easy. It takes 8-10 minutes to complete (online) and automatically provides immediate results.

AQ Profile (8.1) - Applicant Screening Version

Select the most resilient people to join your organization quickly, inexpensively, and effectively.

Easy Usage of the Vibrant tool Applicant Screening AQ Profile

Just follow the below given simple four step process. It is actually very quick and easy.

1 **Configure**

Configure a profile by inputting basic info about the company, position, and applicant into our intuitive, web-based dashboard.

2 **Invite**

E-mail an invite to the applicant or verbally give them access to a secure portal.

3 **Complete**

The applicant spends 8-10 minutes completing the AQ Profile, either at home or in your facility.

4 **View Results**

View the results in a user friendly format. It takes applicants only 8-10 minutes to complete the AQ Profile.



Figure 1: An Overview of Adversity Quotient Profile

The figure gives an insight of AQ Profile (8.1) and provides guidelines as how an Individual's AQ can be measured through online test and how leading companies use it as a robust tool to screen job applicants and hire more resilient people who have the capacity to respond constructively to adversity and challenges of all sorts.

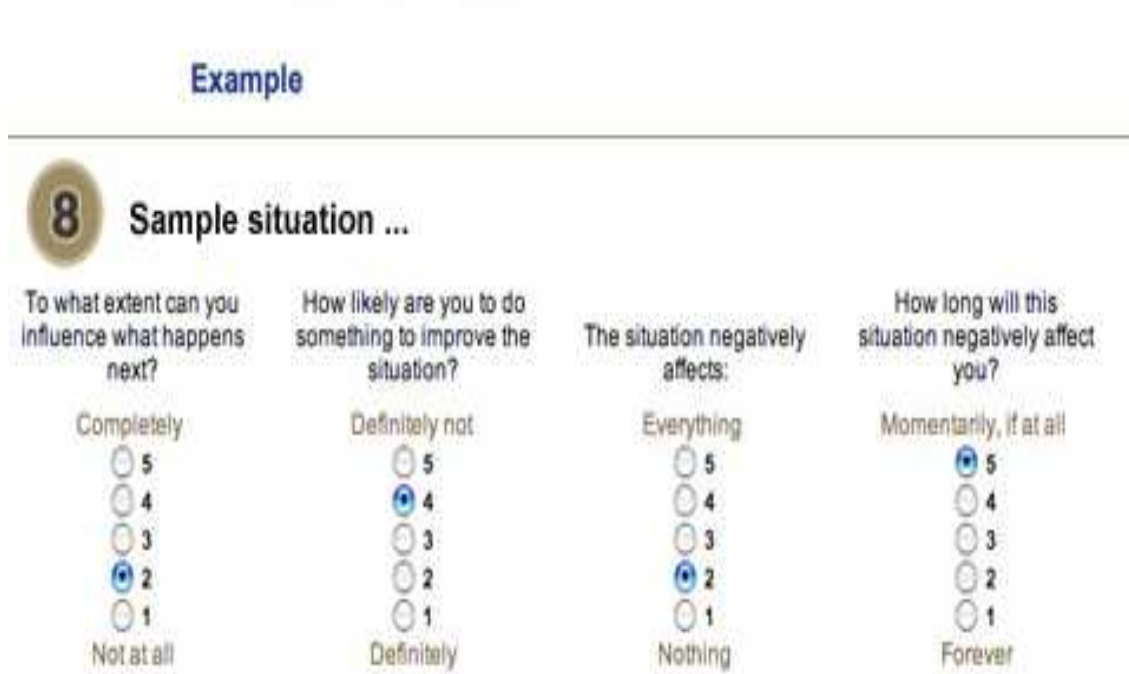


Figure 2: AQ Screening Profile

The figure shows a sample which explains the methodology of a screening profile. The profile consists of fourteen situations. 1. For each situation, imagine it is real and happening right now. 2. Answer the four questions relating to that situation by clicking on the bubble representing your best response to each question on a scale of five to one as shown in the example above.

positions applicants my account

Operations Manager or search by first or last name show applicants »

Instructions: View Applicant Scores

To view detailed reports, select one or more applicants and click the view details » button.

Scores for the Operations Manager position [« back | next »]

<input type="checkbox"/>	Last Name	First Name	AQ	C	O	R	E	Likelihood Of Success	Attrition Risk
<input type="checkbox"/>	Miller	Pete	120	50	10	10	50	Relatively low	Relatively high
<input type="checkbox"/>	Smith	Heather	120	10	50	50	10	Relatively low	Relatively high
<input type="checkbox"/>	Dolden	Stacey	69	16	16	19	10	Relatively low	Relatively high
<input type="checkbox"/>	Rubble	Freddie	125	30	30	30	35	Relatively low	Relatively high
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Ghell	Ralph	101	47	44	41	49	Greater than most	Lower than most
<input type="checkbox"/>	Alvarez	Nino	173	42	44	42	45	Greater than most	Lower than most
<input type="checkbox"/>	Arnold	James	178	47	43	42	40	Greater than most	Lower than most
<input type="checkbox"/>	Hart	Mia	184	48	44	45	47	High	Exceptionally low
<input type="checkbox"/>	Dorris	Dan	156	38	41	38	39	Average	Average
<input type="checkbox"/>	Kaufman	Mary	157	37	40	37	43	Average	Average
<input type="checkbox"/>	Bloom	Judy	150	34	37	36	43	Average	Average

view details »

Figure 3: AQ Screening Profile (Administration Tools)

The Figure explains that it's intuitive and web driven dashboard makes it simple to configure a profile by inputting basic information about the company, position and applicant. Once all the fourteen questions are answered, the applicant's test scores are split into four dimensions CORE, C-Control, O-Ownership, R-Reach, E-Endurance and the total AQ Score which determines the (LOS) Likelihood of Success and Attrition Risk (AR), sort by each dimension to compare applicants. Only those who have completed the AQ profile appear in this list, the maximum number of results to display per page is twenty.

Results for John Doe

AQ score	AQ range	AQ rank / applicants	C	O	R	E
186	High	1 / 6	47	44	47	48

Position: French Pastry Chef
Likelihood of Success: High
Attrition Risk: Exceptionally low
Mindset: Highly resilient, tenacious, optimistic, self-motivated

Figure 4: AQ Screening Profile Results Explained.

The figure highlights a candidate's result who was a participant of AQ Profiling Test for a job profile assessed by a company. We observe that with a High AQ (184-200), John Doe is likely to be among the elite who thrive in a highly demanding, adversity rich job. There is a high probability that John will prove superior in problem solving, energy, attitude and overall performance. Research on AQ indicates that John is likely to sustain high performance in the right job and be drawn to challenges that require his/her natural talents. This high AQ indicates a strong likelihood for better than average health, energy, optimism and staying power. Similarly, reports can be obtained for individual candidates and both the employer and candidates can know their AQ status and based on the test scores obtained selection of desired candidates can be made as per job profile called for as not all jobs require High AQ's some require moderate AQ and low AQ as well.

Conclusion

This paper aims to bring awareness among the woman employees and help combat adversity by developing a person's resilience through ongoing coaching and mentoring, a formal programme approach, and by use of available audio video resources which in turn will help them in delivering consistent performance, so as to be successful in their professional and personal life. The ARP tool can be used by other sectors to check their employees Adversity Quotient Level and if AQ Profiling is used in the Recruitment and Selection Process one can identify the level of AQ the candidates possess at the Initial stage itself and can have a choice to select or reject a candidate, hence leading to the right fit of the candidate to the right place. It also helps the candidates to improve their resilience by checking their AQ levels thereby reduce talent leakage in the system. AQ helps to develop potential performance leaders for growth of the organization by having the attrition rate controlled as Human Resources is a definite key to success to compete in today's cut throat competitive market.

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