

WHAT IS EMOTIONAL TURBULENCE?

1. What is turbulence?

The construct turbulence as in physics can be defined as the violent or unsteady movement of air, water or fluid (Davidson, 2015). The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (Wehmeiere, McIntosh, Turnbull, & Ashby, 2006) describes turbulence as "a situation in which there is a lot of sudden change, confusion, disagreement and sometimes violence". Using the term turbulence in conjunction with emotion the author concluded that emotional turbulence refers to emotions which are unstable, constantly changing and causing confusion within the individual.

2. The nature of turbulence

Physicists have quantified various qualities of turbulence in their quest of gaining insight into this phenomenon and in formulating a workable definition for turbulence (Tennekes & Lumley, 1972). Turbulence thus has many qualities or characteristics, of which not all are compatible with the concept of emotional turbulence; the characteristics of turbulence which is applicable to the construct of emotional turbulence are irregularity or randomness as well as diffusivity (Tennekes & Lumley, 1972) a third quality of turbulence is that turbulence is dissipative (Gleick, 2008). In order to understand the impact of these three qualities on the emotionality of individuals one needs to consider their meaning and how this relates to emotions.

The quality of irregularity refers to something which is not normal according to known rules (Tennekes & Lumley, 1972) and therefore applying this quality to emotions one can say that emotional turbulence leads to emotional responses in the face of trauma which is not commonly found in other individuals. The quality of diffusivity refers to rapid mixing and increased rates of momentum, heat and mass transfer (Tennekes & Lumley, 1972) and thus referring to the emotionality of the trauma victim one can say that emotional turbulence leads to the rapid mixing of different emotions which leads to increases in emotional distress due to the fact that more emotional energy is invested into the emotional response (Gleick, 2008).

Dissipative refers to the tendency turbulence has to cause drag which leads to the draining of energy in a system (Gleick, 2008), applying this to emotionality one can draw the conclusion that due to the abnormal emotional responses and the rapid mixing of emotional responses emotional drag is created which drains the trauma victim of energy which makes it difficult to become unstuck in the current emotional state (Samier & Schmidt, 2009).

3. The effects of emotional turbulence

Emotional turbulence does not solely refer to the turbulent feelings the individual is experiencing but it also refers to the physiological impact these emotions have on the individual's internal chemistry, physical well-being and the individual's capacity to maintain a consistent mind-frame (Griffiths, 2015). All of these effects combined lead to turbulence and disorganisation which has a deep-seated effect on the individual's sense of personal identity; this has the potential to lead to a mental crisis and aggravate physical ailments as it negatively affects the immune system's functioning (Griffiths, 2015).

3.1 Physical reactions

It is well known that emotional responses are accompanied by physiological conditions and physiological response components as certain parts of the human brain is of utmost importance for emotions to be manifested and certain hormones are vital to facilitate the expression of these emotions (Frijda, 1986). Thus based on this short description the author is of the opinion that emotional turbulence will overload the body's physiological systems that facilitates the expression of emotions which will have detrimental effects on the physical well-being of the individual. An example of this is when the adrenaline and steroid hormones associated with shock are repeatedly or continuously released by the body will drain the immune system which will cause the individual to feel ill, it will take the body up to 40% longer to heal wounds and will make the individual more susceptible to a wide range of ailments such as cancer and chronic fatigue syndrome (Griffiths, 2015) (Emotional Logic L.O. 6.3 and 6.4).

3.2 Disorganised thoughts and emotions

Disorganisation in thoughts and emotions refer to a concept known as whirlpools. Whirlpools are described as the simultaneous experience of two emotional stepping stones, or emotions. This is detrimental to the individual as neither of these stepping stones can adequately prepare him to fulfil the emotion's useful purpose but instead these combined emotions generate distress inside the individual (Griffiths, 2015).

Whirlpools are divided into four categories which are influenced by and also influences the thoughts and the emotions of the individual. The first category is withdrawal and is characterised by shame and fatigue and the individual experiences suspicion, paranoid or angry thoughts as well as various bodily reactions (Griffiths, 2015). The second category is irrational action which is characterised by compulsive and destructive behaviour as the individual whom is stuck in this whirlpool struggles with behaviours such as vandalism, violence, self-harm and obsessive compulsive behaviour (Griffiths, 2015). The third category is confusion and here one will encounter individuals with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder whom are brittle, anxious and self-doubting as well as individuals whom feel odd and out of it and they are usually unable to think clearly and are distanced from life (Griffiths, 2015). The final category of whirlpools is low self-regard and here individuals tend to feel hopeless and they are also self-critical (Griffiths, 2015) (Emotional Logic L.O. 6.1).

3.3 Mental functioning and sense of identity

It is stated that one's capacity to hold a consistent mind frame decreases due to the fact that more than one emotion is experienced at the same time which makes it difficult for the individual to invest adequate amounts of energy into utilising the useful purpose of these emotions one by one. Emotional-behavioural chaos results from this which leads to mixed messages to the self and others which directly affects the individual's identity. Beliefs about the self and the world arises from this identity, thoughts arises from beliefs and thoughts provide feedback to emotions and behaviour. This creates a whirlpool in which the negative sense of identity is reinforced. Thus the individual remains in a state of being a victim without seeing the opportunities available to him to get out of the whirlpool and to become unstuck (Emotional Logic L.O. 5.2).

4. Emotional turbulence and Ambivalence

After conducting research on the concept of emotional turbulence the author came to realise that emotional turbulence is closely related to yet another common phenomenon in individuals who went through a traumatic experience, this phenomenon is ambivalence. The reason why the author is postulating that emotional turbulence and ambivalence is closely related is based on a number of observations made by the author and insights gained.

The definition of ambivalence has evolved over the years as its first definition stated that ambivalence was having competing desires at different levels of consciousness (Samier & Schmidt, 2009), an example of this is when someone is unemployed and instead of seeking employment stays at home and does nothing. The definition as postulated by Sigmund Freud states that ambivalent feelings refer to the contradicting feelings one has towards the same person or in response to a certain traumatic experience (Reis & Sprecher, 2009) (Climo, 1992). Yet another definition describes ambivalence as when an individual has both positive and negative emotions about the same event or relationship (Reis & Sprecher, 2009) (Samier & Schmidt, 2009). This is closely related to the concept of whirlpools, which was discussed previously, in which the individual also experiences more than one and often conflicting emotions in response to a traumatic event (Griffiths, 2015).

Ambivalence furthermore contributes to feelings of alienation, frustration, powerlessness, anger and loss (Climo, 1992). Ambivalence has also been found to be a predicting factor of depression, lower quality of life, physiological reactivity as well as lower relationship satisfaction (Reis & Sprecher, 2009). This correlates with the impact emotional turbulence and whirlpools have on the individual and therefore is yet another supporting factor in the close resemblance between these two constructs.

5. Defining emotional turbulence

Thus, based on the above discussion, we can say that emotional turbulence refers to the emotional reaction which differs from known rules (Tennekes & Lumley, 1972) as it is the rapid mixing of emotions (Gleick, 2008), which drains the victim of energy needed to effectively get out of the current emotional state (Samier & Schmidt, 2009).

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