

Managing Stress at Workplace

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Abstract

Stress at workplace has become an increasing phenomenon due to external factors such as technological advancement, changes in the economy of a country which might lead to becoming redundant. Stress in limited quantity is beneficial to organization and employee as well. It helps to achieve personal as well as goals of organization. But stress in excess quantity can cause harmful effects on the body, mind and psychology of employees. This research paper seeks to identify the sources of stress in the workplace and how the signs and symptoms of stress can be recognized by managers as well as employees. Furthermore, the research paper will discuss ways through which a stressed employee in an organization can be approached to help them realize that their stress is negatively impacting their work environment. *Therefore, it is recommended that workers should exhibit self-control and good self-esteem; engage in continuous professional development on skills for better organization, integration of work within specified project constraints and delegation of assignment, authority and breaking work into manageable parts so as to be able to cope with workplace stress.*

Keywords: Stress, Organization, Employees.

Introduction

Workplace Stress is a naturally occurring phenomenon which can act as a motivator under the right circumstances. However, like so many other things in life, an excess of stress will have negative consequences with repercussions that will transcend personal and professional confines. There are various factors both within and outside the workplace setting that lead to excessive stress among employees in an organization such as the 'treadmill syndrome' that Nolan (2009) defines as workers having more work assigned than it is possible to complete in a normal work day. This usually results in employees working their entire work shift without taking any breaks.

The stress level is changing rapidly among the employees due to a set of various reasons such as work overload, over crowdedness at the workplace, generating of loud noises by machines and arousal of conflicts among the employees and the managers due to poor or inadequate decisions. Managers can identify stress in the workplace by discovering work stress complications, by checking frequently the employee's health and work fulfillment. Managers can also prevent stress by ascertaining that employees know where to turn to when they face with such problems and following up on their recovery if health issues arise (Fairbrother & Warn, 2003).

Sources of Stress at Workplace

The following stressors that affect an employee at the workplace as explained by Bloisi et al., 2007

- Job role: It exists when the employee is confused as to what task he/she should be doing or when the employee has overwhelming amount of work to be done with so little time. Stress could also arise as a result of ambiguity.
- Underutilization: This means that the worker has insufficient work to encourage his/her motivation.
- Responsibility for others: It increases stress level, if employees face high responsibility for others. Those who are in charge of others at the workplace and people higher up the organizational hierarchy are often prone to more stress because of expectations from their coworkers.
- Poor working conditions: Some extreme conditions are also major contributors to stress, such as extreme heat, cold, noise and overcrowded.
- Job insecurity: When an employee works in an organization, fear of losing his/her job leads to chronic stress which causes reduced work quality.
- Working hours: Very odd working hours may lead to many physiological problems in employees which may lead to stress during work.
- Control at work: This refers to the extent of control an employee has over his/her work. If employee has very little control over work then he/she loses interest in the work and feels stressed to meet expectations of superiors.
- Managerial style: Managers with autocratic style of control give very little freedom to the employees in decision making and planning.
- Overload & under load: Overload of work means performing a large amount of work in a very short time. Such heightened expectations from any individual may lead to stress. Elsewhere under load is very short amount of work to do and time available is too much. Employee keeps questioning his/her capacity and feels stressed.

Stress at Work warning signs

When you feel overwhelmed at work, you lose confidence and may become angry, irritable, or withdrawn.

Other signs and symptoms of excessive stress at work include:

- Feeling anxious, irritable, or depressed
- Apathy, loss of interest in work
- Problems sleeping
- Fatigue
- Trouble concentrating

- Muscle tension or headaches
- Stomach problems
- Social withdrawal
- Loss of sex drive
- Using alcohol or drugs to cope

Researches Explaining Personality Traits in relation to Workplace Stress

Friedman & Rosenman (1974) stated that people are differentiated by types of personality and each type of personality varies the degree of being affected to stress. It is mentioned that the employees who have:

Type A personality perform better with doing several tasks simultaneously. But later becomes anxious and suffer from high level of stress. Type A persons have a highly competitive desire for achievement and recognition, together with a tendency towards hostility and aggression and a sense of immense time urgency and impatience

Type B personality is more relaxed and calm and is generally stress free. These people have no conflict with people or time. They are more relaxed and easy going, accept situations and work within those situations rather than fight them competitively. Such persons are especially relaxed of time pressures and so are less prone to have problems related with stress (Dhar and Jain, 2001).

Kobasa (1979) introduced the concept of **psychological hardiness** and suggested that hardiness moderates the relationship between stressful life events and illness. Kobasa characterized hardiness as being comprised of three components: (a) a *commitment* to oneself and work, (b) a sense of personal *control* over one's experiences and outcomes, and (c) the perception that change represents *challenge*, and thus should be treated as an opportunity for growth rather than as a threat. Individuals high in hardiness are hypothesized to be better able to withstand the negative effects of life stressors and, consequently, are less likely than individuals low in hardiness to become ill. Kobasa found that hardy executives were more likely to remain healthy under conditions of high stress than were nonhardy executives (Kobasa, Maddi, & Kahn, 1982). Hardiness, according to Kobasa and Maddi (1977), developed from an existential theory of psychology, building on the premise that individuals are not completely hardwired for fixed traits, but have personalities that are composites of the results of experiences that they encounter (i.e. constantly changing and being reconstructed).

McCrae & Costa (1987), Five Factor Model of Personality (*OCEAN*) tries to explain various traits of personality and the degree to which these employees with these personality traits are affected by workplace stress. High *Neuroticism* was associated with higher workplace strain, whereas high *Agreeableness* was associated with lower perceived job stress. In addition, high *Extraversion* and high *Openness* were associated with lower workplace strain. High *Conscientiousness* was associated with lower workplace stress. High

neuroticism has been found to be associated with lower work satisfaction, higher risk of burnout, and physical ill health, while the opposite has been found for extraversion, conscientiousness, and agreeableness (Alarcon, Eschleman, & Bowling, 2009; Grant & Langan-Fox, 2007)

Theoretical Models of Workplace Stress

- **The demand-control model:** The demand-control model Karasek's (1979) is one of the most frequently used theories on stressful work characteristics. The model defines work stress as two-dimensional: a high level of psychological demands combined with a low level of decision latitude constitutes the highest risk for stress-related diseases (Belkic, Landsbergis, Schnall, & Baker, 2004; Haeusser, Mojzisch, Niesel, & Schulz-Hardt, 2010; Kivimäki et al., 2012). The demand component refers to workload, while control (decision latitude) refers to the control over pace, use of skills, and decision authority an employee has. According to the model, the demands act as a stressor and control can act as a buffer to alleviate the strain caused by the demands.
- **The effort-reward imbalance model:** Another model on stressful work characteristics is the effort-reward imbalance model, in which an individual experiences stress at work if the reciprocity between efforts spent and rewards received is not fulfilled (Siegrist, 1996). Effort is interpreted as the demands and obligations the employee is faced with and reward as the money, esteem, and career opportunities (or job security) the employee subsequently expects, not only from the employer but also from society at large. According to the extrinsic effort-reward imbalance hypothesis, the combination of high effort and low reward—effort-reward imbalance—increases the risk of poor health independently of the risks associated with the each of the components alone. The extrinsic effort-reward imbalance hypothesis has been studied extensively and most studies support the notion that the lack of reciprocity between effort and reward is associated with employee health and well-being (Backe, Seidler, Latza, Rossnagel, & Schumann, 2012; Godin, Kittel, Coppieters, & Siegrist, 2005; van Vegchel et al., 2005).

Coping Mechanisms for Stress at Workplace

Once an individual is adequately equipped to deal with stress in general, it is easier to deal with specific workplace stressors. Vieet, (2011) offers four different mechanisms through which individuals can cope with workplace stress:

- **Behavioral coping:** This refers to the physical activities that an individual involves in and helps cope with stress. These actions are meant to address any demands that the individual is subjected to. For instance, where one has a lot of work and the deadline is approaching, they may decide to reprioritize their efforts and/or seek additional help (Vieet, 2011). This is especially effective against time stress.
- **Cognitive coping:** This is where the thoughts and perspective of individuals are used to cope with stress.

Here, individuals will apply a mental filter to focus on the positive side of something rather than the

negative side (Krohne, 1993). In essence, they do away with the negative thoughts. Positive encouragement and self-talk are effective approaches to help individuals reduce their stress levels (Monat & Lazarus, 2001). This is particularly suited to counter Situational stress.

- Problem-focused coping: This mechanism is focused on the problem at hand and seeks the most appropriate solution. Individuals try eliminating the source of stress by seeking the means to address and correct the problem in the most effective way (Krohne, 2002). This method works well to help individuals deal with anticipatory stress.
- Emotion-focused coping: This refers to the various ways that individuals recognize and manage their own emotional responses to situations they find stressful. It is based on how individuals channel their feelings into positive results and is highly effective when dealing with encounter stress.

While the above coping mechanisms have been identified to help deal with each of the four types of stress, the choice of which mechanism to use under a specific circumstance must rest on the stressed individual. Furthermore, the individual does not need to commit to a single coping mechanism. A hybrid solution may very well be the best approach under certain circumstances. Most importantly, the individuals must select an approach that suits their situation and can effectively reduce their stress levels and that of their colleagues.

Final Remarks:

Employees can't control everything in their work environment, but that doesn't mean they are powerless, even when stuck in a difficult situation. If stress on the job is interfering with the work performance, health, or personal life, it's time to take action. No matter what you do for a living, what your ambitions are, or how stressful job is, there are plenty of things workers can do to reduce overall stress levels and regain a sense of control at work. Leaders and managers are uniquely positioned to identify the various sources and types of stress. Furthermore, they may even have the capacity to take action aimed at stemming these sources and types of stress. They must first be able to recognize the signs and symptoms of stress in order to effect the appropriate organizational changes. And, in cases where either the solution resides outside of their sphere of influence or, to help cope with residual stress, is it essential to understand the various coping mechanisms available and help employees select the most appropriate ones.

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