

# STRESS MANAGEMENT: CONCEPT AND APPROACHES

Mahida Hardevsinh Jitsinh, Assistant Teacher in economics, Shri G. J. M. Vidhyamandir, Sokhada,  
Gujarat (India)

## ABSTRACT

Stress Management has become a most important and valuable technique to boost the employee morale and the company's productivity in all companies. All the organizations have understood that the employees play a key role and they should be out of stress to give a high performance atmosphere. There are varieties of techniques to manage stress in organizations.

**Key Words:** stress, concept, approaches.

## Introduction

Stress problems are very common with many people reporting experiencing extreme levels of negative stress. When stress is considered as something that occurs repeatedly across the full lifespan, the true incidence of stress problems is much higher. Being "stressed out" is thus a universal human phenomenon that affects almost everyone.

What are we talking about when we discuss stress? Generally, most people use the word stress to refer to negative experiences that leave us feeling overwhelmed. Thinking about stress exclusively as something negative gives us a false impression of its true nature, however. Stress is a reaction to a changing, demanding environment. Properly considered, stress is really more about our capacity to handle change than it is about whether that change makes us feel good or bad. Change happens all the time, and stress is in large part what we feel when we are reacting to it.

We can define stress by saying that it involves the "set of emotional, physical, and cognitive (i.e., thought) reactions to a change." Thinking about stress as a reaction to change suggests that it is not necessarily bad, and sometimes, could even be a good thing. Some life changes such as getting a new job, moving in with a new romantic partner, or studying to master a new skill are generally considered positive and life-enhancing events, even though they can also be quite stressful. Other life changes such as losing a job or an important relationship are more negative, and also stressful.

Our experience of stress varies in intensity between high and low. How intensely stressed we feel in response to a particular event has to do with how much we need to accomplish in order to meet the demands of that situation. When we don't have to do much in order to keep up with demands, we don't experience much stress. Conversely, when we have to do a lot, we tend to feel much more stressed out.

Generally speaking, people do not like experiencing the extremes of stress. This is true for each end of the spectrum of stress intensity, both high and low. Few people enjoy the feeling of being overwhelmingly stressed in the face of great change. However, most people do not like a total absence of stress either, at

least after a while. There is a word for such a condition (i.e., a lack of stress and challenge) which conveys this negative meaning: boredom. What most people tend to seek is the middle ground; a balance between a lack of stress and too much stress. They want a little challenge and excitement in life, but not so much that they feel overwhelmed by it.

## Review of Literature

Hoskins and Sherry have identified the factors affecting leadership position of staff nurses, Brooks and Jason has concluded the factors that have relationship with work stress and life of executives. Moffitt and Karen Rogers have stated the modeling relationship of stress with job satisfaction, organizational commitment and turnover. Shane and Jon have studied the various factors that influence the performance of police people. Atkins and Nancy has studied the influence of spirituality on wok stress.

Spinal Matthew F., (2007)revealed a research in the relationship among commuter stress, work engagement, and proactive behavior of employees. The purpose of this study was to explore driver stress and its relationship with organizational behaviors. First, it sought to determine if there was a relationship between driver stress and work engagement. Second, it was designed to determine if there was a relationship between driver stress and personal initiative at work. Third, it sought to determine if there was a relationship between driver stress and learning- goal orientation.Mierswa and Mark<sup>7</sup> has studied the emotions at work place that create stress and the factors that lead to team work and professionalism. Sims and Doreen <sup>8</sup>have examined the job factors and impact on behaviors of personnel of front line social service.

## Objectives of the study

- To be aware about the stress management
- To know the concept and approaches in stress management

## Sources of Data

The data collected is mainly secondary in nature. The sources of data for this research include the literature published by various magazines, Journals, Books with the current scenario and research papers on stress management.

## Methodology of Study

The study is based on secondary data. The paper discusses the theoretical framework of stress and stress management and it also highlights the concept and approaches in stress management.

## Concept of Stress

Stress is a common phenomenon of modern life. Stress is generally due to conflict emanating from high aspirations and goal attainment. Stress may also result from indecisiveness and/or failure to cope with the demanding situation. Stress is common for all, but the degree varies which depend on various intra psychic and interpersonal factors. Stress prone people experience more health related problems and experience difficulties in interpersonal area. Although stress cannot be totally eliminated from the individual's life it can be minimized which may help in leading a healthy and prosperous social life. It is thus quite important to discuss about some effective coping strategies to manage the human stress.

### • Stressors

Stress can start from the daily hassles of family to the work place or from the work place for family. Those who are even living single, they are also facing stress. There are various sources which produced stress, where some are acute and some others are still chronic. The study conducted by Holmes and Rahe (1967) stated that the greatest number of people faced stress due to the death of a spouse, divorce and marital separation as comparable to the change of residence, vacation and violation of law, etc. Cohen and his colleagues (1998) conducted their research on chronic and mild stress. They found that severe reprimand at work or a fight with the spouse produced less chronic stress as compared to unhappy marital life or unemployment. Selye (1950, 1956, 1958) identified the general adaptation syndrome which includes three different stages of stress such as the alarm stage, the resistance stage, and exhaustion stage. When a person is under stress, he/she may experience and passes through these specific stages. However, one may or may not pass through all stages of stress, depending on the events that triggered the occurrence.

### Stages of Stress

Stress may be ranged from mild to severe forms. In this context, Seaward (1999, p.7) stated that stress passes through four major stages. In first stage, the stimuli from the sense organs are sent into the brain. In second stage an interpretation took place inside the brain. And then the brain perceives it either threat or no threat. If the brain regarded it as no threat, then the stress is at normal level. Otherwise it leads to the third stage, where the body stays activated, aroused until the threat is over. In the fourth and last stage the body returns to the homeostatic state, which results in the physical and mental calmness. Hans Selye, (1976) proposed that the first stage of stress is the alarm stage, where the body prepares itself for immediate action, aroused by the sympathetic nervous system and released the hormone which alert the organism to meet the danger. If the stress is prolonged, the second stage is the resistance stage, where the arousal become slowdowns compare to the first stage. If the stresses continue for a long period then it entered into the third or the exhaustion stage, which produced both psychological and physical illness. The following figure (Figure-1) describes that, if there is the effective coping strategy in alarm stage it will lead to the normal stage. If the effective coping strategies will be followed in the resistance stage and exhaustion stage respectively it will also lead to the normal stage.

#### STAGE 1 – ALARM STAGE

- alarm reaction has two substages
  - o shock phase – decrease in body temperature, blood pressure, and muscle tone and loss of fluid from body tissues
  - o countershock phase – increase in hormones triggering a defensive reaction such as fight/ flight reaction

#### STAGE 2 – RESISTANCE STAGE

- also called “adaption stage”
  - o stabilization of the increased physiological levels
  - o in other words: the body is on hyper-alert as if it’s about to do battle
  - o for example: high blood pressure can develop into hypertension, risking heart problems
  - o as the body is in this heightened state, it is using up important resources (chemicals, balance), which can cause permanent changes in the body’s organs

## STAGE 3 – EXHAUSTION STAGE

- think “break down” o the body’s adaptations it has made to withstand this prolonged state of stress begins to fall apart o characterized by sleep disturbances, irritability, severe loss of concentration, restlessness, fatigue, trembling that disturbs coordination, jumpiness, low startle threshold/scare easily, anxiety attacks, depression, crying spells.

### **Approches in Stress Management**

There are four different approaches to defining stress:

1. Homeostatic / Medical Approach.
2. Cognitive Appraisal Approach.
3. Person-environment fit Approach.
4. Psychoanalytic Approach.

These four approaches to stress will give you a more complete understanding of what stress really is.

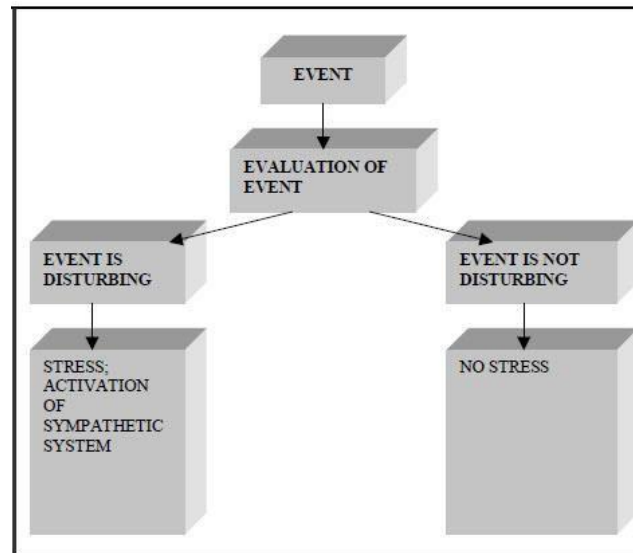
#### **The Homeostatic / Medical Approach**

Walter B Cannon Was the medical psychologist who originally discovered stress and called it "the emergency response" or "the militaristic response", arguing that it was rooted in "the fighting emotions". According to Cannon, stress resulted when an external environmental demand upset the person's natural steady-state balance referred to as "homeostasis". He called the stress response the fight-or flight response. Cannon believed the body was designed with natural defence mechanisms to keep it in homeostasis.

#### **The Cognitive Appraisal Approach**

According to Richard Lazarus (1977), "stress is a situation that someone regards as threatening and as possibly exceeding his or her resources". Lazarus pointed out, that the stress evoked by an event depends on how people interpret the event and what they can do about it. For example, pregnancy may be much more stressful for a 16 year old unmarried schoolgirl than it is for a 25 year old married woman.

## Lazarus's Approach to Stress



Lazarus saw stress as a result of a person-environment interaction, and he emphasized the person's cognitive appraisal in classifying persons or events as stressful or not.

Individuals differ in their appraisal of events and people. What is stressful for one person may not be stressful for another. Perception and cognitive appraisal are important processes in determining what is stressful, and a person's organizational position can shape such perception.

To the extent that stress is related to our interpretation of an event, not simply to the event itself, people can learn to cope with potentially stressful events. They can learn to deal with events actively instead of feeling threatened by them. Therefore, stress would have to include not only the unpleasant events (hassles) that we have to deal with but also the pleasant events (uplifts) that brighten our day and help to cancel out the unpleasant events.

### The Most Frequent Hassles and Uplifts

TEN MOST FREQUENT HASSLES AND UPLIFTS	
<b>HASSLES</b>	<b>UPLIFTS</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Concerns about weight</li> <li>2. Health of a family member</li> <li>3. Raising prices of common goods.</li> <li>4. Home maintenance.</li> <li>5. Too many things to do.</li> <li>6. Misplacing or losing things.</li> <li>7. Yard work or outside home maintenance.</li> <li>8. Property, investment, or taxes.</li> <li>9. Crime.</li> <li>10. Physical appearance.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Relating well with your spouse or lover.</li> <li>2. Relating well with friends.</li> <li>3. Completing a task.</li> <li>4. Feeling healthy.</li> <li>5. Getting enough sleep.</li> <li>6. Eating out.</li> <li>7. Meeting your responsibilities.</li> <li>8. Visiting, phoning or writing someone.</li> <li>9. Spending time with family.</li> <li>10. Home (inside) pleasing to you.</li> </ol>

Thus, Lazarus introduced problem-focused and emotion-focused coping. Problem-focused coping

emphasizes managing the stressor, and emotion-focused coping emphasizes managing your response.

### The Person-Environment Fit Approach

Robert Kahn's approach emphasized how confusing and conflicting expectations of a person in a social role create stress for the person. A good person-environment fit occurs when a person's skills and abilities match a clearly defined, consistent set of roles expectations. Stress occurs when the role expectations are confusing and conflicting or Stress when a person's skills and abilities are not able to meet the demands of the social role.

Thus, Kahn was concerned with the social psychology of stress.

### The Psychoanalytic Approach

Harry Leveson believes that two elements of the personality interact to cause stress:-

**Ego Ideal:** is the first element, the embodiment of a person's perfect self.

**Self-Image:** is the second element - how the person really sees himself or herself, both positively and negatively.

Stress results from the discrepancy between the idealized self (ego ideal) and the real self-image; the greater the discrepancy, the more stress a person experiences- Psychoanalytic theory helps us understand the role of unconscious personality factors as causes of stress within a person.

### Conclusion

Stress is a complex phenomenon and is influenced by various factors. There is no single method for surviving the stressful events in life; rather, it is a process of figuring out what works best for person at the time of stress. The coping strategies will guide the individual to work through both everyday stress as well as crisis stressors. Cognitive behavioral approaches are effective in dealing with stressful conditions. Mindfulness based approaches are recently highlighted as intervention for managing stress. Stress management is important since stress is related to various medical conditions which has enduring effects on individual.

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