

WORK ENVIRONMENT STRESSORS AND JOB PERFORMANCEParam Saraswat*

ABSTRACT

Stress has become the 21 century buzz word, from the high pervading corporate echelons to the bassinets of teaching infants' nurseries we find this world liberally used. Stress is part of modern life. Various events in life cause stress, starting with the birth of a child and enduring with the death of a dear one. Urbanization, industrialization and the increase scale of operations in society are some of the reasons for rising stress. It is an inevitable consequence of socio-economic complexity and to some extent, its stimulant as well. People experience stress as they can no longer have complete control over what happen in their lives. The telephone goes out of order, power is shut down, water supply is disrupted, children perform poorly at school etc, we feel frustrated and then stressed. In this paper an analysis has been made to highlight the causes of work stress and strategies of managing stress.

Keywords:- *Work Stress, Job Performance, Work Disrupted, Managing Stress*

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INTRODUCTION

20TH century has been regarded as the period of incredible change in human history. Philosophers and scientists have been various names to this period. Peter Drucker has called it “The Age of Discontinuity”, John Galbraith has called it “The Age of Future Shock” and Hari Albrecht called it “The Age of Anxiety”.

The word stress is derived from a Latin word “**stringere**”, meaning to draw tight. From the view point of physical sciences, the phenomena of stress are evident in all materials when they are subjected to “force, pressure, strain or strong-front”. Every material steel, rock or wood has its own limit up to which it can withstand stress without being damaged. Similarly human beings can tolerate certain level of stress. Stress is highly individualistic in nature. Some people have high levels of stress tolerance for stress and thrive very well in the face of several stressors in the environment. In fact, some individuals will not perform well unless they experience a level of stress which activates and energizes them to put forth their best results.

For every individual there is an optimum level of stress under which he or she will perform to full capacity. If the stress experience is below the optimum level, then the individual gets bored, the motivational level of work reaches a low point and it results to careless mistakes, forgetting to do things and thinking of things other than work during work hours and also leads to absenteeism which may ultimately lead to turnover. If on the other hand, stress experience is above the optimum level, it leads to too many conflicts with the supervisor or leads to increase of errors, bad decisions and the individual may experience insomnia, stomach problems, and psychosomatic illness.

EVOLUTION OF STRESS

The Garden of Eden began as a tranquil stress environment. However when Adam was given the tantalizing chance to eat the forbidden fruit, he was trust into mankind’s first stressful situation. Adam was offered a choice and, as we

know, decision-making is the breeding ground for conflict, frustration and distress.

DEFINITION:

Stress in individual is defined as any interference that disturbs a persons' healthy mental and physical well being. It occurs when the body is required to perform beyond its normal range of capabilities.

Stress is the way that you react physically, mentally and emotionally to various conditions, changes and demands in your life. High levels of stress can affect your physical and mental well being and performance.

The present world is fast changing and there are lots of pressures and demands at work. These pressures at work lead to physical disorders. Stress refers to individual's reaction to a disturbing factor in the environment. It is an adaptive response to certain external factor or situation or what can be called environmental stimuli as reflected in an opportunity, constraint, or demand the outcome of which is uncertain but important. In short stress is a response to an external factor that results in physical, emotional, behavioral deviations in a person. Stress is an all pervading modern phenomenon that takes a heavy toll of human life. Different situations and circumstances in our personal life and in our job produce stress. Those can be divided into factors related to the organization and factors related to the person which include his experience and personality traits. Job related factors are work overload, time pressures, poor quality of supervision, insecure political climate, role conflict and ambiguity, difference between company values and employee values. Person related factors are death of spouse, or of a close friend, family problems, change to a different line of work, prolonged illness in the family, change in social activities, eating habits, etc.

WORKING TECHNOLOGY AND TOOLS

One of the most important factors in working environment is the technology and working tools. Here, it is important to specify that the term “technology” includes not only machines used in the production line, but also smaller electronic equipment such as computers, calculators, and other smaller tools as screw-drivers, stationery, etc. These tools have an effect on productivity level (Korman, 1977), i.e. the more advanced the technology is available in the working place the higher possible performance usually can be achieved by the employee. However, the most advanced tools are not in absolute terms sufficient to meet the requirements of a highly productive firm. The important thing to remember is that it is not always necessary to have the latest most developed technological equipment, but to make sure that the employees are provided with the tools *needed* to do the a good job and that those tools work-always (Carlaw, 2002).

Nowadays, computers have a noticeable effect on the lives of blue-collar and white-collar workers, “Technology is driven to its limits to automatize as completely as possible” (Muchinsky, 1993, p. 512). He adds that thus a very important issue becomes the division of labor between humans and robots, and not only in terms of productivity, but also in terms of job satisfaction and organizational impact. Another factor that is connected with the tools are the guidelines that employees receive from their managers. Deming (2000), states that if an employee does not have clear guidelines, confusion can arise on how to handle the job. Employee might do what is expected (according to the guidelines) and feel satisfaction from performing, but still not feel good due to a very confusing environment, with instructions not being clear or being changed frequently. Thus, his\her well-being decreases (Deming, 2000).

It is also important to provide the worker with work tools. Here, it is possible to give an example concerning their absence: an employee says he/she spends a large amount of time changing tools needed to perform since they break due to low quality. The management buys low-quality tools to save money for the company. The employee argues that money saved on buying cheaper tools would

not result in *any* overall savings since it would consume 10 times more time spent on changing them. When asking the employee why this is of concern to him since he/she still gets paid for the hours of work, he/she says that he could perform much better if was provided with tools of higher quality. This employee performs at the acceptable level (calculated by the management and with respect to the tools provided); he/she does what he is expected to do. Thus his/her job satisfaction is at an “ok” level. Yet the tools are an obstacle making it impossible to perform in a way employee wants and knows he/she could to being provided with the right tools. Hence, employee’s sense of well-being is affected in a negative way (Deming, 2000)

**Stress busting new mantra for babus
Shivani Bhakoo**

They feel tense and anxious at work, just like us. Their co-workers, bosses and general public make them “crazy”. They, too, at times feel their personal lives are not blissful. Our bureaucrats and top administrators get stressed and to bust their stress they indulge in various activities, which not only keep them fit but also help them in releasing their tension.

The Tribune spoke to a few bureaucrats and officials, who despite having tight schedules find time to relax. They are hooked on to physical activities like badminton, walking on treadmill, morning stroll and aerobic classes, which give them enough energy to deal effectively with public, bosses and subordinates.

Deputy Commissioner Rahul Tewari has a passion for badminton. For five to six days in a week, Tewari finds an hour to play his favourite sport. He said, “We to feel stressed like any other human being. Badminton is my stress-buster. Once I am inside the badminton court, I forget everything. Hitting the shuttle hard de-stresses me. Other than badminton, I like watching good movies to feel relaxed. At times, I take my car without the driver and bodyguards and watch a movie in a cinema hall. And this is possible only if we get little time,” he said.

For Municipal Commissioner AK Sinha, who also happens to be the Chief Administrator Officer of GLADA and PUDA, physical activity is a must. “It is not that I go to gymnasium to beat the stress. Right from the beginning, I was told by my father to be physically active and gymnasium has become a daily routine. For an hour, I walk on treadmill and exercise,” he said. “Other than that, I feel good when I answer to the reporters’ queries,” said Sinha in lighter vein.

As far as Police Commissioner Ishwar Singh is concerned, there is no word like stress. “I don’t think there is stress, we maintain the routine,” he said.

But Kamalpreet Kaur Brar needs to be in gymnasium everyday to stay fit and energetic. She said, “I can not live without going to the gymnasium. At times, for hours together, we keep on sitting, clearing pending files. There is no physical activity. Stress increases at times. Walking on the treadmill and listening to good music provides much relief to me and I feel my efficiency level also increases when I am physically active”.

Source: The Tribune Aug. 6, 2010

CONSEQUENCES OF STRESS

The effect of stress is closely linked to individual personality. The same level of stress affects different people in different ways & each person has different ways of coping. Recognizing these personality types means that more focused help can be given.

Stress shows itself number of ways. For instance, individual who is experiencing high level of stress may develop high blood pressure, ulcers, irritability, difficulty in making routine decisions, loss of appetite, accident proneness, and the like. These can be subsumed under three categories:

- Individual consequences
- Organizational consequence
- Burnout

INDIVIDUAL CONSEQUENCES:

Individual consequences of stress are those, which affect the individual directly. Due to this the organization may suffer directly or indirectly, but it is the individual who has to pay for it. Individual consequences of stress are broadly divided into behavioral, psychological and medical.

- ❖ Behavioral consequences of stress are responses that may harm the person under stress or others. Behaviorally related stress symptoms include changes in productivity, turnover, as well as changes in eating habits, increased smoking or consumption of alcohol, paid speech, and sleep disorders.
- ❖ Psychological consequences of stress replace to an individual mental health and well-being from or felling depressed. Job related stress could cause dissatisfaction, infact, it has most psychological effect on the individual and lead to tension, anxiety irritability, and boredom.

- ❖ Medical consequences of stress affect a person's well being. According to a research conducted, it revealed that stress could create changes in metabolism, increase heart and breathing rates, increases blood pressure bring out headaches and induce heart attacks.

ORGANIZATIONAL CONSEQUENCES:

Organizational consequences of stress have direct affect on the organizations. These include decline in performance, withdrawal and negative changes in attitude.

- * Decline in performance can translate into poor quality work or a drop in productivity. Promotions and other organizational benefits get affected due to this.
- * Withdrawal behavior also can result from stress. Significant form of withdrawal behavior is absenteeism.
- * One main affect of employee stress is directly related to attitudes. Job satisfaction, morale and organizational commitment can all suffer, along with motivation to perform at higher levels.

BURNOUT:-

A final consequence of stress has implementation for both people and organizations. Burnout is a general feeling of exhaustion that develops when an individual simultaneously experiences too much pressure and few sources of satisfaction.

MANAGING STRESS IN THE WORK PLACE

Every responds to stress in a different way, it is only by understanding the nature of individual responses that you can start fighting stress yourself and others. Reduction or elimination of stress is necessary for psychological and

physical well being of an individual. Efficiency in stress management enables the individual to deal or cope with the stressful situations instead of avoidance. Strategies like time management, body-mind and mind-body relaxation exercise, seeking social support help individual improve their physical and mental resources to deal with stress successfully.

Apart from helping employees adopt certain coping strategies to deal with stress providing them with the service of counselor is also useful. Many strategies have been developed to help manage stress in the work place. Some are strategies for individuals, and other is geared toward organizations.

INDIVIDUAL COPING STRATEGIES:

Many strategies for helping individuals manage stress have been proposed. Individual coping strategies are used when an employee under stress exhibits undesirable behavior on the jobs such as performance, strained relationship with co-workers, absenteeism alcoholism and the like. Employees under stress require help in overcoming its negative effects. The strategies used are:

Exercise:-

One method by which individual can manage their stress is through exercise. People who exercise regularly are known to less likely to have heart attacks than inactive people are. Research also has suggested that people who exercise regularly feel less tension and stress are more conflict and slow greater optimism.

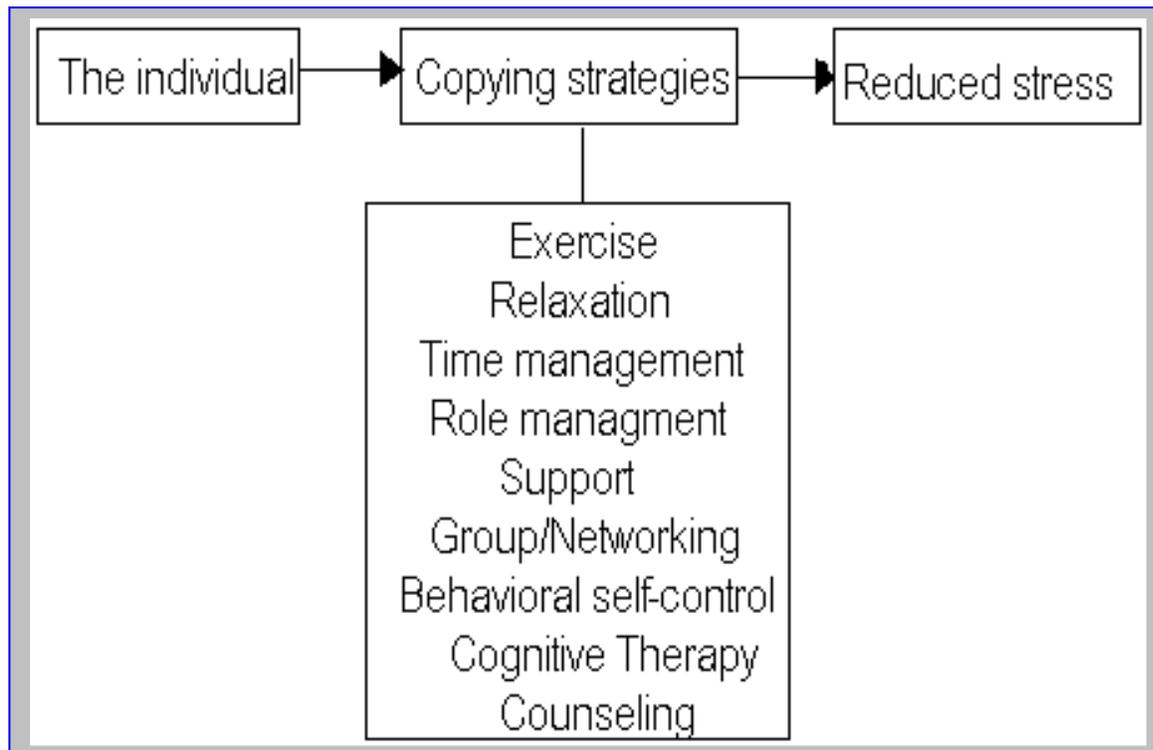


Figure:- Individual coping strategies

Relaxation:-

A related method individual can manage stress is relaxation. Coping with stress require adaptation. Proper relaxation is an effective way to adopt. Relaxation can take many forms. One way to relax is to take regular vacations; people can also relax while on the job (i.e. take regular breaks during their normal workday). A popular way of resting is to sit quietly with closed eyes for ten minutes every afternoon.

Time management:-

Time management is an often recommended method for managing stress, the idea is that many daily pressures can be eased or eliminated if a person does a better job of managing time. One popular approach to time management is to make a list, every morning or the thins to be done that day. Then you group the

items on the list into three categories: critical activities that must be performed, important activities that should be performed, and optimal or trivial things that can be delegated or postponed, then of more of the important things done every day.

Role Management:-

Some what related to time management in which the individual actively works to avoid overload, ambiguity and conflict.

Support Group:-

This method of managing stress is to develop and maintain support group. A support group is simply a group of family member or friends with whom a person can spend time. Supportive family and friends can help people deal with normal stress on an ongoing basis. Support groups can be particularly useful during times of crisis.

Behavioral Self Control:-

In ultimate analysis, effective management if stress presupposes exercise of self-control on the part of an employee. By consciously analyzing the cause and consequences of their own behavior, the employees can achieve self-control. They can further develop awareness of their own limits of tolerance and learn to anticipate their own responses to various stressful situations. The strategy involves increasing an individuals control over the situations rather than being solely controlled by them.

Counseling:-

Personal counseling help employees understand and appreciate a diverse workforce, the holistic approach adopted by the counselor gives him a comprehensive view of the employee as client and enable him to deal the issues of work related problems in a larger context with his awareness of the inter-relationship among problems in adjustment with self, other and environment and

that a work concern will effect personal life and vice-versa, the employee would receive help regarding the problem in all life. One of the advantage of the individual interventions is the individual can use these skills to improve the quality of life in offer domains like family, social support and self, thus reducing the negative carry of experiences in these domains into the work life which might effect his occupation mental health.

CONCLUSION

Stress in the work place has become the black plague of the present century. Much of the stress at work is caused not only by work overload and time pressure but also by lack of rewards and praise, and more importantly, by not providing individuals with the autonomy to do their work as they would like. Most of the employees were not satisfied with the grievance handling procedure of the organization which was found by the unstructured interview. Organization must begin to manage people at work differently, treating them with respect and valuing their contribution. Employers should provide a stress-free work environment, recognise where stress is becoming a problem for staff, and take action to reduce stress. Stress in the workplace reduces productivity, increases management pressures, and makes people ill in many ways, evidence of which is still increasing. Workplace stress affects the performance of the brain, including functions of work performance; memory, concentration, and learning. In the UK over 13 million working days are lost every year because of stress.

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