

STRESS MANAGEMENTJYOTI*

MEANING OF STRESS

Stress may be defined as "a state of psychological and / or physiological imbalance resulting from the disparity between situational demand and the individual's ability and / or motivation to meet those demands."

Stress is the body's reaction to a change that requires a physical, mental or emotional adjustment or response. It can be caused by both good and bad experiences. When people feel stressed by something going on around them, their bodies react by releasing chemicals into the blood. These chemicals give people more energy and strength, which can be a good thing if their stress is caused by physical danger. But this can also be a bad thing, if their stress is in response to something emotional and there is no outlet for this extra energy and strength.

Stress can be positive or negative. Stress can be positive when the situation offers an opportunity for a person to gain something. It acts as a motivator for peak performance. Stress can be negative when a person faces social, physical, organisational and emotional problems. Stress can cause headaches, eating disorder, allergies, insomnia, backaches, frequent cold and fatigue to diseases such as hypertension, asthma, diabetes, heart ailments and even cancer.

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WORK STRESS MODEL

Factors that cause stress are called "*Stressors*." The following are the sources or causes of an organisational and non-organisational stress.

INDIVIDUAL LEVEL STRESSORS:

- **Career Changes:** When a person suddenly switches over a new job, he is under stress to shoulder new responsibilities properly. Under promotion, over promotion, demotion and transfers can also cause stress.
- **Career Concern :** If an employee feels that he is very much behind in corporate ladder, then he may experience stress and if he feels that there are no opportunities for self-growth he may experience stress. Hence unfulfilled career expectations are a major source of stress.
- **Role Ambiguity:** It occurs when the person does not know what he is supposed to do on the job. His tasks and responsibilities are not clear. The employee is not sure what he is expected to do. This creates confusion in the minds of the worker and results in stress.
- **Role Conflict:** It takes place when different people have different expectations from a person performing a particular role. It can also occur if the job is not as per the expectation or when a job demands a certain type of behaviour that is against the person's moral values.
- **Role Overload:** Stress may occur to those individuals who work in different shifts. Employees may be expected to work in day shift for some days and then in the night shift. This may create problems in adjusting to the shift timings, and it can affect not only personal life but also family life of the employee.
- **Frustration:** Frustration is another cause of stress. Frustration arises when goal directed behaviour is blocked. Management should attempt to remove barriers and help the employees to reach their goals.
- **Life Changes:** Life changes can bring stress to a person. Life changes can be slow or sudden. Slow life changes include getting older and sudden life changes include death or accident of a loved one. Sudden life changes are highly stressful and very difficult to cope.
- **Personality:** People are broadly classified as '*Type A*' and '*Type B*'.
 - Feels guilty while relaxing.

- Gets irritated by minor mistakes of self and others.
- Feels impatient and dislikes waiting.
- Does several things at one time.

While the 'Type B' people are exactly opposite and hence are less affected by stress due to above mentioned factors.

GROUP LEVEL STRESSORS:

- **Managerial Behaviour** : Some managers creates stress for employees by
 - Exhibiting inconsistent behaviour
 - Failing to provide necessary support
 - Providing inadequate direction
 - Showing lack of concern and
- **Lack of Group Cohesiveness**: Every group is characterised by its cohesiveness although they differ widely in degree of cohesiveness. Individuals experience stress when there is no unity among the members of work group. There is mistrust, jealousy, frequent quarrels, etc., in groups and this lead to stress to employees.
- **Lack of Participation in Decision Making**: Many experienced employees feel that management should consult them on matters affecting their jobs. In reality, the superiors hardly consult the concerned employees before taking a decision. This develops a feeling of being neglected, which may lead to stress.
- **Interpersonal and Intergroup Conflict** : Interpersonal and intergroup conflict takes place due to differences in perceptions, attitudes, values and beliefs between two or more individuals and groups. Such conflicts can be a source of stress to group members.
- **Lack of Social Support**: When individuals believe that they have the friendship and support of others at work, their ability to cope with the effects of stress increases. If this kind of social support is not available then an employee experiences more stress.
- **Workplace violence**: Workplace violence is a very serious interpersonal stressor. Individuals who experience violence have symptoms of severe distress after the violent event. Workplace violence is also stressor for those who observe the violence.

- **Sexual Harassment:** This refers to un-welcome conduct of a sexual nature that affects the job related performance of an employee adversely.

ORGANISATIONAL LEVEL STRESSORS:

- **Organisational Climate:** A high pressure environment that places chronic work demands on employees fuels the stress response.
- **Organisational Structure:** It defines the level of differentiation, the degree of rules and regulations and where decisions are made. Excessive rules and lack of participation in decisions that affect an employee are examples of structural variables that might be potential stressors.
- **Organisational Leadership:** Represents the managerial style of the organisation's senior executives. Some chief executive officers create a culture characterised by tension, fear and anxiety.
- **Organisational Changes:** When changes occur, people have to adapt to those changes and this may cause stress. Stress is higher when changes are major or unusual like transfer or adaption of new technology.
- **Occupational Demands:** Some jobs are more stressful than others. Jobs that involve risk and danger are more stressful. Research findings indicate that jobs that are more stressful usually requires constant monitoring of equipments and devices, unpleasant physical conditions, making decisions, etc.
- **Work Overload:** Excessive work load leads to stress as it puts a person under tremendous pressure. Work overload may take two different forms :-
 - Qualitative work overload implies performing a job that is complicated or beyond the employee's capacity.
 - Quantitative work overload arises when number of activities to be performed in the prescribed time is many.
- **Work Under load:** In this case, very little work or too simple work is expected on the part of the employee. Doing less work or jobs of routine and simple nature would lead to monotony and boredom, which can lead to stress.

- **Working Conditions:** Employees may be subject to poor working conditions. It would include poor lighting and ventilations, unhygienic sanitation facilities, excessive noise and dust, presence of toxic gases and fumes, inadequate safety measures, etc. All these unpleasant conditions create physiological and psychological imbalance in humans thereby causing stress.

EXTRA- ORGANISATIONAL STRESSORS:

- **Technological Changes:** When there are any changes in technological field, employees are under the constant stress of fear of losing jobs, or need to adjust to new technologies. This can be a source of stress.
- **Civic Amenities:** Poor civic amenities in the area in which one lives can be a cause of stress. Inadequate or lack of civic facilities like improper water supply, excessive noise or air pollution, lack of proper transport facility can be quite stressful.
- **Caste and Religion Conflicts:** Employees living in areas which are subject to caste and religious conflicts do suffer from stress. In case of religion, the minorities and lower-caste people (seen especially in India) are subject to more stress.
- **Economic Factors:** Changes in business cycle create economic uncertainties. When the economy contracts, people get worried about their own security. Minor stress also cause stress in work force.

STRESS MANAGEMENT

Strategies may be categorized as:

INDIVIDUAL STRATEGIES:

- **Biofeedback:** Biofeedback is the process of gaining greater awareness of many physiological functions primarily using instruments that provide information on the activity of those same systems, with a goal of being able to manipulate them at will. Some of the processes that can be controlled include brainwaves, muscle tone, skin conductance, heart rate and pain perception. Biofeedback may be used to improve health, performance, and the physiological changes which often occur in conjunction with changes to thoughts, emotions, and behaviour. Eventually, these changes may be

maintained without the use of extra equipment, even though no equipment is necessarily required to practice biofeedback actually:

- **Time management:** Time management is the act or process of planning and exercising conscious control over the amount of time spent on specific activities, especially to increase effectiveness, efficiency or productivity. Time management may be aided by a range of skills, tools, and techniques used to manage time when accomplishing specific tasks, projects and goals complying with a due date. This set encompasses a wide scope of activities, and these include planning, allocating, setting goals, delegation, analysis of time spent, monitoring, organizing, scheduling, and prioritizing.
- **Meditation:** Meditation is a practice in which an individual trains the mind and/or induces a mode of consciousness to realize some benefit, although it can be argued meditation is a goal in and of itself. The term *meditation* refers to a broad variety of practices (much like the term *sports*), which range from techniques designed to promote relaxation, contacting spiritual guides, building internal energy, receiving psychic visions, getting closer to a god, seeing past lives, taking astral journeys, and so forth, to more technical exercises targeted at developing compassion, love, patience, generosity, forgiveness and more far-reaching goals such as effortless sustained single-pointed concentration, single-pointed analysis, and an indestructible sense of well-being while engaging in any and all of life's activities. Thus, it is essential to be specific about the type of meditation practice under investigation.
- **Cognitive therapy:** Based on the theory that depression is due to distortions in the patient's perspectives, such as all-or-none thinking, over-generalization, and selective perception. The therapist initially tries to highlight these distortions, and then encourages the patient to change his or her attitudes.
- **Relaxation technique:** A **relaxation technique** (also known as **relaxation training**) is any method, process, procedure, or activity that helps a person to relax; to attain a state of increased calmness; or otherwise reduce levels of anxiety, stress or anger. Relaxation techniques are often employed as one element of a wider stress management program and can decrease muscle tension, lower the blood pressure and slow heart and breathe rates, among other health benefits.

ORGANISATIONAL STRATEGIES:

There are several ways in which stress can be handled so that the dysfunctional consequences of stress can be reduced. Some of them are:

- **Role Analysis Technique (RAT):** The Role Analysis Technique helps both the manager and the employee to analyze the requirements and expectations from the job. Breaking-down the job into various components clarifies the role of the job for the entire system. This also helps to eliminate reduction of work and thus lowering down the stress level.
- **Employee Assistance Program:** Another widely used strategy is the employee assistance Programs, which offer a variety of assistance to employees. These include counselling employees who seek assistance on how to deal with alcohol and drug abuse, handling conflicts at the work place, dealing with marital and other family problems. It includes:

Diagnosis- An employee with a problem asks for help; EAP staff attempts to diagnose the problem

Treatment- Counseling or support therapy is provided either by internal staff or outside referral

Screening- Periodic examination of employees in highly stressful jobs for early detection of problems

Prevention- Education and persuasion used to convince high risk employees to seek help to change

- **Organizational Stress Management Program Targets:**

It includes:

- Training programs for managing and coping with stress
 - Redesigning work to minimize stressors
 - Changes in management style to one of more support and coaching to help workers achieve their goals
 - Creating more flexible work hours
 - Paying more attention to work/life balance with regard to child and elder care
 - Better communication and team-building practices
 - Better feedback on worker performance and management expectation.
- **Career Counseling:** Career Counseling helps the employee to obtain professional advice regarding career that would help the individual to achieve personal goals. It also makes the

employees aware of what additional educational qualifications or specialized technical training, if any, (hat they should acquire. By becoming knowledgeable about the possible avenues for advancement, the employees who consider their careers to be important can reduce their stress levels by becoming more realistic about their options and can start preparing themselves for it.

- **Delegation:** Another way of coping with job stress is to delegate some responsibilities to others. Delegation can directly decrease workload upon the manager and helps to reduce the stress.
- **More Information and Help:** Some new employees have to spend more time on a job than necessary because they are not sure what they are doing. So it is necessary that some help should be provided before doing the work that would lead to much efficient, effective work. It would also reduce anxiety and stress among the employees.
- **Job Relocation:** Job relocation assistance is offered to employees who are transferred, by finding alternative employment for the spouses of the transferred employees and getting admissions in schools for their children in the new place. These arrangements help to reduce the anxiety and stress for the moving family.
- **Supervisor Training:** Another type of stress management Program that organizations are experimenting with is supervisor training. The emphasis on supervisory training Program is how to prevent job stress. Managers are trained to give better performance appraisals, to listen to employees' problems more effectively, and to communicate job assignments and instructions more clearly.
- **Individual Stress Reduction Workshops:** Some organizations have also sponsored individual stress reduction workshops for their employees. These programs include biofeedback, meditation to career counselling, time management and interpersonal skills workshops. In lectures and seminars, participants are given a basic understanding of the causes of stress and its consequences. Then, participants are given materials to help them identify the major sources of stress in their own lives, and some strategies for dealing with that stress more effectively.

Another stress management strategy:-

Stress management strategy #1:

- *Avoid unnecessary stress*
 - Learn how to say “no”
 - Avoid people who stress you out
 - Take control of your environment.
- Stress management strategy #2:
- Express your feelings instead of bottling them up.
 - Be willing to compromise.
 - Be more assertive
 - Time Management.

Stress management strategy #3:

- *Adapt to the stressor*
- Look at the big picture
- Focus on the positive.

Stress management strategy #4:

- *Accept the things you can't change:*
- Don't try to control the uncontrollable
- Look for the upside
- Share your feelings
- Learn to forgive

Stress management strategy #5:

Healthy ways to relax and recharge

- Go for a walk.
- Spend time in nature.
- Call a good friend.
- Sweat out tension with a good workout.
- Write in your journal.
- Take a long bath.
- Light scented candles
- Play with a pet.
- Work in your garden.

- ▣ Curl up with a good book.
- ▣ Listen to music.
- ▣ Watch a comedy

Conclusion

Stress management can take many different forms which can be classified in to three broad categories- relaxation, drug therapy and psychological therapy.

Relaxation therapy mainly consists of Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR) and Autogenic Muscle Relaxation (AMR). Both PMR and AMR result in stress reduction. Cognitive behavioural therapy, in the form of stress inoculation training, is successful in reducing stress. The key to success is to think positively; take control of your stress and anxiety by learning effective techniques to combat it. Relaxing bodily tension in order to reduce the physical sensations of stress is a good place to start. Things that help reduce stress: Jogging, Aerobics Change of diet. Career Counseling helps the employee to obtain professional advice regarding career that would help the individual to achieve personal goals. Individual strategy and group strategies are used to reduce stress.

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