

Stress Management: An Integrative Approach

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Abstract: Modern world is a world of stress, right from the time of birth till death an individual is invariably exposed to various stressful situations. Hence stress is a subject which is hard to avoid. When stress accumulates, we may experience certain physical, emotional, or behavioral stress signals. Therefore, stress need to managed and coped with to minimize its debilitating effects. In this paper an attempt has been made to explore causes, symptoms and consequences of stress. This paper also suggests the ways to manage stress. Some of the stress coping strategies includes physical exercise, Yoga and meditation, networking and setting clear objectives, undertake stress audit. Now a day's employee assistance programme and wellness programmes are widely used by many organizations to reduce the stress level of employees,

Keywords: Stress, Causes, Symptoms, Consequences, coping strategies.

1. INTRODUCTION

Stress has become an inevitable part of our lives. Stress arises as a result of our relations with the constantly changing environment and our adaptation to it. A Canadian psychologist Hans Selye, the founder of the theory of stress, defined stress "as the nonspecific response of our body to any demand for change" (cited in Le Fevre et al., 2003, pp.726-744). Looker and Gregson (2003) describe stress as the mismatch between perceived demands and the perceived abilities to cope. Additionally, stress has been simply described as an unavoidable consequence of life (Sorenson, 2007). Hammer and organ have defined – stress as "a set of circumstances under which an individual cannot respond adequately or instrumentally to environmental stimuli or can so respond only at the cost of excessive wear and tear on the organism- for example chronic fatigue, tension worry, physical damage, nervous breakdown or loss of self esteem". Carlson and Buskist (1997) stress is a pattern of physiological, behavioral, emotional and cognitive responses to real or imagined stimuli that are perceived as blocking a goal or otherwise threatening our wellbeing. Ivanchevich and Matteson (1993) define stress simply as "an interaction of the individual to his or her environment". They also define this term in detail as: "adopted response of a person as a reflection of their diversity and/or psychological processes to activities, states, or events in the environment creating exaggerated psychological and physical needs."

Greenberg and Baron (2000) define stress as "a complex pattern of emotional states, physiological reactions and related thoughts in response to external demands". They refer to the demands emanating from the environment as stressors. Examples of stressors are: the demands of work assignments, interpersonal relations between co-workers, one's relations with one's spouse and children, and social obligations. The third term, strain connected to stress and stressors, according to these authors, refers to the accumulated effects of stress expressed as deviations from normal patterns of behavior or activity and thus constituting a consequence to the exposure to stressful events.

Srivastava (1983) attempted to explore the stress performance (production) relationship, whether or not the employees' potentiality to produce comparatively more influences their perception of role based stress. It observed that the employees who maintained constantly high level of production experienced less role stress as compared with low production capacity. It also established that not only the perceived role stress influences employees job performance but their performance level also determines their perception of role stress to a considerable extent. **Karad (2010)** examined the cause and effect analysis of job stress among IT sector. The study revealed that most of the employees in IT sector undergoing one or other kind of stress due to extra organizational, group and individual problems. Further, suggested some coping strategies to avoid stressful conditions i.e. Knowledge about stress, physiological fitness, assertiveness, time management, readjusting the goals of life and relaxation. **Devi (2011)** identified the stress levels among employees

working in IT sector. The study found the stress coping strategies in which includes stress management programs, physical activities planned in job design, life style modification programs, finding triggers and stressors, supportive organization culture, stress counseling programs, and spiritual programs. **Singh and Sofat (2011)** evaluated the causes and levels of stress among employees working in insurance companies. The findings of the study revealed that the level of stress among the women working in insurance companies is higher as compare to men. Further, workload, job insecurity and interpersonal conflict are considered as the major causes of stress among employees. It was also suggested that there should be proper communication system in the organization for reducing stress level among the employees. **Gunasundari and Ravindren (2012)** examined the various factor or causes that involve stress and symptoms of stress faced by employees working in IT industry. The study revealed that stress has significant impact on behavioral and physical symptoms for IT professional. Further, it was found that the workplace stress in IT industry is occurs due to increased fear of job security, work pressure, heavy workload, limited deadlines etc. **Sharmila and Poornima (2012)** examined the specific problems of private bank employees related to occupational stress and found that due to professional and personal reasons about 98% of the respondents were facing high level of stress. Further, work life imbalance was found to be the major attribute which contributed to stress. It was suggested that to improve employee's skill and their confidence to work effectively, job oriented training programs should have introduced and also undertook stress audit at all levels in organization for identify stress area and improving condition of job and also lessen job stress. **Shatrughan singh and et al. (2013)** determined the short term effects of stress management on top line managers of ONGC. Symptom check list (SCL-90) and State Anxiety Inventory were given before and after five days of stress management programme. It showed an improvement of almost 32% in SCL-90 and 10.45% reduction in anxiety score. The somatisation component of checklist gives an overall idea about the distress related to physical sensation i.e. cardio-vascular, gastrointestinal, respiratory and other systems where autonomic meditation influences functions. **Rabindra Achrya and et al. (2014)** evaluated the effects of five days stress management programme, Self Management of Excessive Tension (SMET) on the managers by using the Vedic Personality Inventory (VPI), the Penn State Worry questionnaire (PSQW) and General Health Questionnaires. A significant improvement were observed both in the personality traits and on the four domains of general health, viz. somatisation, anxiety and depression, social dysfunction and psychological well being of the managers. It proved that SMET practices transform the personality traits in managers by reducing anxiety, depression and somatisation and improving their psychological well being. SMET also showed a very high positive impact on the Sattvic gunas of the respondents, reducing the Tamasic and Rajasic gunas and helped in reducing the worries of the participants, thus positively impacting their overall general health. It also concluded that SMET help in reducing stress in managers and thereby enhance their productivity and leading to the growth of organization.

2. PHYSICAL REACTIONS TO STRESS

Stress affects the physical and mental health of an individual. "The Generalized Stress Response is the phrase used to explain a variety of physical reactions to stress, such as:" (Enough Workplace stress, 2003)

- An increased metabolism, for example, faster heartbeat and quicker breathing
- Increased blood pressure
- Increased cholesterol and fatty acids in the bloodstream.
- Decreased protein synthesis, impaired digestion and immune and allergic response systems.
- Faster blood clotting.
- Increased production of stomach acids
- Increased production of blood sugar for energy.

3. KINDS OF STRESS

As far as a conference report by **Jennifer Smith** of Cranfield University school of Management is concerned, there are four different kinds of stress. They are: **Eustress** – It arises only in motivating & inspiring situations, also known as "Good Stress", **Distress** – This is negative or harmful stress that causes us to constantly adopt or readjust. This may be acute stress that disappears quickly or chronic stress that can linger for no specific period. **Hyper stress** – This occurs

when events pile up and stretch the limits of what people can deal with. **Hypo stress** – It occurs when people are bored or unchallenged. In other words, this is an insufficient amount of stress.

4. CAUSES OF STRESS

The sources of stress come from what are called stressors. The stressors or the so-called antecedents come from both inside our body and mind and outside of us. The stressors, thus, fall logically into four categories viz, environmental, organizational, group and individual stressors. Stressors in various categories will help us become more aware of stress in our lives.

- **Environmental Stressors:** Environmental factors have a great impact on employee stress. The main environmental factors that affect the extent of stress of an employee are fast technological change, family demands and obligations, economic and financial conditions, race, caste, class, ethnic identity and relocation and transfers. On the one hand, the modern living style caught up in the rush-rush, mobile urbanized and crowded has deteriorated the wellness and increased the potential for stress on the job, on the other. For most people in the recent years, their weak financial position has forced them to do extra job or the spouse has had to join work to meet ever increasing ends. This situation reduces time for recreational, relaxation and family activities. The overall effect is more stress on the employees. These are, according to some stress researchers, examples of stressors as unresolved environmental demands. That life's changes especially sudden changes (the death of a spouse) have a stressful impact on people is verified by the medical researchers. They have established the fact that the more and sudden change, the poorer the subsequent health of the employee. One psychologist, Faye Crosby reports similar finding that divorce interferes with work more than any other trauma in a person's life. She says, "During the first three months after a spouse walks out, the other spouse, be male or female, usually is incapable of focusing on work."
- **Organizational Stressors:** Stressors occur not only outside the organization, but within it also. Organizational stressors can be categorized into policies and strategies, structure and design, processes and working conditions. Organizational changes to meet challenges are usually accompanied by stressors. For example, downsizing policy of an organization serves as potential stressors for the employees. One researcher reported that downsizing has left many organizations with fewer workers. As such, the remaining workers have been forced to pick up the slack of the workers who have left. Then, the result often is frantic employees and more stress related workers compensation claims. Similarly, the good managers (Say, the Indian managers) to compete successfully with the best ones (say, the Japanese managers) will have to work harder. This, in nutshell, translates to longer work hours and more stress. Difference, if any, between the perceived actual leadership style and expected leadership style leads to a conflict and dissonance between the managers and subordinates. This conflict and dissonance serves as a stress. Also, there is evidence to believe that working women with perceived pay inequality and work overload experience more stress. Added to these are undesirable working conditions such as crowded work area, noise, heat, cold, polluted air, strong odor, poor lighting etc., serve as stressors.
- **Group Stressors:** People are usually members of various formal and informal groups. The department or section, to which one belongs, for example, is formal group. Group bears tremendous influence on individual member's behavior. The group, therefore, can also be a potential source of stress. These group stressors can be categorized into three types:
 - (i) **Lack of Group Cohesiveness:** The famous Hawthorne studies have made it clear that cohesiveness or „togetherness“ provides satisfaction to the employees. Lack of cohesiveness creates conflict which serves a potential stressor for the employees. Denying opportunity to employees to develop and not accepting an employee by other employees produces but stress in the employee.
 - (ii) **Lack of Social Support:** We all as the members of groups look for support from co- members in times of both happiness and sorrow. If we get this social support, we are much better off. If such a support is lacking for an individual member, the same can also cause stress.
 - (iii) **Interpersonal and Inter group Conflict:** The incompatibility in terms of needs and values between co-workers/colleagues usually creates interpersonal conflict. Likewise, variance in objectives and goals between groups leads to inter group conflict. Conflict studies indicate that such dysfunctional conflicts can also lead to considerable stress for individuals.

- **Individual Stressors:** Apart from the stressors discussed so far (environmental, organizational, and group), there are individual factors which serve as stress. These are:
 - (i) **Role Conflict and Ambiguity:** Individual employees have multiple roles to play within as well as outside the organization such as superior, subordinate, colleague, family, and community and so on. These roles are a set of expectations that other members have of an employee. Variation in expectations leads to role ambiguity. If these expectations make conflicting demands on the employee, he/she experiences role conflict. Both role conflict and ambiguity cause considerable stress to the employee.
 - (ii) **Personality Traits:** Personality affects behavior. Personality traits vary from individual to individual. Researchers have classified personality dimensions into type A and Type B. Heart researchers report that Type A employees experience considerable stress. On the other hand, the individuals of Type B, being patient and relaxed, take a broader view of things. They are, therefore, less prone to stress.
 - (iii) **Life and Career Changes:** Life's changes may be slow (getting older) or sudden (the death of a spouse). Particularly sudden changes have a dramatic effect on people. The medical researchers have verified that more the person experiences sudden changes; the poorer will be his subsequent health. The same is true for career changes also. Frequent and sudden changes in one's career or nature of job and responsibility, underemployment or over employment, etc. can be stress-provoking. Besides, certain situations are peculiar to the Indian workers which add to tension and stress to them. Experts on stress management are of the view that a lot of stress in Indian case is due to demands placed on time and finance from family, relatives, friends, community leisure and relationships that we have in our family and social lives. It is established by psychologists that problems at home can cause more anxiety in the work place and, thus, stress on job. One's ambitions of achieving too much in too short time also cause stress in individual life. Going through a process of change during the mid age 35 to 45 years is yet another peculiarity of the Indian managers and professionals. Those who could not make mark by the mid-age tend to develop obsolescence tendencies and, thus, experience stress in remaining years of their working career. Such a situation leads to existential neurosis which serves as a cause of stress for managers and professionals.

5. SYMPTOMS OF STRESS

While humanity has suffered from various kinds of diseases in its history, stress has been called the most debilitating medical and social problem of the present century (Nuernberger, 1990). Stress is unique in the category of diseases. Symptoms of stress can be classified in following three broad categories.

- **Psychosomatic:** The word Psychosomatic consist of two words-psyches (mind) and soma (body). Suggesting thereby that though the symptoms are bodily (physical) the causes are mental. There is general agreement that a high percentage of disease affecting mankind is psychosomatic and their primary causes are our thoughts, attitudes, and the beliefs. When we speak of psychosomatic symptoms, we basically mean that the major source of the disease lies in one's emotional, mental or perceptual and behavioral habits.
- **Psychological:** stress produces many psychological problems. Researchers have found that stress is related with the anxiety, anger, nervousness, irritability, job dissatisfaction, depression, helplessness, hopelessness and tensions are the result of psychological stress. Some of the researchers reported that the employees suffering from occupational stress generally tend to have low psychological commitment to the organization.
- **Behavioral:** Stress also attacks the behavior of the individuals. There is general agreement that high degree of stress drives people to adopt certain easily visible behavioral symptoms such as sleeplessness, excessive drinking, smoking, obesity, absenteeism and gluttony. Some of the less visible behavioral symptoms are bad decision making, negative internal politics, reduced creativity, and apathy and so on.

6. CONSEQUENCES OF STRESS

- **Individual Consequences:** The individual consequences of stress, then, are the outcomes that mainly affect the individual. The organization also may suffer, either directly or indirectly but it is the individual who pays the real price stress may produce behavioral psychological and medical consequences.

- **Behavioral Consequences:** The behavior consequences of stress may harm the person under stress or others. One such behavior is smoking research has clearly documented that people who smoke tend to smoke more when they experience stress. There is also evidence that alcohol and drug abuse are linked to stress, although this relationship is less well documented. Other possible behavioral consequences are accident proneness, violence, and appetite disorders.
- **Psychological Consequences:** The psychological consequences of stress relate to a person's normal health and wellbeing. When people experience too much stress work, they may become depressed or find themselves sleeping too much or not enough. Stress may also lead to family problems and sexual difficulties.
- **Medical Consequences:** The medical consequences of stress affect a person's physical well-being. Heart disease and stroke, among other illnesses, have been linked to stress. Other common medical problems resulting from too much stress include headaches, backaches, ulcers and related stomach and intestinal disorders and skin conditions such as eczema and hives.
- **Organizational Consequences:** Clearly any of the individual consequences just discussed can also affect the organization. Other results of stress have even more direct consequences for organizations. These include decline in performance, withdrawal, and turnover.

7. STRESS MANAGEMENT

Globally more than 3 out of 5 doctor visits are for stress-related problems. Globally 23% of women executives and professionals and 19% of their male peers, say they feel super stressed. (Source: Foundation for Integrated Research in Mental Health 2007)

Stress management starts with identifying the sources of stress in your life. This isn't as easy as it sounds. Your true sources of stress aren't always obvious, and it's all too easy to overlook your own stress-inducing thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Sure, you may know that you're constantly worried about work deadlines. But maybe it's your procrastination, rather than the actual job demands, that leads to deadline stress.

There is no "one size fits all" solution to manage stress. Every individual has a unique response to stress, so experiment with a variety of approaches to manage and reduce stress to learn what works best for you. Stress can be managed if we understand the reasons that cause stress and the level of stress. Stress can be effectively recognized and managed. High level stress affects the individuals directly and through them, their families and organizations are also affected. Therefore efforts should be made to overcome the negative consequences of high stress. Stress management is required when an individual is unable to cope with the demanding environment. This inability generates anxiety and produces defensive behavior so as to overcome the consequences of stress. Such actions may be taken at individual level as well as organizational level.

8. INDIVIDUAL STRATEGIES

At the individual level, each employee can take personal responsibility for reducing stress levels. Individual strategies are based on "self-help" or "do it yourself" approaches, some specific techniques that individuals can use to effectively manage their job stress are:

- **Physical Exercise:** Exercise in any form, be it walking, jogging, swimming, riding bicycles or playing games help people combat stress. Without going into the semantics about the exact relationship between exercise and stress, it can safely be said that at least some side effects of exercise such as relaxation, enhanced self-esteem and simply getting one's mind off the work for a while help people better cope with stress.
- **Behavioral Self-Control:** Behavioral self-control refers to self management. A conscious analysis of the causes and consequences of their own behavior helps employees achieve self-control. In ultimate sense, the self-control strategy implies employees controlling the situation instead of letting the situation control them. Accordingly, one way to avoid stress is to avoid people or situations that will put employees under stress.
- **Networking:** Psychological researches have confirmed that people need and benefit from social support. Developing social support, therefore, can be used as a strategy for reducing job stress too. Doing so would entail forming close associations with trusted co-workers and colleagues who are good listeners and confidence builders. These co-workers

at times help the stressful employee get over stress. Such alliances deliberately sought out and developed in the organizations are called networks or networking

- **Counseling:** Counseling is yet another strategy widely used in organizations for dealing with stress. Employees are given counseling in the matters like career planning to provide them clarity to their career goals and opportunities. This helps reduce uncertainty in this regard which is a major source of job stress. Employees can be helped through counseling to identify their own strengths, weaknesses and response pattern and change their behavior accordingly, In India, certain organizations like Canara Bank, for instance, have started stress counseling centre to mitigate the effects of job stress.
- **Yoga and Meditation:** Yoga and meditation which are of the Indian origin, also affect the psychological well being of people. Many studies show that adaptation of the yoga way of life can significantly reduce the job burnout of employees. The yoga way of life is an integrated approach to the changing physical, mental, vital and emotional personality of an individual.

9. ORGANIZATIONAL STRATEGIES

Besides individuals practicing coping strategies, organizations too have been developing implementing stress – reduction strategies. Coping strategies an organization will adopt to combat stress will aim at to reduce the already existing stressors and prevent occurrence of potential stressors. Accordingly, an organization can adopt the following strategies.

- i. Clear objectives should be set for the organization and the members must commit themselves to achieve these objectives. This helps minimize role ambiguity which usually filters down the organization in the form of neurosis.
- ii. Once objectives are clearly defined, organization must, then, be sincerely committed to effective utilization of its human resources to achieve the organizational goals. For this, an organization development (OD) department should be started with a responsibility to create meaningful and enriching jobs for its employees.
- iii. The organization must be adaptable to the changing social, economic, political and technological developments. Thus, the organizational structure must be flexible so as to accommodate such changes.
- iv. The stress is caused by not knowing what the next move is and how they are going to make it. But carefully devised plans for career paths and development taking into consideration both the individual capabilities and aspirations, on the one hand, and the organizational requirements, on the other, lead to reduction in stress experienced by employees.

Now a day, Employee assistance programmes and wellness programmes are being increasingly used by firms to reduce the stress level of the employees. Some of these programmes focus on a specific issue or a problem, such as alcohol or drug abuse, carrier counseling, job allocation or burnout. Still other programmes may target a specific group with group within the organization.

Employee Assistance Programs: Current employee assistance programs are design to deal with a wild range of stress related problems both work and non- work related. EAP's tend to be based on the typical medical approach to treatment and involve the following

- **Diagnosis:** Employees with a problem ask for help. EAP staff attempt to diagnose the problem
- **Treatment:** Counseling or therapy is provided. If EAP staffs are enabling to help, employee may refer to appropriate professionals.
- **Screening:** Periodic examination of employee is highly stressful job is provided to detect early indicators of problems.
- **Prevention:** Education and persuasion are used to convince employees at high risk that something must be done to assist them in effectively coping with stress.

Wellness programs: Wellness programs, often called health promotion programs, focused on employees overall physical and mental health. In simple language, any activity an organization engages in that is design to indentify and assist in preventing or correcting specific health problem, health hazards, or negative health habits falls under wellness programs. This includes not only disease identification but lifestyle modification too. The most prevalent examples of such programs are smoking cessation, physical fitness and exercise, nutrition and diet control and work and personal stress management.

10. CONCLUSION

Thus it is clear that stress is most the common in wake of liberalization, globalization and modernization process across industries and it occurs when there is discrepancy between the demand of the environment, workplace and individual's ability to carry out and complete these demands. As a result of these pressures, employees develop various symptoms of stress that can harm their job performance. Negative stress leads to destructive organizational and personal consequences both long and short run. Therefore stress needs to managed and coped with to minimize its harmful effects. In this case, the responsibility of organization arises, that they must take proper initiative to reduce the stress level among the employees. They can adopt any techniques, namely, Physical exercise, Networking, Counseling, Yoga and meditation, Employee assistance programme and wellness programme.

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