



CONTEMPORARY STRATEGIES FOR WORK PLACE STRESS MANAGEMENT

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Abstract

This century has belonged to the Information Technology sector. The IT rumble has brought in its own challenges regarding strategy formulations and policy making to compete with and be in pace with IT revolution. It has brought with it, its own set of challenges to organizations like how to put in place systems and process that are in tune with the IT revolution, how to strategize and compete in the IT era? etc.

On-the-job stressors suffers from unclear job expectations, time pressures to noisy work stations. One of the significant factor is absence of work / life balance, which can contribute to the stress load, especially women who tend to be the primary care takers of children and elderly persons.

Now more than ever before, job stress poses a threat to health of employees and in turn to the health of organization although occupational stress and stress management have assumed enormous importance in any organization. The work life and the problems that are encountered in daily work life has been blended with our lifestyles for the past several years.

Whatever the root causes, stressed employees tend to be fatigued, prone to mistakes and injuries, and are more likely to be absent. With a dual strategy of organizational change and individual stress management, businesses can be proactive and promote healthier, more productive employees and reduce healthcare costs.

Work place stress management programs and implementation of measures to reduce psychological pressure and individual's sense of control are possible ways to counteract the negative effects of a stressful situation.

Key Words: Workplace Stress, Social Life, Health, Satisfaction, Conflict.

Introduction

Stress is a condition or feeling experienced when a person perceives that demands exceed the personal and social resources the individual is able to mobilize. Richard S. Lazarus

Stress refers to the anxiety from the conflict between our external environment and us, leading to emotional and physical pressure. In our fast paced world, it is impossible to live without stress. There is both positive and negative stress, depending on each individual's unique perception of the tension between the two forces. Stress bears deliberating effects on both the employees and the employer. (Khanka, p.319) Corporate India is finally waking up to the fact that a lot of human potential is being shattered away because of stress and burn out. (Shekhar Bajaj).

Workplace stress is the harmful physical and emotional retort that occurs when there is a poor match between job demands and the capabilities, resources, or needs of the worker. These conditions may lead to poor work performance or even injury. Job stress is also associated with various biological reactions that may lead ultimately to compromised health. The Symptoms of Stress would be Absenteeism, escaping from work responsibilities, arriving late, leaving early deterioration in work performance, more of inaccuracy, memory loss, cribbing, over-reacting arguing, getting irritated, anxiety, deteriorating health, more of accidents, improper eating habits (over-eating or under-eating), excessive smoking and drinking, sleeplessness, etc.

Sources / Causes of Stress

Some of the major contributions towards the stress includes Organizational factors like Discrimination in pay/salary structure, strict rules and regulations, Ineffective communication, Peer pressure, Goals conflicts/goals ambiguity, more of centralized and formal organization structure, Less promotional opportunities, Lack of employees participation in decision-making, Excessive control over the employees by the managers.

Individual factors include various expectations which the family members, peer, superior and subordinates have from the employee. Failure to understand such expectations or to convey such expectations lead to role ambiguity/role conflict which in turn causes employee stress. Other individual factors causing stress among employees are inherent personality traits such as being impatient, aggressive, rigid, feeling time pressure always, etc. Similarly, the family issues, personal financial problems, sudden career changes all lead to stress.



Job concerning factors are Monotonous nature of job, Unsafe and unhealthy working conditions, Lack of confidentiality, Crowding, Extra-organizational factors- In today's modern and technology savvy world, stress has increased. Inflation, technological change, social responsibilities and rapid social changes are other extra-organizational factors causing stress.

One of the effective evaluation tools is a health risk assessment (HRA). The HRA is an online or print questionnaire provided to employees that helps identify risks for diseases and contributing factors, to stress levels. HRA enables employees to learn about their individual risks and can be an effective motivator towards making healthy lifestyle changes to reduce those risks. The American Psychological association suggests following ways that a company's culture can be changed to help reduce stress:

1. Ensure that workloads are in line with employees' capabilities and resources.
2. Design jobs to provide meaning, stimulation and opportunities for employees to use their skills.
3. clearly define employees' roles and responsibilities.
4. give employees opportunities to participate in decisions and actions affecting their jobs.
5. improve communications to help reduce uncertainty about career development and future employment prospects.
6. Provide opportunities for social interaction among employees.

Establishing work schedules that are compatible with demands and responsibilities outside the job and offering supportive services can help reduce stress. Here are some key strategies

1. Flexi timing.
2. Job-sharing.
3. Long lunch hours.
4. Elder care support.
5. Health care advocacy.
6. Stress management workshops.
7. Build in exercise breaks.
8. Onsite support groups.

Some of the other Strategies from employer for Managing Stress are encouraging more of organizational communication with the employees so that there is no role ambiguity/conflict. Effective communication can also change employee views. Managers can use better signs and symbols which are not misinterpreted by the employees; Encourage employees' participation in decision-making. This will reduce role stress, Grant employees greater independence, meaningful and timely feedback, and greater responsibility; providing more realistic, stimulating and particular goals. The employees must be given feedback on how well they are heading towards these goals; Encourage decentralization; Have a fair and just distribution of incentives and salary structure; Promote job rotation and job enrichment; Create a just and safe working environment; Have effective hiring and orientation procedure; Appreciate the employees on accomplishing and over-exceeding their targets;

Individual strategies for managing stress includes making a "to-do" list daily, prioritize the acts in the list and plan the acts accordingly. Take regular breaks during work to relax y. By effective time management, the employees can achieve their targets timely and can meet work pressures and, thus, avoid stress; Do hard work. Strive to achieve your goals but do not do it to the harm of family, health, or peer; Indulge in physical exercises. It helps in effective blood circulation, keeps you fit, diverts mind from work pressures; Encourage a healthy lifestyle. Take a regular sleep, have plenty of water and healthy eating habits. Promote relaxation techniques such as yoga, listening music and meditation; The employees should have optimistic approach about their work. They should avoid connections with negative approach employees; The employees should have an emotional intelligence at workplace. They should have self-awareness, self confidence and self-control at workplace; Employees should build social support and have close connections with trustworthy peer who can listen to their problems and boost their confidence level. This social network will help the employees to overcome stress; Employee counseling is a very good strategy to overcome employee stress. Through counseling, employees can become aware of their strengths and how to develop those strengths; their weaknesses and how to eliminate them; and they can develop strategies for changing their behavior. Employees should be given career counseling which helps in reducing their ambiguities with regard to career; Find a fun way to release stress, such as, cracking jokes, playing tennis, golf, etc. and Do not remain preoccupied with yourself. Turn your focus outwards. Help others. This will release some stress.

Objectives

1. To study the causes of stress among employees and effect of stress on productivity of an organization.
2. To analyze the level of stress on employees.
3. To study the effects of stress on the health of employees.
4. To study the role of stress in interpersonal relationship.



Methodology of The Study

The study is based on secondary data. In this regard various libraries were visited and some on-line journals were also reviewed in this direction.

Review of Literature

Weiss M. (1983). -The Author investigated the sources of Job stress that is linked to Job dissatisfaction, Job related tension and anxiety and reduced productivity and effectiveness. He tried to reduce sources of stress so that he can prevent the deleterious health consequences. Through his study he determined the potential of social support that alleviate the deleterious consequences of stress. 1

Singh A. P.& Singh S.(2009) –His study emphasizes on the phenomenon of Job Satisfaction in the organizations. According to him, Job Satisfaction is directly related to Stress and Work culture that an Organization provides. He identified three sectors in which stress originate and classified stress into two main types i.e. eustress and Distress. Further, he pointed the importance of positive stress and positive events for better performance and satisfaction of employees. 2

Gladies J. J. & Kennedy V.(2011)- The author revealed a significant correlation between Organizational Climate and Job Stress among the women working in IT companies of India. According to him, learning how to manage stress is a very crucial issue that should be developed in IT companies so that they can reduce or eliminate the causes of stress and poor working environment.3

Charu M. (2013)- He in his study stated that higher stress is directly proportional to quality of work life for IT professionals. He outlined few factors namely fair pay structure, steady role demands, supervisory support, congenial job environment, capability fit of the job, role autonomy and stress that directly affect the quality of work life. The main reason of stress amongst the associates of IT industry is the rapid change in technology.4

Khalid A. (2012)- There is a direct relationship between stress and job performance in any organization. To improve the performance of an individual in an organization an employee should receive good support from their leaders. Hence, a supportive leader can improve the performance of an employee even at unfavorable situations.5

Kavitha(2012)- The article focuses on the organizational role stress for the employees in the IT sector. It also highlights that women face more stress than men in the organization to be more specific married women faces more stress than the unmarried women.6

Urška Treven, Sonja Treven & Simona Sarotar Zizek (2011)- Organizations, where the employees are said to be stressed are more likely to be unsuccessful in the competitive market. Various approaches of managing stress, good work organization and good management are the effective ways of preventing stress. He categorized stress broadly into three main types; they are a) Transient Stress b) Post Traumatic Stress Disorders (PTSD) c) Chronic Stress. 7

Richardson (2008)- A classification of stress interventions has been done, those are primary, secondary and tertiary. He suggested all the employees to adopt relaxation training intervention for stress management which is the easiest and least expensive approach to implement.8

P.S. Swaminathan,& Rajkumar S. (2013)- He conducted a study that focused on the levels of stress among the age group, profession, different varieties of jobs, hours of work and the influence of work environment on the degree of stress faced by employees. Stress in an employee is very individual in nature. His study indicates about an optimum level in which every individual can perform with his full capacity. He has identified three conditions responsible for work stress they are a) Role overload b) Role self distance c) Role stagnation.9

Satija S. & Khan W. (2013)- According to him Occupational Stress is as same as Job Stress that need to be controlled at the workplace otherwise it will affect negatively employee's work attitudes and behavior. He conducted a study to investigate the relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Occupational Stress. The findings of his study revealed that Emotional Intelligence as a significant predictor of Occupational Stress.10

Bhatti N. ,Shar H. A., Shaikh F. M. & Nazar M. S.(2010)- He has classified stressors broadly into two main types-a) Extra-Organizational and b) Intra-Organizational Stressors. According to his study he predicted that the major causes of



stress are firstly workload that causes 25% of stress, secondly timings that results 16% of stress, thirdly climate that causes 11% of stress.11

Kodavatiganti K & Bulusu V.(2011)- The aim of the article is to have a clear understanding of the phenomenon that causes stress among the academicians . According to the article women educators face comparatively higher level of stress than men counterparts. The stress amongst the academicians are caused because of lengthy working hours, inadequate resources and long working hours, classrooms that are over filled.12

Sharma S., Sharma J. & Devi A.(2012)- The level of stress within a role varies because of individual differences in mindset, age, gender, and their performance in job. However, various factors that influence stress are age where the younger employees are more stressed as compared to other employees, level of qualification, pay, authorities of control, awards, word of praise, improved designations and working couples. The study recommended a reinforcement approach that should be positive in nature so as to reduce the degree of stress at the workplace. 13

Rosasa J. H. A, Blevinsb R. C. , Gaoc H. ,Tengb W. Y. & White J. (2011)– It reveals the levels of stress that differ by occupational position, and not by age and gender. The analysis shows that female had higher stress rates than males. The main problems faced by students due to stress are sleeping problems, depression and irritability.14

Srivastav A.K. (2010)– The articles focus on the nature of role that causes stress. It says role performance encountered the problems of stress so they should be tried to reduce or eliminated. The nature of role stress was found to be heterogeneous which cannot be dealt with one uniform solution or intervention as a whole. Hence, specific problem related solution or interventions should be adapted for better organizational performance and effectiveness.15

A. Y. Tatheer (2013)- Majority of the bankers of Pakistan claim that they are highly stressed because of their jobs that not only affect their performance in banks but also equally affect their health and personal life. They also declare that the organizational politics and bureaucracy are the main reasons of stress in their banks.16

Michailidis M. and Georgiou Y. (2005)- The author focus on the degree of occupational stress that is influenced by the factors like level of education, various patterns of their relaxation and any other habits like drinking or smoking . The implications say that consuming alcoholic drinks is the main factor that determines the degree of occupational stress in an individual. 17

Sinha V. and Subramanian K.S. (2012)- The study highlights that various levels of organization experience different kind of organizational role stress. It also states that stress is influenced by various factors like shortage of resources, inadequacy within a person, overload with a role, stagnation of a role and isolation and expectation of a role.18

Pratibha G. (2010)– The impact of distress level on the quality of life is negative that may result to serious burnout problems in private banks. The distress level in the banks can only be reduced by various stress management programmes or interventions that would also improve the quality of work life.19

Karthik R. (2013)- Employee's performance at work is influenced by stress that can be either positive or negative. The employee's performs better if they face low to moderate amount of stress. Hence, it aims at reducing the level of stress rather than eliminating stress completely.

Findings

1. Major factors contributing to stress are workload, vulnerability, low physical condition.
2. There is significant correlation between workload and emotional exhaustion.
3. There is no significant difference in stress variable with reference to gender.

Suggestions & Recommendations

1. The company can go for some relaxation activity program for the employees in order to reduce the tension of the employees.
2. The company can also focus on training the employees how to make decision in pathetic situation.
3. The company should provide program for improving a person attitude and development process.
4. Counseling session can be held for the employees showing the symptom of stress.
5. Organization should offer wellness program.
6. Deep relaxation should be provided for the employees for 10 to 20 minutes.



7. Physical exercise increases heart capacity, provide a mental diversion for work pressure.
8. Leisure time can be provided to the employees and may feel relaxed and work.
9. Organization can focus on creating awareness program on the negative impact on the consuming alcoholic and cigarette.
10. Organization can often go with the brain storming games that keep employee active participants in each and every matter which help in increase in concentration.
11. Organization can have a focus on providing yoga to the employees.

Conclusion

The study on work stress has revealed that the respondents feel that they are satisfied with the environment where they are working and they are happy with the effective team work among the employees. The employees are happy with the working hours given to them by the company to do the job. The company can concentrate on providing some stress relief program which helps them to reduce the stress level. The employees are satisfied with the company environment and they are working with the medium stress level in the organization.

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Web Sites Visited

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