STRESS MANAGEMENT AT WORK PLACE

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ABSTRACT

Workplace stress has a bearing not only on our personal well being but also on the organizational success. Stress is a physical or psychological stimulus which, when impinging upon certain individuals, produces psychological strain or disequilibrium. The paper aims to understand the issues and challenges of stress. Workplace stress could lead to aggressive feelings and behavior, decreased concern with punctuality, obsessive/compulsive behavior, and reduced work efficiency. Organizational factors, environmental factors, personal factors act as stressors. The recent pandemic of Covid-2019 led to immense stress, depression, fear and anxiety in personal lives as well as at work places. The tripartite approach which consists - primary level stress management,secondary level stress management, and tertiary level stress management is recommended.

Keywords: *Stress, stressors, work place, psychology, pandemic*

INTRODUCTION

The concept of workplace stress is an important subject area of research in the field of organizational behavior. Workplace stress involves several factors which are different from other factors affecting routine life stress and pandemic covid-19 stress. The companies which focus on welfare of the employees and practiced well structured stress management provide better work environment and are more successful. In this globalized competitive world, the need of workplace stress management cannot be ignored.

As per ILO (International Labour Organisation) report, workplace stress is now recognized worldwide as a major challenge to workers' health and the health of their organizations. Though stress is believed to be associated only with white collar workers and management executives, in reality stress affects every employee of the organization.

OBJECTIVES:

2) The paper aims to understand the issues and challenges of stress

3) To find out the sources of stress.

4) To find out the stress management techniques.

METHODOLOGY: This is descriptive paper which analyses the sources of stress and find out stress management techniques. The paper is divided into different sections. Section I deals with sources of stress. Section II

Understanding the sources of stress

Stress is the reactions of the body to forces of a deleterious nature, infections, and various abnormal states that tend to disturb its normal physiological equilibrium. The paper discusses three schools of thought to understand the stress model.

Response-based model of stress

Stimulus-based model of stress

The first school propounds "a response-based model of stress". The second school advocates "a stimulus-based model of stress".

These two schools define stress differently-one defines stress as an independent variable and the other defines it as a dependent variable.

I) The response-based model of stress views stress as a dependent variable. In other words, it views stress as an outcome of external factors or as a response to external factors. It means the response of different people to similar external factors could be different, depending on their personal characteristics. Some people may feel stressed because of these factors and others may not be affected at all.

Hans Selye in 1956 described stress as a dependent variable, which involves three concepts:

1. Stress is a defensive mechanism.

2. Stress follows the three stages of alarm, resistance, and exhaustion.

3. A prolonged stress could result in diseases.
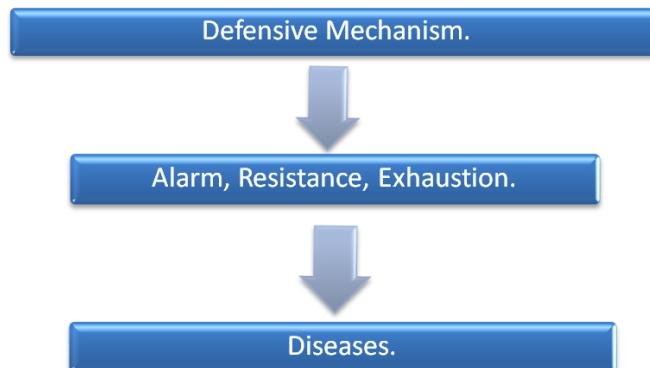
II) The three important tenets of the stimulus-based model of stress are:

1. Change is inherently stressful.

2. Life events demand the same level of response across the population.

3. There is a common threshold beyond which illness can result.

III) There is also a third model of stress called the transaction-based model of stress. This model incorporates both the response-based and the stimulus-based models of stress. It acknowledges that situations are not inherently stressful but are potentially stressful, and it is necessary to take into account the source of stress, the moderators of stress response and the manifestation of stress.
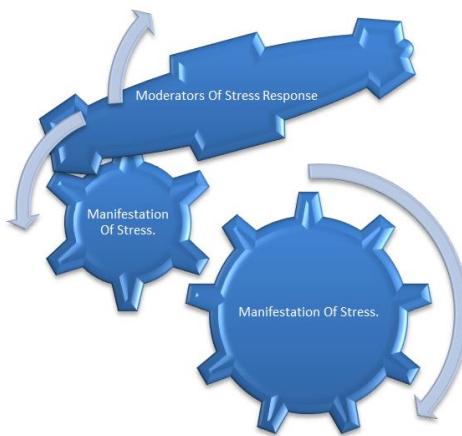
The term stress is a rubric for a complex series of subjective phenomena, including cognitive appraisals in the form of threats and challenges, stress emotions, coping responses, and reappraisals.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

World Health Organization (2003) Work-related stress is the response people may have when presented with work demands and pressures that are not matched to their knowledge and abilities and which challenge their ability to copy.

Robbins (2009) Stress is a dynamic condition in which an individual is confronted with an opportunity, demand, or resource related to what the individual desires and for which the outcome is perceived to be both uncertain and important.

Ivancevich and Matterson (1990) An adaptive response moderated by individual differences and/or psychological processes that is a consequence of any external environmental action, situation, or event that places excessive psychological and/or physical demands on a person.

Hitt, Miller, Colella, (2006) Stress is the unpleasant tension that occurs within an employee when he perceives a situation that is about to exceed his ability to cope and consequently endanger his well being. The workplace stress is the feeling that one's capabilities, resources, or needs do not match with the demands of the job.

The stress experience may be a combination of three complex set of responses:

1. Physiological response

2. Emotional response

3. Cognitive or problem-solving response or productivity, lying or making excuses to cover up poor work, excessive defensiveness or suspiciousness, problems in communication, social withdrawal and isolation and impulsivity. Prolonged workplace stress can even lead to depression and other related psychiatric conditions.

The JD-R Model propounds that there are two different underlying psychological processes that play a role in workplace stress. The first process, termed health impairment process, involves job demands that may lead to job strain.

The second process proposed in the JD-R model is the motivational process that is associated with job resources. The model assumes that job resources have motivational potential and can lead to higher work engagement, low cynicism, and excellent performance.

Demand-Control Model: As per the Demand-Control Model, job strain is a function of the following two factors:

1. Workplace demands faced by an employee

2. The control that the employee has in meeting those demands.

The demand-Control Model suggests that job stress is a function of both job demands and job control.

Using these two dimensions of demands and control, there could be four workplace stress types that are faced by an employee in the work environment.

These four workplace stress types are termed as passive, low strain, active and high strain depending on the high or low of demands and control. Employees facing high strain situation will experience stress that could be detrimental to the individual and the organization in the long term.

Effort-Reward Imbalance Model: This model considers the following two factors relevant for workplace stress:

1. The effort required by the employees

2. The rewards received by the employee

The effort refers to the performance demands and obligations of the job. Rewards refer to extrinsic and intrinsic outcomes of the job. These include factors like salary, performance pay, recognition, esteem, etc. The Model proposes that organizations that have jobs that require strong efforts but low rewards violate the principle of reciprocity and hence face a stressful work environment. The individuals facing such an environment may exit the company or may stay put hoping for changes in the work environment or due to limited opportunities in the job market.

SECTION II

Identification of Stressors

'People don't leave jobs; they leave toxic work cultures'

The study of various researches shows that factors which promote work place stress are termed as Stressors. Stressors are the environmental conditions that cause employees to experience stress. Stressors could be 'challenge stressors' like those associated with workload, pressure to perform, etc. or 'hindrance stressors' that might keep employees from performing like red tape, politics, etc.

Some important stressors are described below:

- ➢ **Role Conflict:** A situation in which different roles lead to conflicting expectations.

- ➢ **Role ambiguity:** A situation in which goals, expectations, and/or basic job requirements are unclear.

- ➢ **Work overload:** It could be in terms of quantity of work involved which could be too much or quality of work in terms of the complex nature of work.

- ➢ **Resource inadequacy:** Lack of adequate resources can lead to workplace stress as it can make it difficult to accomplish job tasks efficiently and effectively.

- ➢ **Working conditions:** These include the job environment consisting of physical surroundings like lighting and psychological aspects like peer and supervisor relationships. Unpleasant working conditions and the unfriendly, closed and ambiguous work environment may lead to workplace stress that affects overall performance.

- ➢ **Organizational culture and management style:** The culture and leadership style of organizations can lead to workplace stress. Open and merit-based organizational culture where the management is transparent and friendly with employees can lead to a high-performing organizational environment in contrast to that organizational culture where leaders managing through fear and control.

- ➢ **Organisational monitoring:** Work-related and non-work-related monitoring of employees by management can lead to a stressful work environment. Employees might feel that they don't have sufficient discretion and control over their work environment and lack privacy and freedom.

- ➢ **Job insecurity:** Job insecurity can result from organizational culture or due to corporate phenomena like mergers, downsizing, re-engineering, etc. The resulting job insecurity can lead to a stressful workplace environment.

In short, the degree to which supervisors treat employees in a respectful and caring manner reflects workers' perceptions of interactional justice. Supportive managers can mitigate stress reactions to distributive and procedural justice

SOURCES OF STRESS

- ➢ **Environmental Factors:** Environmental factors refer to uncertainty in the political, technological and economic environment. Political uncertainty refers to the uncertainty arising from unstable political systems. Changes in the business cycle can lead to period of recession which creates economic uncertainty. The period of recession makes employees anxious about their job security as during a recession organizations resort to strategies like downsizing. Technological uncertainty refers to technological obsolescence which can have a bearing on the viability of a company's operations and profitability.

    The recent pandemic covid-19 has caused stress at work place leading to work from home but for longer hours where the employee is being watched throughout the full day through continuous reporting back and through time tracker techniques

- ➢ **Organizational factors:** Organizational factors refer to stressors like work pressures, work overload, unfriendly management, demanding boss, unpleasant co-workers, etc. Organizational structure and job design can also serve as stressors. Organizational structure and job design can lead to tasks that lack required degree of autonomy, task variety, etc. The job environment might involve poor work conditions, difficult work layout, poor organizational and work policies, etc. Job design may involve insensitivity to workers' needs that give rise to constant anxiety and stress. Role demands may put undue pressures on employees and may also lead to role conflicts.

- ➢ **Personal factors:** Personal factors are mostly related to workload and work-family balance. Family issues and personal economic problems can lead to high work stress. Organizations that consciously and deliberately take into account work-family life balance and personal problems of employees tend to perform better by providing the stress-free organizational environment.

- ➢ **Perception:** Organizational behavior theories propound that employees react in response to their perception of reality rather to the reality itself. Hence, perception can moderate the relationship between a potential stress condition and the employees' reaction to it. The stress potential may not lie always in the objective conditions but may lie in the employee's interpretation of those conditions.

- ➢ **Job Experience:** The amount of experience on the job is found to be negatively related to work stress. Employees who remain with an organization longer are found to have more stress-resistant traits. In other words, they are resistant to the stress sources of the organization.

- ➢ **Social Support:** If the organizational environment is friendly, professional and transparent with collegial relationships between co-workers and supervisors, then stress factors are easily managed as social support tends to buffer the impact of stress.

- ➢ **Self-Esteem:** Researchers say that people with high self-esteem suffer fewer incidences of stress as compared to people with lower self-esteem. People with higher self-esteem tend to engage in active coping behaviors when faced with stressful demands. They have higher control over the environment than people with lower self-esteem.

THERE ARE DIFFERENT LEVELS OF STRESS

Individual Stress

Personality traits are the important factors like perception, self-esteem, personality, work commitment and dedication. At the individual level, a stress factor that looks like a threat for one individual could become an opportunity for another depending on his personality, experience, perception and social support.
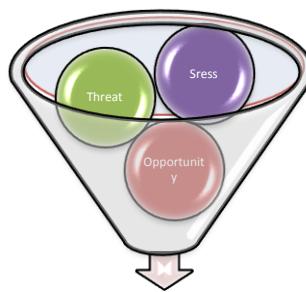
Group Stress

Group characteristics and the relationship of the individual with the group can lead to stress for an individual. In general, group stressors can be categorized into two areas; lack of group cohesiveness and lack of social support. Stressors like interpersonal conflicts, group politics, individual interests, group rejection can act as group-based stressors for employees arising out of lack of group cohesiveness.

Social support has been recognized as a major buffer in handling workplace stress by researchers. A group that is cohesive and that offers social support to its members can provide a stress-free environment. If social support is lacking within the group, this could lead to increased stress level for group members. The group leader should take note of group stressors and provide a positive climate for group members to ensure a stress-free work environment.

Organizational Stress

These factors like poor organizational structure, inefficient job design and specification, role ambiguity, role overload, role conflict, job insecurity, red tape, nepotism, politics, etc. can affect the work environment and lead to organizational stressors that affect many employees of the organization.

Stress-Performance Relationship

A significant amount of research has been dedicated to investigating the stress-performance relationship. One proposed relationship suggests an inverted U between stress and job performance as shown in Figure 9.6. As per this theory, low to moderate levels of stress stimulate the body and increase its ability to react. But when stress crosses a certain level, the work performance of the employee starts deteriorating. In accordance with the work-stress models, when the demand placed on the employee is disproportionate to the resources at his disposal and the control he can exert on the job environment, his work performance gets adversely affected.

As the stress level increases, the performance enhances till a certain point. Moderate to high levels of stress stimulate the person to put more efforts in his/her job to increase his/her performance. High level of stress may have a negative impact on the performance of an individual in the long term. The intensity of stress brings down a person's energy, resources, and enthusiasm to work. Thus, we can see that stress can be either helpful or harmful for job performance depending upon its quantum.

During the pandemic of corona 2019, many people suffered from mental illness, depression, guilty, homelessness, pessimism, sleeplessness, loss of appetite and other such symptoms. Financial insecurity became the biggest fear which leads to anxiety and many health issues as well as domestic violence issues.

Safety Culture as Moderator: The safety culture has proved to reduce the negative effects of work stress on performance. Therefore organizations must focus on developing a sense of a safe and secure work environment and full-time availability of support.

Stress Management

Stress Management in organizations aims at identifying and eliminating stressful situations, teaching individuals to cope with stress and helping employees who have become victims of stress. A tripartite model of stress management is suggested for implementing stress management programmes in organizations. Let us discuss these in detail.

Primary level stress management: This type of stress management is stressor-directed. The objective is to eliminate, reduce or control the sources of stress. The main goal is prevention of work place stress. For managing the primary level stress, organizational level interventions are taken. These interventions can take any of the following three forms:

Organisational changes at the macro level: Here the stressors that are targeted are related to organizational culture, management style, work conditions, workload, organizational structure, career development and work culture. Organisational level programmes might focus on changing organizational culture, providing management coaching, designing coping strategies and programmes, designing career development programmes keeping in mind the goals related to stress management and designing organizational structure for providing a stress-free organizational work environment.

Secondary level of stress management: These are organizational interventions that are response-directed. The objective is to help individual employees and groups of workers recognize their response to stress and the symptoms of stress. The goal is to develop stress resistance and adaptive coping strategies through employee education and training. Secondary level stress management programme recognize that it is not possible to completely prevent workplace stress by devising stressor-directed organizational interventions. These programme aim at minimizing the effects of stress exposure using techniques that rely on coping processes. The secondary-level prevention focuses on prompt detection and management of potentially stressful consideration by increasing employee awareness and improving the stress management skills of employees. This programme may cater to addressing psychological, physiological and behavioural impacts of stressors. They may take the form of instituting stress management training programme, stress coping workshops like meditation, stress relaxation techniques, and related skills training programme like social skills training, time management, etc. Many leading corporate have launched wellness programme, exercise and fitness programme, etc. as part of the secondary-level stress prevention and management.

Tertiary level stress management: The interventions are symptom-directed. The objective is to assist the employees who are exposed to stress in terms of health care programme and stress rehabilitation. At this level, the focus shifts from prevention of stress to the curative approach to stress problems. The programme at this level focus on rehabilitation and recovery of individuals who are already affected by workplace related chronic stress. Some important interventions are providing counseling services, instituting employee assistance programme, building social support networks and offering career sabbatical to burnt-out employees.

Such programme become necessary components of the tertiary level stress management in organizations.

Motivation: An internal feeling that helps individuals in attaining their personal and professional goals in an efficient manner.

Productivity: A measure of how efficiently an input is used to produce output.

Role ambiguity: Situation of indecisiveness that an employee faces about a particular assigned role.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

- Stress management is very essential at workplace because it affects not only the mental and physical health of the employees but also the efficiency, productivity and wok environment of an organization.

- Stressors (challenge stressors or hindrance stressors) are the environmental conditions that cause employees to experience stress.

- The triple approach which consists - primary level stress management, secondary level stress management, and tertiary level stress management is recommended.

- Stress management strategies can be designed as stressor-directed, response-directed and symptoms directed.

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