

WORK STRESS: CAUSES, EFFECTS AND MANAGEMENT- A REVIEW

Karan Singh Negi*

ABSTRACT

Stress at workplace is emerging as a major problem in India, more so as economic activities increase, there is pressure on employees to enhance their performance. This paper presents a review of work stress, various facets of the problem, causes and suggests measures to manage work stress. Employers need to know about the factors causing stress amongst their employees as this problem has long term effects on the functioning of the organization and also on the health of the employees. Individualistic and organizational approaches have been suggested for managing work stress.

* Doon University, Dehradun

INTRODUCTION

Work stress is a phenomenon that comes from variety of reasons and affects people working at various places in different ways. It is a harmful and emotional or physical response that develops in employees of an organization due to various causes such as work pressure; working conditions, mismatching capabilities, resources and needs. (Park 2007) It is a common problem amongst employees in business organizations and affects their work performance; organizational climate; family and personal life. Work stress shows its effect both at the work place and also in the personal life of the employee.

The link between the psycho-social aspects of the job and the health and well being of the workers has been added (Dollard and Metzger 1999). However, limited work has been done in India on the effects of distinct stressors on job performance. One of the most important sources of work stress is job strain. According to demand/ control model (Karasek 1979) job strain is determined by the interactions between the psychological demands and decisions latitude.

Job strain is not the only stressor that the common workers may face at their workplace. Physical exertion and job insecurity can also cause stress. Unfortunately uncertain job security and the fear of layoff is also a source of psychological stress for some especially during the time of economic contraction (William 2003)

A study by Neha and Verma (2010) shows the concepts of stress, its consequences, symptoms, sources of stress and discusses various strategies to cope up with the stress along with diversity. In this study various psychological consequences such as an individual experiencing tension, headache, high blood pressure, psychological and behavior consequences of stress have been brought out. It clearly explains different causes of stress such as environmental and organizational, group and individual in understanding the sources of stress. Recommended strategies to cope up with stress are physical and behavioral self control and social support.

Kazmi et al (2008) have reported that occupational stressors contribute to organizational inefficiency, high staff turnover, absenteeism due to sickness, decreased quality, and quantity of practice, increased costs of health care, and decreased job satisfaction. One of the organizational outcomes that affected by occupational stress is job performance. The purpose of their study was to investigate the effect of job stress on job performance. The prevention and management of

workplace stress requires organizational level interventions, because it is the organization that creates the stress. Success in managing and preventing stress will depend on the culture in the organization.

A study by Jensen and Hyun (2008) examines the relationship between task-related incivility, revenge, and working harder. Based on the literature on cognitive and emotional appraisals in response to interpersonal conflict, they also considered the role that trust and anger would play as mediating the relationship between incivility and our primary outcomes. Thus, their study suggests organizations seeking to create a pleasant and productive workplace need to understand the victim's cognitive and emotional experiences in response to incivility.

Rashmi and Gole (2008) conducted a study to understand the impact of stress on the performance of employees. Relationship between job stress, job satisfaction & performance was examined. They have reported two components resulting into stress; (i) High level of job demands (ii) little control over one's work. Impact of stress on productivity was the main concern of this research. Study identified various strategies for improving the performance of the employees.

According to Akella (2007) a learning organization provide team work, team learning, free vertical and horizontal flow of information, training and development, rewards and decentralized system of hierarchy. Studies reveal that such employees are found adapting themselves according due to career and financial prospects, tolerate abuses may be tricked into accepting management objectives and interest without any extra payments. Learning organizations were found providing training by pushing the employees into delegation of responsibilities which actually brings fear, anxiety and stress for an employee.

Panda (2007) highlighted the various stress reactions that results in diseases arthritis (inflammatory joint pains) and measured psychological work conditions. It's scientifically proven that stress can decrease immunity function rendering individual more prone to health challenges. Kivimaki et al (2002) conducted a study to understand work stress and its adverse effect on health. The researcher used Job Strain Model and Effort- Reward-Imbalance model to analyze the relation between high job demand and risk of health from Cardiovascular Diseases. This study reveals that high Job strain and high demand at work continuously may result in

cardiovascular diseases and high rate of mortality caused due to such diseases. Studies reveal that in spite of long hard working hours with high pressure, employees who do not get Effort – Reward- Imbalance Reward are more likely to get risk of Cardiovascular disease and can result into death increasing the rate of mortality.

According to Negi (2013) Human resource management practices play a vital role in the functioning of any business organization including public sector banks which undertake bulk of financial transactions in Tier II and Tier III cities. This paper presents the results of a study conducted in selected branches of Allahabad Bank Dehradun and their regional office on human resource management practices with reference to strategic issues.

The results of a study by Negi (2014) presents the results of a study of work stress in lower and middle level employees of business organizations of Matsasya Industrial Area of Alwar district in Rajasthan. The study was conducted on basis of interviews and questionnaires based on stratified random sampling in some of the units of this industrial hub located near the NCR region. Various causes of work stress have been identified and tackling these would be useful for the management in enhancing work performance of their respective business organization

CAUSES OF WORK STRESS

Work stress may be brought about by many different causes, either singly or in association with each other. The main causes of work stress are:

1-Job insecurity

Lack of job security makes a person insecure and leads to stress. Lack of job permanency occurs when employees are engaged on contract or thorough outsourcing and this makes him insecure.

2-Fear of skill redundancy

As technology changes and economic development takes place, new skills are required by the employees to perform their work satisfactorily. They need to learn new skills and if this does not happen, they existing skills become less useful for their job functions. As a result, their skills become redundant and this leads to work stress.

3-Frequent job change

The change in job by the employee during the short term period leads to the stress in the mind of the employee and it affects his/her working in the organization.

4-Unrealistic deadlines and expectations

Often, employees at different levels may be asked to do their work within short time frames and meet unrealistic deadlines and expectations. When this happens over a long period of time, there occurs work stress.

5-Technology overloads

Change in technology or expecting the employees to use newer technology which changes very quickly is a reason for stress. Example change in the technology in the banking sector from manual book entry to the software entry provide difficulty to the employee to work and this leads to the stress in the employee to cope with new technology which may be difficult to learn quickly.

6-Lack of involvement in decision making

Lack of involvement in the decision making in the organization without providing his/ her opinion on decisions leads to the stress in the employee and he/ she is not able to perform their work/duties properly

7-Aggressive management style is also the cause of the stress in the employees

If the management style is aggressive and keeps on commenting or pushing the employee, he/ she will get demoralized and this will lead to stress and cause impact on the working of the organization.

8- Harassment of the employee

Some of the organization cause harassment to the employee and make him do work or use abusive languages to harass the employee in front of the others employees. Employer may also harass the employee by delaying salary and other benefits. This causes stress and makes the person feel insulted

9-Competition

Peer to peer competition is also increasing in all organizations this is the cause of the stress to the employees .It affects the performance and the attitude of the employee becomes negative when there is a cut throat competition amongst the team members

11-Increasingly diverse workforce

The diverse workforce consists of the people coming from different cultural backgrounds .This also leads to the stress amongst the team as well as the single individuals as the person does not adjust according to the culture and habit of the other person from different background

12-Downsizing

Downsizing leads to the stress in the mind of the employees when the organization at certain stage makes a change or downsizes the business by terminating the employee from his/ her job after a certain period from the organization.

13-Work/home conflict

At certain stage the work/home conflict occurs when the person works more in office and puts in extra time , thus neglecting his/her personal and family life. This causes stress which is related to his workplace.

EFFECTS OF WORKSTRESS

The main effects of work stress have been outlined in the following text:

1-Physiological effects

These include the physiological effects of work stress on human beings. These may be in the form of health problems like increased blood pressure; persistent headaches and cardiological disorders.

2-Psychological effects

Work stress also affects the psychology of the employee. It may cause tension, anxiety and irritability in the person affected by work stress.

3-Behavioral effects

There could occur behavioral effects of work stress on the employee. These could be changes in behavior such as absenteeism, employee turnover, and lack of motivation, alcoholism, smoking habit, irritability and frequent loss of temper.

WORK STRESS MANAGEMENT

Managing work stress is an important process which is required to be done both at the level of the individual and also by the business organization. Often, both these approached need to be followed together.

1-INDIVIDUALISTIC APPROACH

The individualistic approach for work stress management includes the following:

- **Time management**-managing time by the individual in such a manner that the work is performed on time and also there is enough time for meeting the personal and family needs.
- **Physical activity**-More physical activity like games should be played to reduce stress
- **Relaxation techniques**- Relaxation techniques need to be adopted. The most favorable technique of relaxation is yoga. Others could be long walks or spending time with the family or picnics or cinema.
- **Building social support**- Employees under work stress to take support from the society including friends and colleagues. At least two or three times a week, stress employees should spend time with supportive friends or family.

2-ORGANIZATIONAL APPROACH

Organizations also need to develop and adopt approaches for management of work stress in their organizations. These include the following:

- **Selection and placement decisions**- the selection and placement decisions must be appropriate and should be according the rules defined in the organization

- **Goal setting-** the goals which the team or the department gives to his team members or the employee should not be unrealistic. .
- **Redesigning jobs-** jobs given to employees should be redefined according to the needs, skills and capabilities of the employee.
- **Increasing employee involvement-** employee involvement means making the person to involve himself in the decision making process. This should be increased at all levels.
- **Increasing organizational communication-** there should be proper communication amongst the employees and there should be proper feedback. It can be either done through formal or informal communication followed in the business organization.
- **Providing organizational wellness programs-** this can be done by making the employee feel better in the working by giving him appreciation and providing better facilities to his/her family members

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