Stress Management in the Workplace

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Abstract

Stress is a fact in our daily life. When a person needs help, it means the person feels physically and emotionally disabled. Most people believe that their capacity and capabilities are so little to encounter high level of stress. Today, with progress in all respects, human is facing new challenges in many different fields as if progress in turn creates new problems. Over a century, the nature of working has been changed widely, and still these changes are in progress. Following these changes, number of illnesses has been increased, morality and human aspects are faded and new problems are occurred every day, so that we are facing job stress which called “illness of the century”.

Keywords: Stress, Good and Bad Stress, Exhaustion, Stress side effects, Origins of Stress

Introduction

Stress is a fact in our daily life. When a person needs help, it means the person feels physically and emotionally disabled. Most people believe that their capacity and capabilities are so little to encounter high level of stress.

Today, human is in a transition process from an industrial to a post- industrial world. Also, the post- industrial world, like the agricultural or industrial world has its own characteristics. People were living their own simple life over thousands of years, but an industrial revolution started to change their life in so many aspects.

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occurred every day, so that we are facing job stress which called “illness of the century” (Jazany, Habibi and Nasr, 2010, p. 127).

**Stress Definitions**

Most people think that they know the stress. The reality is that, stress is complicated and it is not well perceived. To know how the stress works and affects on our lives, first, we describe it and then study its relationship with organisational life.

You may define stress as a reaction to a threat to (real or imaginary) your mental, physical and emotional health which can lead to series of reactions or physiological problems. (Mohsenzadeh, 2007, p. 1)

According to Cropanzano, Howes, Grandey and Toth (1997), Stress is a mental feeling when job duties are beyond person's capabilities. These mental feelings create the anxiety and tension which are symptoms of stress (p. 164).

According to “The National Job Safety and Health Institution” job stress is an annoying excitement which occurs when there is no proportion between person’s wants, job requirements, and person's talents, or worker's resources and needs. Researchers of this Institution believe that mostly, job stress and challenge is regarded as synonym, while these two words are different.

Challenge will give mental and physical energy to person and stimulate him to learn new skills in his job field. Therefore, a challenge in a workplace is a constructive and an important factor for health and productivity (Norcross & Prochaska, 2007, p. 78).

There are three different views for stress definition. First, stress could be an environmental stimulus. In this case, environmental events that make demands on the person partly are tolerable and not stressful. Second, stress might be a reaction by the person to the extra burden. Finally, stress can be an unknown body reaction to a demand that lead to pressure or stress in reaction or response conditions. In other word, as mentioned, different response of stress in different people and conditions are different (Giga, L.Cooper, & Faragher, 2003, P.281). Therefore, the question is if stress is an individual response or a social factor that lead to some psychological responses (Caplan and Jones, 1975, pg. 713).

Although, stress has defined in different forms, but the common aspect of these definitions is that reason of stress is a physical or emotional stimulation and the person responses to it in a specific manner. Here, we define the stress as an individual reaction to adapt stimulation which has created great physical and emotional requirements, but it is also necessary that we define every component, separately. First, the purpose of adoption is that people adopt themselves with stressful conditions in different manners. Second, stimulations are stress factors. Third, the stress factor can be physical or emotional. Finally, what is wanted from person must be large enough to create stress. Of course, the amount of stress could be different from one person to
another. Therefore, person gets stressed when feels unable to overcome the job (Moorhead and Griffin, 1995, p. 251-252).

Person and Stress

According to “the General Adoption Syndrome”, people resist against stressful events in a normal level. Some people can be tolerant against stress while the others can't. When the person faces the stress factor, general adoption syndrome begins. The first stage of syndrome is called “warning”. In this stage, the person feels stress without any reason and may be confused. If the factor is strong, the person may be unable to handle it. Any way, he will employ his all physical and mental power to resist the negative effects of the stress. Therefore, at the second stage of the syndrome, person starts to resist against the effects of the stress factor. In many cases, it is possible that the person finishes the syndrome at the resistance stage. On the other hand, with permanent existence of stress factor and lack of solution, person enters to the third stage of syndrome called exhaustion. At this stage, person really gives up and will not be able to encounter stress any more (Moorhead and Griffin, 1995, p. 252-253).

Good And Bad Stress

The stress source is not necessarily bad. The cases such as fame, achievements etc. can create stress which is called good stress (Moorhead and Griffin, 1995, p. 253). Sometimes the concept of stress and competition is considered mistakenly at workplace. Competition, physically or emotionally, in the workplace creates a positive energy for persons to learn new duties and work more effectively. When the competition is over, person feels relaxed and comfortable but when the competition has daily requirements which could not be overcome, relaxation turns into exhaustion and satisfaction changes into stress (Rasca & Deaconou, 2008, p. 2).

The Impacts of Differences on Stress

Personal differences: the impact of personal differences on stress is very crucial. The normal levels of persons' resistance against stress are different.

Cultural differences: their impacts are also very important too. Results of a study shows that American managers are under stress less than Japanese and Brazilian managers are.

The gender differences: according to the results of a study, it is possible that women are more talented than men to be involved in stress (Moorhead and Griffin, 1995, p. 254). 47% of Americans are worry about stress. About half of American, especially women, parents and working age people are worry about stress rate in their life. Women believe stress is more effective in them than men (%53 to %43). Women who are under stress report feelings such as anger, desire to cry and physical weakness, while men complain about difficulties in sleep,
anger and sensitivity. At the end, women involve in high blood pressure, anxiety, depression and obesity more than men (Kazemi, 2007, p.40-41).

The Origin Of Stress

Many factors can cause stress. Most studies regard today's modern life as the origin of stress as well as organisational field. Also, the root of anxiety and pressure is the modern life style and stress is a modern illness. Some researchers believe that the origin of fear and stress is working activities of modern institutions. These risky working conditions allow managers and organisations to use fear and stress to control and increase the organisation's productivity (Vasconcelos, Flávio Carvalho de, Vasconcelos, Isabella Freitas Gouveia de, & Crubellate, João Marcelo., 2008, p. 41). Other studies on stress at work have identified many factors, Some of them are: taking turns, ignoring the personal capability, lack of work and impatience, overworking, job roles confliction, prejudice in wage, ambiguity in job security, relationship with colleagues, qualitative state of machines and also the work safety (Giga, S. I., L.Cooper, C., & Faragher, 2003, p. 116).

Organisational stresses are factors in the work environment which can cause stress. There are four groups of stress in the workplace:

- **Job requirements**: they are stress factors at work. For example some jobs are more stressful than the other.
- **Physical requirements** which depend on the location of job. One of the important factors is temperature. Office design can be problematic too.
- **Role requirements**: they can cause stress. It is possible that stress originates from Role ambiguity (not clear expectations) or Role confliction (coordination between two or more roles).
- **The interaction with others**: the last group of stress factors is interaction requirements which could face the person in organisational environment (Moorhead and Griffin, 1995, p.256-257).

Consequences of Stress

Stress will have a lot of consequences and job effects such as migraine, alcohol or drug abuse and smoking cigarette, or physical and emotional effects such as migraine, high blood pressure and consequences concerning mental health such as depression (Giga, S. I., L.Cooper, C., & Faragher, 2003, p. 116).

According to other classification, stress consequences can be divided in 3 groups of individual, organisational and individual- organisational.
Individual Consequences

Individual consequences affect the person, mostly. However, this may also affect the company directly or indirectly.

Individual consequences may be divided as follow:

- **Behaviour consequences** are reactions which can be harmful to the person and the others.
- **Mental consequences** depend on person’s mental and physical health.
- **Physical consequences** would affect the person's physical state. Stress may result in physical disorders.

Organisational Consequences

It is clear that, as mentioned before, individual consequences can affect the organization, but stress has other consequences which may have effects on institution more directly.

- **Functional consequences** which is lack of proper and correct function
- **Quitting**, the most important kinds of quitting are absence and resign
- **Attitudes**, job satisfaction, mood, organisational commitments get accordingly affected along with the personal motivation accordingly.

Personal - Organization Consequences

Exhaustion is the final consequence of stress that either affects person or organisation. Exhaustion is the feeling of fading. It appears when the person is bearing many pressures and little satisfaction (Moorhead and Griffin, 1995, p. 261-262).

Stress Management At Workplace

With knowing that stress is widespread in organizations and potentially is harmful, the organisations and persons should pay special attention to manage stress effectively. There is variety of personal and organizational strategies to manage the stress (Moorhead and Griffin, 1995, p.266). Stress management can be performed either in form of eliminating stress factor or training the personnel to encounter conditions which create stress (Vasconcelos, Flávio Carvalho de, Vasconcelos, Isabella Freitas Gouveia de, & Crubellate, João Marcelo., 2008, p. 40). Many researchers have studied social, psychological and medical aspects of stress. The researchers with the workplace point of view regard working and professional environment as
the main source of the job stress. Other studies have emphasized on personal differences (Ganster, Schaubroeck, 1991, p.23).

Stress causes physical, mental and behavioural problems. A person under stress is unable to pay attention to their work; therefore, it can harm them and others in that organization. Overall, job stress reduces efficiency and effectiveness of staff. Working conditions have a main role in creating stress for personnel, but the personal factors should not be ignored in this field (Alipour, 2011, p. 3).

Growth of studies on stress field has resulted in understanding of organizational stress, but unfortunately our understanding of workplace stress is limited because despite the improvements in the last years, most studies don't have true methodological frameworks (Jex, 1998, p.2).

There are two schools to study the stress: medical-psychological school and organizational school. In the medical-psychological school, stress is defined in terms of different parameters which affect the quality of working life and person’s health. This school is based on a natural and medical science. The human body is known as a set of mechanisms that act in a stable and predictable state. Distance from this standard is known as a symptom of stress in personal level.

In organizational school, studies include spectrum of activities which are undertaken in an organisation and between the organizations. In the organisational school, the human body is being ignored socially and organisationally. In these studies, human body as the place of appearing stress is being forgotten. To eliminate the distance between the two approaches, the organisational studies should be performed with respect to person’s stress and at the same time the organization should be taken into consideration (Styhre, Ingelgard, 2003, p. 2-6). In order to encounter stress, there are two kinds of strategies, the first one works at individual level, and the second one works at the organisational level.

**Individual Encounter Strategies**

**Sport**: sport is one of the most important methods to overcome the stress.

**Rest**: effective rest is a method to encounter stress. One of the ways of relaxing is taking regular vacations.

**Time management**: it is believed that a good time management can reduce daily stress.

**Role management**: in this strategy, person works to avoid working’s pressure, ambiguity and active conflict. For example, if a person doesn’t realize what is expected from him, he should ask his boss more explanations in this case.
Supporting group: it is a simple group including friends and family members with whom a person may spend the time (Moorhead and Griffin, 1995, p. 266 -268).

Mohsenzadeh (2007) also introduces two other strategies to encounter the stress.

1. **Relaxation**: it is a way to help us reducing and removing tension and anxiety through decreasing unnecessary muscular contractions. This is a self-control method that helps us experiencing less stress in stressful situations.

2. **Time management**: Most people believe that time limitation is one of the most important source of stress. A busy day, lack of enough time for doing different tasks, being loaded with works that are behind, late for meetings etc. are the problems which people mention. Therefore, in such cases, stress management should include time management which is an important skill needed for success. Sometimes, we misunderstand the term "time management" and we think we must control and manage our time. Whereas, time is not controllable and we have to control ourselves and our time. Indeed, time management is a kind of self-management (p. 2).

**Strategies to Counter Stress in Organisation**

- **Organizational plans**: organizational plans are performed through current organisational mechanisms. For example, well-designed and scheduled jobs can reduce job stress.

- **Side Plans**: side plans as well as organisational proceedings are helpful for stress reduction in many organizations. For example, for staff health promotion program, nowadays, most organizations are trying to provide especial side plans or to use the existing programs.

**Stress Prevention Strategy**

It is impossible to present a general solution to prevent stress, but we can introduce an instruction instead. To recognize the current problems, first we have to regard size and the available resources of the organization. Regardless of the method of information Gathering, data should include staff understanding of their working conditions, stress level, health and satisfaction. The list of the working condition, which may lead to stress and warning signs of stress and effect, could be a good start to make decision on collected information (Alipour, 2011, p. 34).

In the next stage, after recognizing stress resources and understanding its aspects, plan and execution of intervention strategy is adjusted. In small organizations, official discussions may create useful ideas on prevention which help to recognise stress difficulties. In the big organizations, an official process might be needed. Some interferes may be performed quickly, (such as improvement of communications, education etc.) whereas some others may need more time (Alipour, 2011, p. 34).
Conclusions

Although we cannot see the stress as a permanent negative phenomenon and there is some positive stress too, but it has a lot of effects on organization members. Affected by stress, managers, staff and clients will have the special psychological moods which may lead to actions directly reflected in activities and productivity of organisation. Therefore, stress management and its implication for more creativity and quicker cursor movement toward the organizational targets is one of the goals which have been recently developed in organizations. The organizations can prevent negative stress and its consequences by training managers and personnel effectively for better recognition and management of stress factors.

References


