

PROFESSIONAL STRESS MANAGEMENT

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Introduction

In this competitive world, stress is an inevitable part of human life. Everybody is stressed due to some or the other reasons. When a person feels insufficient in dealing with demands and challenges faced in life, she/he experiences stress. Being harmed by this situation or taking advantage of it mainly depends on the person because stress may either be a factor threatening the organism physically or psychologically or a power which gives energy in dealing with life (Baltaş, 2002). Stress is the way human beings react both physically and mentally to changes, events and situations in their lives. People experience stress in different ways and for different reasons. This article attempts to help the reader to understand stress, its management and to apply the information in every day's life.

Good and bad stress

Types of stress have been identified to show the importance of achieving a healthy balance between ourselves and our environment. The reaction to stress is based on a person's perception of an event or situation. If situation is viewed negatively then distress, overwhelms, oppresses or out of control sets in. Distress, is harmful, destructive and negative in nature and it is called as "bad stress". However, Eustress is desirable, productive and it is positive in nature. It results from a "positive" view of an event or situation which is also called "good stress." Eustress helps to rise to a challenge and can be an antidote to boredom because it engages focused energy. It is often a question of perception: A positive stressor for one person can be a negative stressor for another. For instance, many people regard public speaking as very stressful causing physical reactions such as an increased heart rate and tension, while some look forward to the event. Another way of looking at it is that bad stress holds one back from best performance and in the long term may do a lot of damage.

Studies show that stress is not always a negative fact (Palmer and Hyman, 1993). In fact, a bit of stress is necessary to gain outstanding success. Because of this, successful people are those who convert their stress to creative energy and creative power (Krüger, 1993). Some experts argue that those who work in a moderate level of stress end up with a higher performance (Steers, 1981). Besides, a moderate level of stress may have a motivating effect if the individual's comprehension of roles is positive (Little, Simmons and

Nelson, 2007). Each profession causes a specific level of stress. While a low level stress results in immobility and laziness, stress in the optimal level (eustress) has the effect of motivating (Nydegger, 2002).

In today's world the person who succeeds is not always the one who lives at break neck speed. It is not needed to get dragged down by pressure and stress. One can learn to take some pressure off, slow the pace down and get more in touch with what really is wanted

Occupational Stress

Stress may be individual, organizational and outside of organization (Gupta, 1981; Kreitner and Kinick, 1992) or it is possible to divide them into two groups as individual and organizational components (Nahavandi and Malekzadeh, 1999). Organizational stress, which is also called occupational stress, is the interaction between working conditions and the working person in environments in which the work demand exceeds the skills of the worker (Ross and Altmaier, 1994). These factors may be monotony, change of technology, excessive work load, job security, ergonomics, management problems. Stress in working people results in various feelings such as worry, fear and depression loss of spirits in workers (Griffin, 1990), lack of harmony between managers and workers (Hubbard, 1995), lack of productivity, burnout (Dunham, 1992), lack of job satisfaction (Van Dick, Phillips, Marburg and Wagner, 2001) in addition to creating personal problems.

The occupational environment of the 21st century is a fast-paced, dynamic, highly stimulating environment which brings a large number of benefits and opportunities to those who work within it. The ever-changing demands of the working world can increase levels of stress, especially for those who are consistently working under pressure. Whilst pressure has its positive side in raising performance, if such pressure becomes excessive, it can lead to stress which has negative consequences. Stress is not a disease but it can lead to a reduced ability to perform at work and have an impact on a person's health and wellbeing. An organization with a high level of absenteeism, rapid staff turnover, deteriorating industrial and customer relations, a worsening safety record, or poor quality control is suffering from organizational stress.

Each profession causes a specific level of stress. **Behr and Newman** defined job stress as "a condition arising from the interaction of people and their jobs and characterized by changes within people that force them to deviate from their normal functioning". It is a common work place problem experienced by all professionals, irrespective of their nature of work.

Studies have addressed several aspects of occupational stress among different professionals.

World Health Organization in Global Burden of Disease Survey shows that mental health disease, including stress-related disorders, will be the second leading cause of

disabilities by the year 2020. Survey in 2007 by Associated Chamber of Commerce and Industry of India also reported that work related stress and mental fatigue is affecting the Indian employees and also reported that those working in the banking sector, both public and private, tend to get stressed as they have to attract a large pool of customers for various schemes besides ensuring timely recovery of loans. Evidences from existing literature states that more than 60% of bank employees have one or other problems related to stress. According to a recent study conducted by Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India, it has been found that banks are the top 10 high stress workplace in recent times.

In a study conducted for nationalized banks employees in Chennai and the findings reveal that about 97 out of 100 respondents face high level stress due to professional and personal reasons. The respondents were overburdened with work load in their work place. Work life imbalance is one of the major attributes which contribute to stress for employees. (JayasreeRajendran, 2010)

Further a study examines occupational stress of employees in the banking sector at different organizational levels and educational backgrounds by using Occupational Stress Indicator (OSI). Results show that employees' educational levels affect the degree of stress they experience in various ways. Bank employees cannot afford the time to relax and "wind down" when they are faced with work variety, discrimination, favoritism, delegation and conflicting tasks. The study also shows the degree to which some employees tend to bring work-related problems home (and take family problems to work) depends on their educational background, the strength of the employees' family support and the amount of time available for them to relax.

However, teaching is among the professions that causes more stress compared to other professions (Hargreaves, 1999; Pithers, 1995). Stress affects both the teacher and the learners in the teaching process (Forlin, Douglas and Hattie, 1996). Kyriacou (1987) who has carried out various studies on teacher stress, defines teacher stress as the experiencing of unpleasant feelings such as depression, anger, worry, irritableness and tension which are formed as a result of working as a teacher. Stress sources of teachers may be summarised as low motivation in students, discipline problems, the pressure of time and the work load, being assessed by others, colleague relationship, conflict and indefiniteness of roles, bad working conditions and self-respect, students' discipline problems, the inadequate support of colleagues, family and friends (Detert, Derosia, Caravella and Duquette, 2006; Kyriacou, 2001). In addition, students being late to school, their failure and students not doing homework may cause stress in teachers (Adams 2001; Joseph, 2000). It is important for educational organizations to study and manage rationalistically the stress sources of teachers who have the important duty of educating individuals.

Stress exist in every organization, whether big or small. The work place and organizations have become so much complex due to which stress exists; work place stress

have significant effect over employee job performance. Stress not only affects physical, psychological and financial balances of an employee but also the employers as well. Desired results cannot be expected from employees who are burn out, exhausted or stressed. The National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health states that job stress, now more than ever, poses threat to the health of workers and health of organization. About one third of workers report high level of stress, one quarter of employees view their job as number one of stressor. (Bashera and Ismai 2010)

Health consequences of stress

Constant stress can ruin one's spirit, slowing down the motivation to lead a meaningful life. Under stress one may fall into poor judgment, a general negative outlook, excessive worrying, moodiness, irritability, agitation, inability to relax, feeling lonely, isolated or depressed, aches and pains, diarrhoea or constipation, nausea, dizziness, chest pain, rapid heartbeat, eating too much or not enough, sleeping too much or not enough, social withdrawal, procrastination or neglect of responsibilities, increased alcohol, nicotine or drug consumption, and nervous habits such as pacing about or nail-biting.

Many people experience stress as they combine busy lives and the demands of work or study while trying to save time for work and family. For some people stress become almost a way of life. We all experience episodic stress getting ready for an exam, or an interview or completing an important task. However, a continuous state of stress should not become a way of life. Stress-over a prolonged period of time can increase health problems.

For instance, in a survey by Katrina (2011), 88% of working parents suffer stress related health problems. Around 75 to 85% of health related problems are precipitated or aggravated by Stress.

Stress Management

Research shows that generally employees manage their stress in different ways. Leo Jeeva and Chandramohan (2008) attempted to identify the psycho social stress and coping methods in a sample of 55 civil pilots. The results clearly indicate presence of professional stress (78%) amongst the civil pilots. Majority of them (77%) used emotion focused as a stress coping method. However, some of the pilots used problem solving (18%) and social support (5%) as an effective stress coping methods. Stress management programmes are suggested for the stress prone pilots for enhancing their operational efficiency.

Nothing is impossible in this world. We must analyze our stress points or triggers and try to stay away from them. All human beings are blessed with Emotional Intelligence, making use of which employees can smartly handle stress and shall not allow stress to rule over his body system or even get carried away by stress. **Dalai Lama**, a spiritual guru, has rightly said that "if you have fear of some pain or suffering, you should examine whether there is anything you can do about it. If you can, there is no need to worry about it; if you

cannot do anything, then there is also no need to worry”. However, some stress management techniques are been suggested here.

Stress Management Techniques

Regular exercise

Physical activity plays a key role in reducing and preventing the effects of stress. Regular exercise atleast 30 minutes, three times per week found to release pent-up stress and tension. It restores health and peace to an individual.

Healthy life style

“Your food will be your medicine” said Hippocrates. It is important to make sure that our diet is well balanced in order to enjoy good health and avoid long term disease and illnesses. Well-nourished bodies are better prepared to cope with stress, so be mindful about healthy balanced diet. Reduce caffeine and sugar. The temporary “highs” caffeine and sugar provide often end in with a crash in mood and energy. By reducing the amount of coffee, soft drinks, chocolate and fried snacks in the diet, one could feel more relaxed and get good sleep. Getting adequate sleep fuels mind, as well as the body. Feeling tired will increase stress because it may cause irrational thinking.

Meditation techniques

Ranging from practices associated with specific religions or beliefs to methods focusing purely on physical relaxation, meditation is one of the most popular techniques to achieve physical and mental relaxation. It is said that 20 minutes meditation is equivalent to 5 hours sleep. An experiment on stress reduction using the Transcendental Meditation (TM) technique and Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR) was conducted at a South African firm with 80 employees (Broome et al , 2005). Six weeks of TM practice produced greater reductions in psychological stress than six weeks of PMR ($p < 0.03$). A review of studies conducted on Transcendental Meditation (TM) by Orme-Johnson, Zimmerman and Hawkins, 1997) through over 500 experimental studies in 200 Universities from 33 countries revealed that TM helps expand consciousness, decrease oxygen intake and stress level, increase basal skin resistance and coherence in EEG and virtually suspends breathing up to one minute. Transcendental Meditation is a skill of effortlessly minimizing mental activity so that the body settles into a state of rest deeper than deep sleep while the mind becomes clear and alert. They showed that meditators displayed a greater physiological equilibrium than non-meditators. They also showed that meditators maintained this equilibrium under stress more effectively than non-meditators.

Yoga

There are many forms of yoga.... ancient Indian forms of exercise based upon the premise that body and breathing are connected with mind. Some studies have confirmed the useful role of yoga in managing stress. Nagendra and Nagarathna (1988) have dealt with stress management in their book entitled, New Perspectives in Stress Management.

According to them, the ancient Indian science of Yoga holds the key for combating this modern menace. Some modern methods of stress management and their limitations and the management of stress by Yoga are discussed in the book, for example, SMET (Self Management of Executive Tension) technique; QRT (Quick Relaxation Technique). These are some of the programmes developed by the Vivekananda Kendra for the management of stress which have been found to reduce stress significantly.

Time management

Good time-management skills are critical for effective stress control and in particular, learning to prioritize tasks and avoid over-commitment are critical measures to make sure that one is not overscheduled. Develop time-management skills.

Sharing with others

When under stress due to some problems, contacting friends who are attentive listeners will help. They may provide moral support and encouragement to solve the problems. Sharing problems with close friends reduces stress.

Bio-feedback

A different approach with stress is bio-feedback by which individuals under medical guidance learn from instrumental feedback to influence symptoms of stress such as increased palpitation and severe headache. Earlier, it was thought that people could not control their involuntary nervous system, which in turn controls process like heart beat, Oxygen consumption, stomach acid flow and brain waves. If people can exercise some control over these internal processes, bio-feedback may help in reducing undesirable effects of stress. Other stress release efforts that could be resorted to are like massaging, exercising programmes, counselling services and reading self-help books.

There are many stress busting strategies available which have proven track records. Occupational stress is an increasingly important occupational health problem in our society, is a matter of serious concern. It is responsible for rapidly mounting suicide in their technological haven It may produce both overt psychological and physiological disabilities. However it may also cause subtle manifestation of morbidity that can affect personal well-being and productivity. So attention should be paid to reduce the stress in their occupational field. (Ajay solkahe, 2011).

Conclusion

Many organization today have begun to use stress management programs for employees who are having trouble adapting to stress at the workplace or at home. Many people have spill over stress from home into their working environment and there by help them to become more adept and skillful in facing varied life situations.

Knowledge about stress management techniques and practice of the same will definitely help anyone to mentally be better equipped to manage stressful situations and will help in maintaining calmness and equanimity of mind, at all times.

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