

## THE FACTORS INFLUENCING ORGANISATIONAL STRESS AND STRATEGIES FOR MANAGING STRESS

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### **ABSTRACT**

Stress is a common phenomenon in modern organizations. It is both physical and psychological. It is understood through biological disorders leading to a psychological illness. Stress does not result from a single experience but occurs when the realization of desires and wishes are constrained by certain internal and external factors. People often confuse stress, anxiety, and burnout. They are not the same concept, although stress is accompanied by anxiety, whereas anxiety need not result into stress and burnout is a state of mind, resulting from emotional stress. A person may feel strained when overworked on a particular day. If this strain continues, it may result in burnout.

### **INTRODUCTION**

The factors that convert potential stress into actual stress are called stressors and these can be intra organizational or extra organizational. Intra organizational factors are again divided into individual factors and organizational factors. Individual factors responsible for stress are related to purely personal disposition, whereas organizational factors are related to the conditions in which individual works in an organization. Environmental factors responsible for stress are outside the control of both managerial and individual actions and hence they are uncontrollable. The positive form of stress is known as “eustress”. The negative consequences of stress are of greater concern as they have a negative impact on organizational performance. They have an impact on individual psychology and behavior on one hand and affect the organization on the other hand. This article provides a detailed discussion of stress that enables one to understand the phenomenon and design strategies to manage it effectively.

**KEYWORDS:** *Stress and Burnout, Emotional Stress, Managerial and Individual Actions*

### **Definition of Stress**

**Stress** is defined as “a state of psychological and physiological imbalance resulting from the disparity between situational demand and the individual's ability and motivation to meet those needs.”

**Dr. Hans Selye**, one of the leading authorities on the concept of stress, described stress as “the rate of all wear and tear caused by life.”

Stress can be positive or negative:

- Stress is good when the situation offers an opportunity to a person to gain something. It acts as a motivator for peak performance.
- Stress is negative when a person faces social, physical, organizational and emotional problems.

“Job stress can be defined as the harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when the requirements of the job do not match the capabilities, resources or needs of the worker. Job stress can lead to poor health and injury.”

*(United States National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health)*

### **Factors Influencing Stress**

When an individual experiences any deviation in his or her biological system, it is potential stress. Individual, organizational and environmental variables (stressors) affect potential stress, which ultimately leads to actual stress. Intra- Organizational stress arises from individual, and organisational factors. Extra organisational factors related to the environment of the organization.

Intra – organizational factors causing stress are divided into individual factors and organizational factors.

### **Intra- Organisational Factors**

#### **I) Individual Factors:**

- \* Personality and Individual differences
- Family Problems
- Economic Problems
- Life styles
- Role Demands.

#### **II) Organisational Factors:**

- \* Working Conditions
- \* Organisational Task
- \* Administrative Policies & Strategies
- \* Organisational Structure & Design
- \* Organisational Process and Styles
- \* Organisational Leadership
- \* Organisational Life cycle
- \* Group Dynamics

### **Extra - Organisational Factors**

#### **Environmental Factors**

- Political
- Economical
- Technological
- Legal
- Ecological

- Government
- Social, Cultural and Ethical environment

### **Intra - Organisational Factors**

#### **Individual Factors**

##### **Personality and Individual Differences**

An individual's basic disposition is the main reason for potential stress. Introversion, extroversion, masculinity, rigidity, and locus of control are some of the personal factors that lead to stress in individuals. Personal life and Demographic differences such as **age, health, education, and occupation** are some of the individual differences that cause stress in individuals.

##### **Family Problems**

Family issues influence the personal life of individuals. **Sound marital relationships, marital discipline, and healthy children lead to a happy personal life of individuals.** They enjoy the life and become positive in their attitudes. So they have less stress. Poor marital relationships, family separations, problematic children, early death of a spouse or other close family members are some of the reasons for greater stress in an individual. Although some of the personal reasons are out of one's individual control, one has to develop a strong willpower to overcome the problems in order to reduce stress.

##### **Economic Problems**

Economic difficulties also cause stress. Poor management of personal finance, heavy family expenditure, the constant demand for money, poor income earning capacity and slow personal financial growth are some of the economic reasons responsible for greater stress. For instance, **increased family expenditure due to an increased cost of living, children's education and health creates heavy demand on an individual, creating greater stress.** These are external factors beyond an individual's control, planned lifestyle and developing contentment will really help a person to feel less stressed.

##### **Life Styles**

In the modern world, the lifestyle of an individual is one of the main reasons for stress. Ever-increasing ambitions, changing fashions, etc. can cause envy and feeling of discontentment. A sudden change in lifestyle, makes an individual to experience a situation that compels him to alter his **attitude, and behavior.** **Acceptance of promotions,** bring more responsibilities to the individual. Persons occupying higher positions at an early stage are prone to greater stress. This is because of their inadequate preparedness to adapt to the new career responsibilities.

##### **Role Demands**

Individuals play multiple roles in their personal, social and organizational life. In their personal life, they play roles of husband or wife, father or mother, brother or sister and so on. In their social life they play roles of members of a club, community groups, recreation groups, religious groups, etc. Similarly in organizations, employee's play role of superior, subordinate, co-workers, members of various formal committees, union leaders, informal group leaders etc.

Balancing the demands in all these roles is like walking on tightrope. They cause, **tension, anxiety, and emotion due to conflicting demands.**

For instance, an employer may be required to attend simultaneously a function at home and have an important official board meeting. Another example is the case of an employee, who is forced to go against his principles. These role conflicts arise due to **poor role perception, role ambiguity, role overload and role overlapping.**

### **Organisational Factors**

An organization is a statutory or legal body where people set goals, mobilize resources and draw strategies and policies, in order to create a structure, process and working conditions. In modern organizations a number of factors create a situation of stress. Changing environment, dynamics, globalization, organizational adjustments like mergers and acquisition, downsizing, resizing, collaboration, etc., lead to stress among employees. In addition, a number of internal organisational factors cause stress. Some of them are poor working conditions, strained employee-management relations, behavior of colleagues, organizational design and policies, unpleasant styles of leadership of superiors, misunderstandings in organizational communication, improper motivation, job dissatisfaction, less attention to merit and seniority and so on.

- **Working Conditions:** Working conditions and stress are inversely related, Employees in the poor working environment are subject to greater stress. Some of the working conditions that lead to more stress are : crowded work areas, **dust, heat, noise, polluted air, strong odor due to toxic chemicals, radiation, poor ventilation, unsafe and dangerous conditions, lack of privacy, etc.,**
- **Organizational Task:** Organisational tasks are designed to meet objectives and goals. Poor planning and designs lead to greater stress. Task autonomy, task inter-dependency, task demands, task overload, etc., are some of the factors of organizational task that become potential reasons for stress, if not properly designed. The employees should adjust themselves with co-workers, supervisors, and subordinates. They are expected to communicate, coordinate, exchange views with other people irrespective of Caste, creed, gender, religion and cadre hierarchy. They require a greater degree of emotional tolerance. Inability to adjust and poor tolerance leads to a greater degree of stress among the employees.
- **Administrative Policies and Strategies:** Administrative strategies followed by an organization and employee stress are positively related. Downsizing, competitive pressure, unfair and discriminating pay structure, rigidity in rules, frequent transfers, job rotation and ambiguous policies are some of the reasons for stress in an organisation. In recent years, employees working in banks have expressed anxiety over the news about possible merger of banks in the near future. In many private organisations a discriminative pay structure is followed with specific instructions to employees not to disclose their pay and perquisites with their colleagues.
- **Organisational Structure and Design:** As pointed out earlier, organizational structure is designed to the realisation of organizational goals. Certain aspects of design like, **specialisation, centralisation, line and staff relationships, span of control and organization communication can together create stress in organizations.** For example, **wider span of management compels the executive to manage a large number of subordinates.** This may place greater stress on the executive. When he tries to maintain good relationship.

- **Organisational Process and Style:** A number of organizational processes are designed to meet organizational goals. The communication process, control process, decision-making process, promotion process, performance appraisal process, etc. are designed for a smooth realization of organizational objectives. These processes limit the scope of employees' functions. Improper design of various organizational processes leads to the strained relationship among the employees. They may also cause de- motivation and job dissatisfaction. Consequently, employees feel stress in adapting to the processes.
- **Organisational Leadership:** The top management is responsible for creating a sound organizational climate and culture through an appropriate leadership style. The climate provided should be free of tension, fear, and anxiety. The authoritarian leadership style creates an environment in which they work under impersonal relationships and tight control. This creates greater work stress in employees.
- **Organisational Life Cycle:** Every organization moves through four phases of an organizational life cycle, namely, birth, growth, maturity, and decline. In each of these stages, the structure and design of an organization undergo frequent changes, to which the employees must adjust, subjecting them to job stress. For instance, in the initial stage of an organization stress is caused because of ambiguous policies and designs. In the growth stage, employees experience stress due to failure to meet conflicting demands. In the maturity stage, employees are pressurized to achieve higher targets to meet the demands of the market. At the time of decline, stress is caused due to downsizing, retrenchment, and loss of financial rewards and changing organizational systems.
- **Group Dynamics:** Groups always exist in an organization. They arise from the inherent desire of human beings and spontaneous reactions of people. Both formal groups, such as committees and informal groups exist in the organizations. Groups have a number of functional activities. They provide social support and satisfaction, which are helpful in relieving stress and at the same time, they can also be a source of stress. Lack of cohesiveness, mutual support and lack of recognition in the group cause stress.

### **Extra-Organisational Factors**

Factors are related to environment of the organisation. They are outside the scope of the organisational managerial and individual control. Environmental factors create job stress in individuals and they may be internal or external. Most of the internal environmental factors relate to **organisational goals, management system, organisational structure, processes and design of organisation.**

- **Political:** The political party in power enacts legislation in parliament, which reflects their ideology. Every political party that forms the government wishes to either enact new laws and regulations or bring changes in the existing ones. Thus, political changes cause uncertainty in the environment. Employees are compelled to adapt to the legal order, which can create stress.
- **Economical:** This encompasses income level, demand and supply. Inflation etc. Changes in these factors make new demands on both the organisation and employees. This creates stress if the employees are unable to adjust to the situations. For instance, increased inflation level creates pressure on employees income leading to stress.

- **Technological:** Changes in technology bring in new methods of production and new ways of handling organisational tasks. Employees are required to learn new skills in order to discharge their jobs effectively. Inability to cope with the new technology creates stress in employees. For example, bank employees initially resisted the move to introduce computers as they felt it would lead to retrenchment, which caused them stress.
- **Legal:** Organisations have to follow the legal provisions, but often, practical difficulties arise in the implementation of the complex laws and regulations indented to control operations. Inability to respond properly to the laws and regulations, employees find themselves in stressful situations.
- **Ecological:** This environment is of great concern to organisations as the government is enacting legislation to protect the ecological environment and organisations are compelled to adapt to it. Protecting the ecological balance can be cause for potential stress.
- **Government:** The government is composed of the administrative machinery and institutions that enforce laws, regulations, policies and other government instructions. The bureaucratic practices of the administrative machinery can create stress in executives.
- **Social, Cultural and Ethical environment:** Social factors influence the lifestyle of employees. Certain social measures such as health protection, civic facilities and social groups reduce stress in the employees. Certain sociological variable such as race, sex, social class, gender, etc., and cultural factors such as beliefs, customs, and traditions are potential stress factors. Certain other environmental factors that lead to stress are : stock market crashes, frequent elections, downsizing, information technology and the related changes in the business. Further, dual career couples, racial and gender discriminations, health hazards due to pollution and imbalance in the natural environment, also may cause stress.

### Managerial Implications of Stress

At first, an individual experiences stress through imbalance psychology emotions, A physiological breakdown or biological changes disseminate this stress. However, mild stress elevates the body's metabolic and biological rates, leading to secretion of juices from the glands that increase the inner drive for achievement. Such stress namely, the eustress is a positive form of stress. The word eustress is taken from the Greek language, which means good stress. In its mild form, it enhances job performance, leads to excellence and provides the impetus to work hard and perform better. Individuals involved in the discharge of professional oriented jobs, jobs involving creativity, challenge, interpersonal communications and certain managerial jobs, will be benefited by eustress, which leads to positive performance. Thus, eustress helps individuals to perform tasks better and faster.

### Positive and negative consequences of stress

- **Positive** consequences of stress are : increased productive positive response to target, development of proper perception in decision making, increased motivation and performance, increased adaptability to change and increased quality of job performance.
- **Negative** Consequences of stress are: more cause for concern to the management and employees. As pointed out by Schuler, Khan, and Byosiyere, stress leads to high blood pressure, ulcers, accidents, irritation. etc.

- **Physiological Consequences:** Stress influences the biological system of a human being. Certain visible forms of stress are increased blood pressure, tendency towards heart disease, cancer, sweating, dry mouth, hot and cold flashes; increased level of cholesterol, ulcer, arthritis, etc., Physical stress increases the body metabolic rate. This results in malfunctioning of the internal glands and consequent body disorder, which manifests as increased heart beats / breathing and headaches. Physical stress can also create psychological problems as both are interrelated.
- **Psychological Consequences:** By themselves, psychological consequences of stress are not visible, but they have a considerable effect on the employee's performance. Psychological stress creates pressure in the mind, which is expressed in terms of psychological symptoms, such as, anger, anxiety, depression, nervousness, irritation, tension, boredom, aggressiveness, moodiness, hostility and poor concentration. Tension, anxiety and emotion lead to procrastination. Psychological stress produces interpersonal aggressions, misunderstanding, poor interpersonal communication, and low interpersonal relationship further, stress leads to aggressive attitudes, increased interpersonal complaints, poor job performance, low self esteem, increased resentment. Less concentration and increased dissatisfaction.
- **Behavioural Consequences:** Stress impacts employee's behaviour. Abnormal behaviour is observed in individuals who are prone to stress. A change in eating habits, sleep disorders, increased smoking, alcoholism, fidgeting and aloofness are some of the behavioural changes observed in stressful employees. It can also lead to anxiety, apathy, depression, and emotional disorder. This leads to impulsive and aggressive behaviour and frequent interpersonal conflicts. Further, undereating, overeating, drug abuse and sleeplessness are also some of the behaviour consequences.

### **Organisational Consequences**

Stressful employees cause problems to the management of the organization. Some of them are described below:

- **Absenteeism:** Employees subject to stress are found to be addicted to drugs and alcohol. so, they may frequently absent from work, which creates a discontinuity in their work. Absenteeism adversely affects the performance of other employees and hence the organization as a whole.
- **Turnover:** Employees under continuous stress become disgruntled and frustrated. Therefore, they may likely to leave the organization. This situation increases employees turnover in that organization.
- **Decision Making:** Excessive stress distorts the perception of managers. This adversely affects the analytical attitude and decision making skill of the managers. Thus, stressful executives make irrational decisions, leading to loss of organizational resources and reputation.

### **Strategies for Managing Stress**

Stress experienced by the employees in their job has a negative impact on their health, performance and their behavior in the organization. Thus, stress needs to be managed effectively so as to set off these harmful consequences. Strategies for managing stress are as follows-

### **Organizational Strategies for Managing Stress**

- 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..
- The organizational goals should be realistic, stimulating and particular. 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.
- Appreciate the employees on accomplishing and over-exceeding their targets.

### **Individual Strategies for Managing Stress**

- The employees should make a "to-do" list daily, prioritize the acts on the list and plan the acts accordingly. Take regular breaks during work to relax you. 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 the mind from work pressures.
- Encourage a healthy lifestyle. Take a regular sleep, have plenty of water, have healthy eating habits. Promote relaxation techniques such as yoga, listening music and meditation.
- The employees should have optimistic approach to their work. They should avoid connections with negative approach employees.
- The employees should have emotional intelligence at the workplace. They should have self-awareness, self-confidence and self-control at the workplace.
- The employees should build social support. They should have close connections with a 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 are also given career counseling which helps in reducing their ambiguities with regard to career.



## CONCLUSIONS

Stress is a psychological concept and is symptomatic. Stress and anxiety are different concepts. Anxiety is a cause of stress, but stress need not results into anxiety. Prolonged stress leads to burnout. A host of factors cause stress. Stressors are factors that cause stress in individuals. They can be intra or extra organizational. While individual stressors are intra organizational, environmental stressors are extra organizational. Individual stressors are the personality of a person, individual differences, family problems, economic problems, lifestyles, and role demands. A number of organizational factors that cause stress in individuals are poor working conditions, poor task design, unfair administrative policies and strategies, improper organizational structure and design, organizational process and design, organizational leadership, organizational life cycle and group dynamics. Environment factors comprise political, economic, technological, legal, ecological, governmental, social and ethical favors. Nevertheless, stress and personality, occupation, age, lifestyles and time demands are related to each other. Excessive stress leads to both biological and behavioral disorders. Although, stress is usually considered as a negative factor, there is also positive stress called eustress, which is mild stress that enhances performance. However, the negative consequences of stress are greater than the positive consequences. Physiological consequences are : increased blood pressure, heart attacks, cancer, sweating, etc., Psychological consequences are : anger, aggressiveness, moodiness, hostility, poor concentration, tension, and anxiety. Abnormal behavior is observed in stressful situations. Poor perception, inconsistent attitudes, and poor learning are some of the behavioral consequences. The outcome of stress is absenteeism employee turnover, irrational decision-making and disturbed customer relationships that lead to a negative corporate image.

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