WORKPLACE STRESS & ITS IMPACT ON THE EMPLOYEES

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Abstract: Stress is a state of physical, mental or emotional strain that occurs in response to real or perceived events which occur in our everyday lives. It is the way our bodies respond and adjust to a continually changing environment. Stress can be positive or negative. In a positive sense, stress can force us into action; it can induce feelings of excitement and new levels of awareness. In negative sense, it can bring on a range of adverse effects such as anger, depression and extreme anxiety. This can in turn lead to physical problems such as headaches, skin rashes, ulcers, high blood pressure and in extreme case heart disease and stroke.

Stress management refers to a wide spectrum of techniques and psychotherapies aimed at controlling a person’s levels of stress, especially chronic stress, usually for the purpose of improving everyday functioning. The process of stress management is one of the keys to a happy and successful life in modern society. Although life provides numerous demands that can prove difficult to handle, stress management provides a number of ways to manage anxiety and maintain overall well-being. Stress can affect both your body and your mind. People under large amounts of stress can become tired, sick, and unable to concentrate or think clearly. Sometimes, they even suffer mental breakdowns. Stress does not necessarily have a negative effect on a person. For example, a certain level of tolerable stress improves performance on many tasks. Also, work can be stressful if it is not sufficiently challenging.

In this difficult economy, many of us are finding it harder than ever to cope with stress in the workplace. Regardless of occupation, seniority, or salary level, we’re spending more and more of our work days feeling frazzled and out of control, instead of alert and relaxed. There are a variety of steps you can take to reduce both your overall stress levels and the stress you find on the job and in the workplace. These include: Taking responsibility for improving your physical and emotional well-being. Avoiding pitfalls by identifying knee jerk habits and negative attitudes that add to the stress you experience at work. Learning better
communication skills to ease and improve your relationships with management and co-workers.

Keywords: Introduction, Types of stress, Stress management, techniques of stress management, stress management at work place, Strategies & methods of Stress management

INTRODUCTION

Stress is your mind and body’s response or reaction to a real or imagined threat, event or change. Stress is a state of physical, mental or emotional strain that occurs in response to real or perceived events which occur in our everyday lives. It is the way our bodies respond and adjust to a continually changing environment. Stress can be positive or negative. In a positive sense, stress can force us into action; it can induce feelings of excitement and new levels of awareness. In negative sense, it can bring on a range of adverse effects such as anger, depression and extreme anxiety. This can in turn lead to physical problems such as headaches, skin rashes, ulcers, high blood pressure and in extreme case heart disease and stroke. When you are stressed, your body responds as though you are in danger. It makes hormones that speed up your heart, make you breathe faster, and give you a burst of energy. This is called the fight-or-flight stress response. Some stress is normal and even useful. Stress can help if you need to work hard or react quickly. For example, it can help you win a race or finish an important job on time.

The threat, event or changes are commonly called stressors. Stressors can be internal (thoughts, beliefs, attitudes or external (loss, tragedy, change).

OBJECTIVES

1. To understand the workplace stress
2. To find the causes of the stress at the workplace stress
3. To determine the effects of the of the stress on the employees
4. To suggest the ways to counter the stress & Improve Productivity

FOUR MAIN TYPES OF STRESS

Every one of us would probably experience different types of stress at one time or another. It could be some personal stress arising in the work place, strained family relationships with teenage children, emotional stress caused by financial problems.
Eustress Have you ever (I’m sure you have) felt

1. The thrill and excited feeling while watching a horror movie
2. The feeling of excitement when you won a game or race
3. The excitement when you bought your first car
4. The accomplishment of a challenge
5. The proud feeling of being a first time parent
6. The happy feeling of being loved
7. The excitement of going for a holiday

These feelings sure make us feel good and they are the so-called "good stress" or "positive stress". They are able to exert a healthy effect on you. It gives one a feeling of fulfillment or contentment and also makes one excited about life. Unfortunately, it is a type of stress that only occurs for a short period of time. Eustress is also often called the curative stress.

Distress

In life, when there is good or positive stress, there is also "bad" or "negative stress". These types of stress are the opposite of Eustress and it's called Distress. Distress is a “negative stress”. It is a stress disorder that is caused by adverse events and it often influences a person’s ability to cope. Some events leading to distress are:

1. Death of a loved one
2. Financial problems
3. Heavy work responsibility and workload
4. Strained relationship
5. Chronic illnesses

Distress can be classified further as acute stress or chronic stress.

Hyper stress

When a person is pushed beyond what he or she can handle, they will experience what we called hyper stress. Hyper stress results from being overloaded or overworked. It’s like being stressed out. When someone is hyper stressed, even little things can trigger a strong emotional response. People who are most likely to suffer from hyper stress are:

1. Working mothers who have to multi-task, juggling between work and family commitments
2. Wall Street traders who are constantly under immerse tension
3. People who are under constant financial strains.
4. Generally people working in fast pace environment.

**Hypo stress**

Hypo stress stands in direct opposite to hyper stress. That is because hypo stress is one of those types of stress experienced by a person who is constantly bored. Someone in an unchallenging job, such as a factory worker performing the same task over and over, will often experience hypo stress. The effect of hypo stress is feelings of restlessness and a lack of inspiration.

**STAGES OF STRESS**

When you are under stress, you experience and pass through three specific stages. These stages are Alarm, Resistance, and Exhaustion.

1. **The Stage of Stress Alarm Reaction:** The initial stress effect on the body.
   This is also known as the 'fight or flight' response. As soon as our body is faced with a stressful situation, our body explodes with a sudden surge of energy with flooding of hundreds of hormones and chemical activators into the bloodstream. We become alert and ready to meet any threat.

2. **The Stage of Stress Resistance:** Response to stress effect on the body.
   When you do not get any relief from the first stage of stress, you slowly start feeling a reduction in your energy levels.
   The normal indications of this level are exhaustion, weariness, anxiousness, and being forgetful. You start smoking and drinking more to come out of your stress. Being weak, you are an easy target for colds and flu.

3. **The Stage of Stress Exhaustion:** Stress effect on the body turns harmful.
   When stress continues beyond the second stage and you do not adhere to remedial measures, the final stress stage of exhaustion settles in. You are now totally tired and drained out of all energy. You do not even have the desire or the drive to do your work or live your life. Thus our body goes into stress exhaustion and breakdown due to the side effects of continuous, uncontrolled stress.

**STRESSORS**

A stressor is a chemical or biological agent, environmental condition, an external stimulus or an event that causes stress to an organism. An event that triggers the stress response may include for example:
environmental stressors (elevated sound levels, over-illumination, overcrowding)

- daily stress events (e.g. traffic, lost keys)
- life changes (e.g. divorce, bereavement)
- workplace stressors (e.g. role strain, lack of control)
- physical stressors (e.g. tobacco, alcohol, drugs)

The main causes of stress that arise due to the external environment were studied by Thomas H. Holmes and Richard H. Rahe, from the University of Washington. In 1967 they conducted a study on the connection between certain important life events and the illnesses. As a part of that study they also compiled a list of main reasons of stress in the society.

From the studies conducted by Holmes and Rahe, and also other studies that have been conducted from time to time, it seems that following are the biggest causes of present day stress levels in modern societies:

1. **Financial Problems** – This is the number one source of stress these days. You and your family are not be able to do what you want to due to lack of money. Debts are piling up. Credit Card payments, pending mortgage installments, rising costs of education, mounting expenditure on health concerns. Financial matters top the list of stressors.

2. **Workplace Stress** – Stress at workplace is another of the main causes of stress. You may be worried about your next promotion. You might be facing the negative or bullying behavior of your boss. You might not be reaching your well-deserved career goals; you might be worried due to office politics. You might be stressed about some major change that is taking place in the organization, or, you might be under stress because of the prospect of losing your job.

3. **Personal Relationships** – Studies of children, attitude of relatives, arguments with spouse or children, change of place due to requirements of your job, illness of a family member, moving in of parents or moving out of elder children are all main causes of stress.

4. **Health** – Heart diseases, hypertension, problems with eye sight and sugar afflict many people becoming a major cause of life stress for them. Maintaining good health, reducing weight, increasing weight, being able to lead a healthy life-style: all of these and a few more are the main causes of stress due to health concerns.
5. Irritants - Besides the ones that I have mentioned above there are those annoyances and irritations that you encounter in your daily lives which go on to become biggest sources of stress for you. Problems at workplace, balance of work and family life, PTMs at children’s schools, workload, visit to doctor, not enough sleep, no time to relax, no time to discuss some problems These main causes of stress are taking their toll on today’s urban man in the shape of stress related diseases that we mentioned at the top.

EFFECTS OF STRESS

Stress causes changes in your body. It also affects your emotions.

How stress affects the body

Common symptoms of stress include:

- A fast heartbeat.
- A headache.
- A stiff neck and/or tight shoulders.
- Back pain.
- Fast breathing.
- Sweating, and sweaty palms.
- An upset stomach, nausea, or diarrhea.

Look at how you currently cope with stress:-

Think about the ways you currently manage and cope with stress in your life.

Unhealthy ways of coping with stress

These coping strategies may temporarily reduce stress, but they cause more damage in the long run:

- Smoking
- Drinking too much
- Overeating or underrating
- Zoning out for hours in front of the TV or computer
- Withdrawing from friends, family, and activities
- Using pills or drugs to relax
- Sleeping too much
- Procrastinating
- Filling up every minute of the day to avoid facing problems
Taking out your stress on others (lashing out, angry outbursts, physical violence)

STRESS MANAGEMENT

“A set of techniques and programmes intended to help people to deal more effectively with stress in their lives by analyzing the specific stressors & taking positive action to minimize their effects. Most stress management programmes deal with job stress and workplace issues.”

A predetermined strategy for coping with psychological or emotional turmoil. As part of a health benefits package, a company may offer stress management therapy to improve job performance.

STRESS MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

1. Stress management strategy: Avoid unnecessary stress

Not all stress can be avoided, and it’s not healthy to avoid a situation that needs to be addressed. You may be surprised, however, by the number of stressors in your life that you can eliminate.

- **Learn how to say “no”** – Know your limits and stick to them. Whether in your personal or professional life, refuse to accept added responsibilities when you’re close to reaching them. Taking on more than you can handle is a surefire recipe for stress.

- **Avoid people who stress you out** – If someone consistently causes stress in your life and you can’t turn the relationship around, limit the amount of time you spend with that person or end the relationship entirely.

- **Take control of your environment** – If the evening news makes you anxious, turn the TV off. If traffic’s got you tense, take a longer but less-traveled route. If going to the market is an unpleasant chore, do your grocery shopping online.

- **Avoid hot-button topics** – If you get upset over religion or politics, cross them off your conversation list. If you repeatedly argue about the same subject with the same people, stop bringing it up or excuse yourself when it’s the topic of discussion.

2. Stress management strategy: Alter the situation

If you can’t avoid a stressful situation, try to alter it. Figure out what you can do to change things so the problem doesn’t present itself in the future. Often, this involves **changing the way you communicate and operate in your daily life**.
• Express your feelings instead of bottling them up. If something or someone is bothering you, communicate your concerns in an open and respectful way. If you don’t voice your feelings, resentment will build and the situation will likely remain the same.

• Be willing to compromise. When you ask someone to change their behavior, be willing to do the same. If you both are willing to bend at least a little, you’ll have a good chance of finding a happy middle ground.

• Manage your time better. Poor time management can cause a lot of stress. When you’re stretched too thin and running behind, it’s hard to stay calm and focused. But if you plan ahead and make sure you don’t overextend yourself, you can alter the amount of stress.

3. Stress management strategy: Adapt to the stressor

If you can’t change the stressor, change yourself. You can adapt to stressful situations and regain your sense of control by changing your expectations and attitude.

• Reframe problems. Try to view stressful situations from a more positive perspective. Rather than fuming about a traffic jam, look at it as an opportunity to pause and regroup, listen to your favorite radio station, or enjoy some alone time.

• Look at the big picture. Take perspective of the stressful situation. Ask yourself how important it will be in the long run. Will it matter in a month? A year? Is it really worth getting upset over? If the answer is no, focus your time and energy elsewhere.

• Focus on the positive. When stress is getting you down, take a moment to reflect on all the things you appreciate in your life, including your own positive qualities and gifts. This simple strategy can help you keep things in perspective.

4. Stress management strategy: Accept the things you can’t change

Some sources of stress are unavoidable. You can’t prevent or change stressors such as the death of a loved one, a serious illness, or a national recession. In such cases, the best way to cope with stress is to accept things as they are. Acceptance may be difficult, but in the long run, it’s easier than railing against a situation you can’t change.

• Don’t try to control the uncontrollable. Many things in life are beyond our control—particularly the behavior of other people. Rather than stressing out over them, focus on the things you can control such as the way you choose to react to problems.
• **Look for the upside.** As the saying goes, “What doesn’t kill us makes us stronger.” When facing major challenges, try to look at them as opportunities for personal growth. If your own poor choices contributed to a stressful situation, reflect on them and learn from your mistakes.

• **Share your feelings.** Talk to a trusted friend or make an appointment with a therapist. Expressing what you’re going through can be very cathartic, even if there’s nothing you can do to alter the stressful situation.

5. **Stress management strategy: Make time for fun and relaxation**

Beyond a take-charge approach and a positive attitude, you can reduce stress in your life by nurturing yourself. If you regularly make time for fun and relaxation, you’ll be in a better place to handle life’s stressors when they inevitably come.

**HEALTHY WAYS TO RELAX AND RECHARGE**

- Go for a walk.
- Spend time in nature.
- Call a good friend.
- Sweat out tension with a good workout.
- Write in your journal.
- Take a long bath.
- Light scented candles.

6. **Stress management strategy: Adopt a healthy lifestyle**

You can increase your resistance to stress by strengthening your physical health.

- **Exercise regularly.** Physical activity plays a key role in reducing and preventing the effects of stress. Make time for at least 30 minutes of exercise.
- **Eat a healthy diet.** Start your day right with breakfast, and keep your energy up and your mind clear with balanced, nutritious meals throughout the day.
- **Reduce caffeine and sugar.** By reducing the amount of coffee, soft drinks, chocolate, and sugar snacks in your diet, you’ll feel more relaxed and you’ll sleep better.
- **Avoid alcohol, cigarettes, and drugs.** Self-medicating with alcohol or drugs may provide an easy escape from stress, but the relief is only temporary.
• Get enough sleep. Adequate sleep fuels your mind, as well as your body. Feeling tired will increase your stress because it may cause you to think irrationally.

THE FIVE BEST STRESS MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES

The best stress management techniques are those that are easy to use. Quick to learn and quick to implement, you can use them to manage your own stress levels or teach them to help others manage theirs. Stress management techniques help you control of your stress and be a healthier, happier and more pleasant person to be around.

1. Identify what is stressful
Stressors are the external factors that can cause feelings of stress - these include deadlines, bills, life events, daily hassles, certain people, etc. Make a list of the things that cause you stress.

2. Avoid stress sneezers
Protect yourself by recognizing stress in others and limiting your contact with them.

3. Learn from the best
When people around are losing their head, who keeps calm? What are they doing differently? What is their attitude? What language do they use? Are they trained and experienced? Learn from the best stress managers and copy what they do.

4. Practice socially acceptable heavy breathing
You can trick your body into relaxing by using heavy breathing. Breathe in slowly for a count of 7 then breathe out for a count of 11. Repeat the 7-11 breathing until your heart rate slows down, your sweaty palms dry off and things start to feel more normal.

5. Eliminate or reduce stressors
Review your list for stressors that you can eliminate. Maybe you are taking on too many projects or your time is being wasted on interruptions, e-mail, TV, mindless web surfing, etc. Maybe there are people, jobs, or situations that repeatedly cause you stress. Make a conscious decision to eliminate or reduce these stressors from your life. Many stressors cannot be eliminated. The next step is to find ways to cope with these stressors and the impact they have on you.

HOW TO REDUCE STRESS

It is of utmost importance that an organization takes this issue seriously. The organization can help reduce stress by:
• Reducing the number of hours for which their employees would have to work per week. This will, in the long run, contribute to a more efficient functioning of the organization, as employees would have more time to rest at home, and will come back the next day feeling refreshed.

Working hours should be flexible. This may also include shifts, and the rotation of employees.

• A tried and tested technique that many organizations have begun using is the provision of lounges and other recreational facilities to help employees relax during the day should they require some time off.

You may even choose to add refreshments and a TV so that they could forget all the worries of work for a few minutes. Investing in such facilities is a great idea for any organization. You may also allow them to take more holidays throughout the year to ensure that they have a good break.

• Female employees may find that they do not have enough time to spend with their newborn if they have just had a baby.

You should make allowance for such situations. Providing longer maternity leave could help your female employee to come back to work without having too much on her mind with regard to the baby and any postnatal depression.

Another idea would be to provide child care facilities at the office so that mothers with young children could peep in and ensure their kids are okay every few hours.

• As an employee, you should also make it a point to occasionally have a casual chat with your employees to ensure that they are satisfied with their jobs and have no issues at work.

You should also encourage them and appreciate and praise him/her for tasks carried out very well. This would reduce any worries they may have of the risks of losing their jobs and help them to feel more secure.

CONCLUSION

Stress can be both positive and negative, which has an impact on the employee's performance at work. If taken positively, the results are positive, and if taken in a negative way, may yield disastrous results. For most of the people, low amount of stress enable them to perform their jobs better. However, a high level of stress or for that matter even a low
level stress spread over a long period, eventually takes its toll, and the performance declines. So the management of stress is very important and according to my point of view accept the things if you can not change them and take them positively.

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