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Shavita Deshwal
Assistant Professor Dept. of
Business Administration, MSI

Strategies for managing stress

Shavita Deshwal

Abstract

Stress is inevitable in today's complex life. Right from the time of birth till death, an individual is regularly exposed to various stressful situations. The threat of political and economic imbalances and uncertainties, unemployment, poverty, urbanization and increased socio- economic complexities and innumerable other factors contribute to stress. In fact modern times have been called the "age of anxiety and stress" (Coleman, 1976). Stress has been experienced since time immemorial, but its toll is higher than ever before. Stress is growing problem because of increase in working hours, deadlines, conflicting demands and increase accountability. The present paper makes an attempt to discuss stress and its solution with reference to pertinent literature.

Keywords: Stress Complexities, Exposed, Imbalances, Conflicting demands.

Introduction

In today's competitive world stress is part of everybody's life. Stress is an aspect of our life that cannot be avoided. Since 1990s riding on the globalization wave, India has moved to a higher growth route. With the momentum has fuelled the economy and increased per capita income it has also resulted in greater pressure of work on individuals. Work is good for people if it is well designed but it can also be a great source of pressure. Work stress has a calamitous effect on quality of life and quality of work life. Stress has no boundaries. Stress is created by a multitude of overlapping factors such as work load, stringent relationship, ethical problems and uncertainties in life. Too much of stress for too long period is harmful for work life and personal life. The research at hand aims at knowing the consequences of stress and how to overcome from it.

Stress

Selye (1936, 1956) defines stress as a dynamic condition in which an individual is confronted with an opportunity, constraints or demand related to what he or she desire and for which the outcome is perceived to be both uncertain and important. National institution of occupational stress and hazards defined work stress as being the harmful physical and emotional response that occurs where the requirements of the job do not match the capabilities, resources, or needs of the worker. Aziz (2003) investigated the prevalence of organizational stress among Indian information technology employees. The study revealed more stress among men as compared to women. Edworthy (1993) found that stress has negative implications such as poor quality of work. low productivity, absenteeism, high turnover. Kushnir and Kasan (1993) told that stress is viewed as resulting from the combination of high role demands and low coping resources (material, psychological, interpersonal and organizational). Taylor and Cangemi (1989) examine occupational stress and conclude that psychological factors can affect job satisfaction, work adjustment, work attitudes and overall well-being in the work environment.

Types of Stress

1. Constructive and Destructive Stress: The stress that has positive impact on people which gives a feeling of excitement and enthusiasm is called positive stress. Negative stress gives negative impact on the mind and body.
2. Episodic and Chronic Stress: When stress comes to a person on interval basis then such stress is called episodic stress. Episodic stress is not constant in nature Chronic stress is one in which a person faces stress continuously and he can neither fight nor flee. Archer 1991 described that chronic stress is often a serious health breakdown.

Correspondence:
Shavita Deshwal
Assistant Professor Dept. of
Business Administration, MSI

Consequences of Stress

1. **Physiological Consequences:** It includes high blood pressure, high pulse rate, sweating, headaches and gastrointestinal problems. There is high degree correlation between stress and stress-related illness. The impact of stress is on the employee and also on the organization for accidents occurred at workplace, absenteeism of employee and compensation claims.
2. **Psychological Consequences:** Excessive amount of stress in an organization can cause boredom, dissatisfaction, anxiety, tension and depression. All of these take the feeling of well-being away from the individual and contribute to poor concentration, indecision and decreased attention span at work. (Watson and Tellengen 1985). If individuals are not able to change or move away from the stressors. They may resort to psychological substitutes such as anger, apathy, feeling of persecution, criticism, denial, forgetfulness and procrastination (Fletcher 1988)
3. **Behavioral Consequences:** High stress level affects our behavior also. When stress becomes distress, job performance gets affected and workplace accidents become very common. High stress levels impair our ability to remember information, make effective decisions and take appropriate actions (Jamel 1984). It will bring problem of sleep disorder, rude behavior, and irregular eating habits and at extreme level workplace violence.

High level of unchecked and unmanaged work stress not only undermines the quality, productivity and creativity of employees but also their health, well-being and morale. It is impossible to eliminate stress so it will be easier to us to understand the techniques and strategies to control it. By controlling stress we can make ourselves productive at workplace and at home also.

Steps to Manage Stress

1. **Awareness:** We should be aware of the symptoms of stress which makes us uneasy in terms of physiological consequences, psychological consequences and behavioral consequences.
2. **Identification of source:** After recognizing the symptom the next step is to diagnose the source of stress.
3. **Coping with stress:** This step takes time as it is not easy to remove the stress at once. Dealing in a constructive ways with emotional feelings and making strategies to change the behavioral pattern is the only solution for coping with the stress.

Stress Dealing Strategies

Stress related strategies can be of two types:

- A. Individual related strategies
- B. Organization related strategies

A. Individual Related Strategies

1. **Exercise:** This is the best way to remove the stress. It also keeps our body fit. People with healthy and active body feel less stress and unhealthy and inactive people are more prone to stress.
2. **Time Management:** Major reason of stress is our poor time management which creates anxiety and frustration in individuals. If we can manage our time then 40% of the stress problem can be managed.

3. **Relaxation:** It is not stress that kills us; it is our reaction to it. (Hans Selye) This is the simplest way to get rid of stress. Breathe deeply, sit quietly, developing a hobby are some small but powerful ways to reduce stress.
4. **Seek Help:** Take advice and seek help of other people to alleviate stress. When we talk to others we can discuss the reasons and problems and it will surely help us to kill the stress.
5. **Getting Close to Self:** Privacy is another way to reduce stress. Talking to self, walking alone are some ways to be closer to self.

B. Organization Related Strategies

1. **Institutional Programmes:** Organizations also have the responsibility to manage the employees' stress. Organizations provide a platform in terms of properly designed jobs, work schedules and adjusting work overload.
2. **Collateral Programmes:** In this programme organizations help the employees who are under stress. Organizations have adopted stress management programmes, employee fitness programme and health promotion programmes for this purpose.

Conclusion

Stress is inevitable in today's complex life. Right from the time of birth till death, an individual is regularly exposed to various stressful situations. The threats of political and economic imbalances and uncertainties, unemployment, poverty, urbanization and increased socio-economic complexities and innumerable other factors contribute to stress. In fact modern times have been called the "age of anxiety and stress" (Coleman, 1976). Today an employee is expected not only to meet deadlines but also to give quality output, which is essential for his survival and also to move ahead. If an organization is not having healthy employees it will lead to early retirement, productivity losses, high level of health care cost, higher rate of injury and accidents. All these things will negatively affect the organization. If an organization wants their sustainable development they need to take steps for reducing the level of stress of employees.

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