Job Stress and Coping Mechanism: Theoretical Dimensions

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I. INTRODUCTION

Stress is real or imagined threat to one’s psychological, physiological, and spiritual wellbeing. It touches all most all profession starting from an artist to top executives. The stress is becoming part and parcel of everyday life. Stress can strike anytime, in a fashion that may leave you unaware of its presence in your life.

Stress has become an inevitable part of human life in the recent times. It makes life more challenging and dangerous. However, when stress is beyond the coping of a person, it causes disturbance for his/her life or work sphere. Stress has its roots in the organizational and personal life.

Stress at work is relatively a new phenomenon of modern life style. The nature of work has gone through drastic changes over the last century and it is still changing at whirlwind speed. The work related stress in the life of organized workers affects the health of the organization.

Economic globalization has led to processes such as downsizing and restructuring with increasing pressure on people at work. The organizational stress leads to an increase in sickness, absenteeism, increased turnover rates, replacement cost and additional cost, litigation, potential public loss of goodwill; all these consequently lead to increased pressure on social services and welfare and reduced productivity.

Stress comes in the different stages of life as follows

- The loss of a toy or a reprimand from the parents might creates a stress shock in a child.
- An adolescent who fails an examination may feel as everything has been lost and life has no further meaning.
- In an adult, the loss of his or her companion, job or profession failure causes stress.

Some of the symptoms or signs by which a person recognize that he/she is under stress are

- Muscle tension in various part of the body
- Palpitation
- High blood pressure
- Indigestion
- Hyperacidity
- Acquiring self-destructive behavior like eating and drinking too much, smoking excessively, relying on tranquillizers
- Trembling
- Shaking
- Nervous blinking
- Dryness of throat and mouth
- Difficulty in swallowing
- Headache
- Loss of appetite
- Indigestion
- Forgetfulness
- Trouble sleeping
- Hostility
- Pounding heartbeat
- Loss of self confidence
- Anger
- Quarrelling

When stress crosses the threshold peculiar to an individual, it deteriorate his/her performance capacity. Frequently it jumps over that threshold may result in syndrome called chronic fatigue in which a person feels lethargic, disinterested and is not easily motivated to achieve anything. This may make the person mentally undecided, confused and accident prone as well. Sudden exposure to unberving stress may also result in a loss of memory.

In a study sponsored by world health organization and carried out by school of public health, the global burden of diseases and injury indicated that stress diseases and accidents are going to be the major killer in 2020. The ischemic heart diseases and neurological depression, both stress diseases, are going to rank first and second in 2020. Other stress diseases like, ulcers, hypertension and neuronal disorder including insomnia have assumed epidemic proportions in modern societies. This paper presents factors of stress in an organization as well as coping mechanism.

1. FACTORS OF STRESS
2. JOB INSECURITY
   Organized workplace is going through metamorphic changes under intense economic transformations and consequent pressures on employees to increase production. Usually, in most of the private concern, employees are working on temporary basis, apart from that, reorganization, takeover, mergers, downsizing, competition and other changes become major stressors for employees.
3. HIGH DEMAND FOR PERFORMANCE
   The organization may expect high level of performance from the employees but it may be beyond the capacity of employees. The expectation of unrealistic performance with same pay causes stress. This stress leads to physical and emotional drain to the employees.
4. EXCESSIVE TRAVEL
   The excessive travel with high fare and too much away from family also contributes to employee’s stress. The traffic is really bad and unpredictable in cities. Most of the call centers are located on the out side of cities and therefore, most of the employees spend a long time for traveling to and from their offices.
5. TECHNO STRESS
   The expansion of technology – computers, pagers, cell phones, fax machines and the internet, has resulted in heightened expectations for speed, productivity and efficiency. It gives increased pressure on the individual workers to constantly operate at peak performance levels. There is also constant pressure to keep up with technological breakthrough and improvement. Forcing employees to learn new technology causes stress.
6. WORK PLACE CULTURE
   Adjusting to the workplace culture, whether in a new company or in old company, can be intensely stressful and making oneself to adopt the various aspects of workplace culture such as communication patterns, hierarchy, dress code if any, work space and most importantly working and behavioral patterns of the boss as well as the co-workers, can be a tension of life. Maladjustment to workplace culture may lead to subtle conflicts with colleagues or even with superiors. It is no surprise that people feel more confused, anger, depressed and worried.
7. PERSONAL FAMILY PROBLEM
   Generally the employees going through personal or family problems tend to carry their worry and anxiety to the work place. When one is in a depressed mood, his/her unfocused attention and lack of motivation affects his/her ability to carry out job responsibility.
8. TERMINATION FEARS
The termination itself a stressful event. The vagueness and lack of structure of termination and pink slips can provide problems of ill-mental for some individuals and it is becoming poison in the mind of employees.

8. TERRIBLE BOSSES

Generally, where there are cruel bosses, there are an increased turnover, more stress, disability, less productivity and lower team morale. Many people leave their job and earn stress in life. Bosses are highly dominating person in the organization. All the activities are carried out according to instructions of bosses. If the bosses are bad, it leads to major stress in the organization. Being the victim of a brutal boss an employee become clinically depressed. It leads to sleeping disorders, ulcers, high blood pressure, loss of creativity and even posttraumatic stress disorder.

9. JOB DESIGNS

Improper job design may cause stress to employees. Employees cannot execute the work with poor job design that subjects the employees to have more stress. The frequent changes in the job design affect the performance, predictability and control.

10. LOUSY FEED BACK

Most of employees require feedback when this feedback is deficient, there can be a number of problems. Some times there may be no feedback. In some cases there may be negative feedback in the performance. Getting consistently skewed feedback can erode self confidence. Getting no feedback at all can be extremely stressful. The most encouraging jobs are those where people perform a task–whether a complicated management process or a simple physical task–and get immediate feedback. Proper feedback increases motivation and reduces stress. Poor feedback can have tremendous impact on the psychological health and productivity of employees.

12. UNPLEASANT CO–WORKERS

Employees catch colds and bad moods from infected co-workers. The unpleasant co-workers rank right up a major sources of occupational stress at work, especially, dealing with bosses, peers and subordinates can dramatically affect the way of feeling at the end of the day. Poor relationships lead to low trust, low supportiveness and low interest. The mistrust of fellow workers is connected with high role ambiguity, poor communications, psychological strain in the form of low job satisfaction and feeling of job related threat to one’s well being. There are three critical relationships at work, viz., and relationship with superior, relationships with subordinates and relationship with colleagues or co-workers.

(i) Superiors

The superior may take too much advantage and give pressure to employees. They may play favoritism, and misuse the power to torture employees.

(ii) Subordinates

The way in which manager supervises the work of other has always been considered a critical aspect of his or her work. For instance, the inability to delegate is a common criticism leveled against some managers. Nowadays managers take new challenges, learning to manage by participation. Today’s emphasis on participation can be a cause of resentment, anxiety and stress for the managers.

(iii) Relationships with colleagues

Stress among co-workers can arise from the competition and personality conflicts. Usually described as office politics, inadequate social or moral support can be critical to the health and wellbeing of an individual and to the atmosphere and success of an organization. Because most people spend so much time at work. The relationships among co-workers can provide valuable support or conversely huge sources of stress.

13. WORK OVERLOAD

There are two different types of work overload. Viz., (i) quantitative overload simply refers to having too much of work to do that must be done with limited time.(ii) qualitative overload refers to work that is too difficult for an individual to perform qualitatively. Too heavy work burden causes increased stress.
14. WORK UNDERLOAD
Job under load is referred with repetitive, routine, boring and under stimulating work which also causes ill health. Certain workers may face long period of time in which they may have little to do while facing the possibility that they may suddenly be required to spring into action in a crisis.

15. ROLE IN THE ORGANISATION
(i) The confused, unclear role of the employees leads conflict and stress. There are five critical factors - role ambiguity, role conflict, role conflict intersender, inter-role conflict
(ii) And feedback ambiguity etc., is also a major source of stress.
(iii) Role Ambiguity
Role ambiguity arises when individuals do not have a clear picture about their work objectives, their co-workers expectation of them, and the scope and responsibility of their job. Often this ambiguity results simply because of a supervisor’s failure to lay out the employee role. Even a wide range of activities can create role ambiguity. In a new company or a change in the structure of the existing organization can create a temporary state of role ambiguity. The role ambiguity may cause depressed mood, lower self-esteem, life dissatisfaction, low motivation to work.
(iv) Role Conflict
This dimension of stress is found to be experienced by the employees when there is a simultaneous occurrence of two or more sets of pressures such that compliance with one role assigned to him conflicts with the other role he plays.
(v) Role conflict intersender
This is experienced when there are conflicting pressures from more than one person like superiors, colleagues and subordinates.
(i) Inter-role conflict

No manager has only one role to play in his organization and social life. When the manager has to play more than one role simultaneously and when these roles have incompatible demands for time and attention, managers experience such type of stress. A consequent result of many roles to play demands the manager to shift from one role to the other which in turn may also create another type of stress “role shifting stress”.
(vi) Feed Back Ambiguity
The feedback ambiguity is experienced by manager when they feel that the superiors are neither responding nor reacting fully to their performance; such situations contribute to the perplexity since the manager does not know whether his performance is up to the satisfaction of his superior and whether he is in the expected direction by the superior and the employing organization.

16. PERSONAL INADEQUACY
A strong feeling by the employees that he lacks in certain skills and abilities may often make him experience this kind of stress. This feeling grows in magnitude especially in the technologically ever-expanding organization environment.

17. RESOURCES INADEQUACY
When the manager feels that he is not given adequate resources by his employing organization, he tends to experience this type of stress and might result in the development of feelings of neglect and deprivation of information.

18. ROLE SHRINKAGE
The growth of any organization is not always because of new job identified but also because to provide special attention to certain already existing jobs. As a result of this, in any growing organization it is natural for certain activities which are earlier being performed by one person may be allocated to another person. The executives view this reallocation of duties as a whisking away act by the organization. Thus, reducing the importance of his role, the executives tend to experience this type of stress. Feelings of diminished responsibility, transfer of certain duties and facilities are associated with this kind of stress.
19. **ROLE STAGNATION**

Managerial motivation is largely dependent upon the extent to which their higher order needs are satisfied. When a manager feels that whatever may be his level of performance accomplishment, but there is no opportunities for growth and development, he experiences this kind of stress.

20. **ROLE ISOLATION**

The extent to which a executive sees his role to be central and vital to the organization has positive bearing on his effective functioning. Managers experience this type of stress when they feel that their role is not connected with the main business of the organization. No way contributing to the effectiveness of the organization and to the peripheral to the organizational activities. This is evidenced well when the manager has no opportunity to interact with other managers who occupy significant roles in the organization.

21. **UNDER UTILIZATION OF SKILL**

When the skills remain underutilized, leads the person demotivated due to scarcity of opportunities for growth which is resulting in frequent absenteeism, aloofness, role ambiguity, instability and dissatisfaction.

22. **ORGANIZATIONAL POLITICS**

Organizational politics within departments if improperly handled results into negative feelings, fault finding and high role ambiguity which spoil the overall culture and climate of the organization and creates gossips and politics.

23. **OVER RESPONSIBILITY**

Over responsibility is another organizational role stress agent. In an organization, there are basically two type of responsibility: responsibility for people and responsibility for things such as budgets, equipment and buildings. Responsibility for people is found to be particularly stressful. Being responsible for people usually requires spending more time to interacting with others, attending meetings and attempting to meet deadlines.

24. **EVALUATION OF JOB PERFORMANCE**

The process of being evaluated and appraised can be a stressful experience for all of the personnel. It is considered that performance appraisals can be anxiety provoking for both the individual being examined and the person doing the judging performance. The supervisor making performance judgment faces the threat of union grievance procedures in some case, as well as interpersonal strains and the responsibility of making decision affecting another person’s livelihood. The way in which an evaluation is carried out can affect the degree of anxiety experience.

25. **ORGANIZATION STRUCTURE AND CLIMATE**

Just being part of an organization can create threats to individual’s sense of freedom and autonomy. Organization workers sometimes may complain that they may not have a sense of belonging, adequate opportunities to participate. It makes the employees feel that their behaviour is unduly restricted and is not included in office communications and consultation. The non-participation at work was a significant predictor of strain and job related stress and it causes general poor health, escapism, drinking, depression, low self-esteem, absenteeism and plans to leave work; whereas participation in the decision – making process on the part of the individual may help increase his or her feeling of investment in the company’s success and create a sense of belonging and improve communication channels within the organization.

26. **SHIFT WORK**

Many workers today have jobs requiring them to work in shifts, some of which involves working staggered hours. Shift based workers subjects to more stress. Shift based worker may have to work in night. It may cause stress to the employees.

27. **LONG WORKING HOURS**

The long working hours causes more stress to the employees. In many industries the employees are forced to work more than standard hours. The employees becomes tired and less effective.

28. **RISK AND DANGER**

A job which involves risk and danger can result in higher stress levels – when someone is constantly aware of potential danger, he or she is prepared to react immediately. The individual is in
constant state of arousal, as described in the “fight or flight” syndrome. It results in adrenalin rush, respiration changes and muscle tension are all seen as potentially threatening to long-time health.

30. INSUFFICIENT SUPPORT FROM TOP MANAGEMENT

The executives need top management support to take immediate decisions in the critical situation and to implement the decision efficiently and effectively. The top management support is also needed to extract work from the subordinates. If the top management support is not given properly at proper time the executives subject to stress. This stress affects the smooth working of employees as well as affects their peaceful mind.

III. COPING WITH STRESS

It is useful to know about unhealthy stress management and healthy stress management to avoid the further stress.

How not to manage stress?

These coping strategies may temporarily reduce the stress but this may prove more dangerous to health in long run as follows

- Smoking
- Drinking alcohol
- Over eating
- Under eating
- Watching T.V for hours together
- Avoiding friends, family
- Using drugs
- Sleeping too much
- Anger on others

How to cope with stress?

- Meditation
- Yoga
- Walking
- Pending time with nature
- Playing games
- Gardening
- Listening to music
- Reading book
- Concentrating on work
- Serving society
- Helping others

Coping with organizational stress

The organization can take the following steps to reduce the organizational stress. The organization can

- Create a supportive organization climate
- Enrich the design of task
- Reduce conflict and make clarity organizational goal
- Plan and develop career paths and provide counseling
- Enhance self esteem
- Delegate and prioritize the efficient time management
- Redefine the role
- Mobilize the needed resource
- Provide the training to its employees
- Support the participative management
IV. CONCLUSION

This paper has brought out factors of stress in an organization. Job insecurity in view of competitive situation is the main culprit. Business organization to gain competitive advantage are making unrealistic performance expectations from the employees. Technology is changing so fast and to keep abreast of all the changes and master the technology, employees find difficult to cope up with job pressure. Globalization has made most of the organizations to compete in international market, organizations are building up culture which is highly competitive. The modern technology has disrupted the entire family system and nucleus families are becoming order of the day. This disruption of family is a factor of stress. Pink slips are scary. They put fear real or imaginary – in the minds of the employees.

Managers and superiors have become highly demanding from their subordinates. This puts pressure on the employees. Modern day organization has become client centre and clients of the organizations do not provide feedback to the employees and in this client centered organization, job design is poor leading to role conflict, role duplication, role stress, role stagnations, role shrinkage, role isolation, acquired skills unmatched to job. Performance evaluation has become totally subjective. The present day organization is the breeding ground for the above trends which have lead to job stress among employees.

A third of the total visits to a doctor is caused by stress. It is always advisable to follow healthy stress management and keep the life stress free and diseases free otherwise we will become victims of the stress.

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