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PRAGMATIC STUDY ON COPING STRESS AT WORKPLACE

ABSTRACT

An endeavor has been made through this paper to spotlight empirical impact of stress on workforce along with focusing on strategies to dispel its influence. Stress, by definition, is the interaction between an individual and the demands and burdens presented by the external environment. Stress occurs due to a demand that exceeds the individual's coping ability, disrupting their psychological equilibrium. Hence, in the workplace environment stress arises when the employee perceives a situation to be too strenuous to handle, and is threatening to their well being. There are many external stressors that contribute to an employee's ability to adapt to the demands of the environment. It is a well known fact that Work Stress is a byproduct of all the human activity which surely affects an individual's health and performance over a period of time. Human resource is the most vital component of any commercial, non-commercial, Government or Private organization functioning in any sector all over the globe. It has been seen that work stress is a highly cognitive phenomena and requires proper techniques to manage. It is a challenging task for the managers today to find the various causes of stress and eliminate them so as to reduce the negative impact on the employees mind. However, it is a stressful task to identify the exact stressors in a given work set up because judging each employee's psychological response to a given aspect of work is extremely difficult.

OUTLINE

There is no denying the fact that current workforce in organization's environment is equipped with immense stress & the alarming spike in the incidence of reported stress among employees in recent years and its impact on every aspect of employee and organization has made the management of stress an urgent business strategy for every organization. Whatever the root causes, stressed workers tend to be fatigued, prone to mistakes and injuries, and are more likely to be absent. A profound analysis in this field must be taken by both employees and organizations. Being aware of stress, its impact and stress relievers can put the employee in a situation that would be surely beneficial to him.

Is it a healthy job one are doing?

A healthy work environment provides people with opportunities to meet work and personal goals. Undoubtedly earning a living is necessary, but people also need to balance work life with family life, social opportunities outside work and physical well-being. A healthy job is likely to be one where the pressures on employees are appropriate in relation to their abilities and resources, to the amount of control they have over their work, and to the support they receive from people who matter to them. As health is not merely the absence of disease or infirmity but a positive state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, a healthy working environment is one in which there is

not only an absence of harmful conditions but an abundance of health-promoting ones.

These may include continuous assessment of risks to health, the provision of appropriate information and training on health issues and the availability of health promoting organizational support practices and structures. A healthy work environment is one in which staff have made health and health promotion a priority and part of their working lives.

About stress...

A stress is a state of mental or emotional strain or tension resulting from adverse or demanding circumstances. We generally use the word "stress" when we feel that everything seems to have become too much - we are overloaded and wonder whether we really can cope with the pressures placed upon us. Anything that poses a challenge or a threat to our well-being is a stress. Some stresses get you going and they are good for you - without any stress at all many say our lives would be boring and would probably feel pointless. However, when the stresses undermine both our mental and physical health they are bad. In this text we shall be focusing on stress that is bad for you.

WHAT IS WORK-RELATED STRESS?

Work-related stress is the response people may have when presented with work demands and pressures that are not matched to their knowledge and abilities and which challenge their ability to cope. Stress occurs in a wide range of work circumstances but is often made worse when employees feel they have little support from supervisors and colleagues, as well as little control over work processes. There is often confusion between pressure or challenge and stress and sometimes it is used to excuse bad management

practice. Pressure at the workplace is unavoidable due to the demands of the contemporary work environment. Pressure perceived as acceptable by an individual, may even keep workers alert, motivated, able to work and learn, depending on the available resources and personal characteristics. However, when that pressure becomes excessive or otherwise unmanageable it leads to stress. Stress can damage an employees' health and the business performance.

Work-related stress can be caused by poor work organization (the way we design jobs and work systems, and the way we manage them), by poor work design (for example, lack of control over work processes), poor management, unsatisfactory working conditions, and lack of support from colleagues and supervisors. Research findings show that the most stressful type of work is that which values excessive demands and pressures that are not matched to workers' knowledge and abilities, where there is little opportunity to exercise any choice or control, and where there is little support from others. Employees are less likely to experience work-related stress when - demands and pressures of work are matched to their knowledge and abilities - control can be exercised over their work and the way they do it - support is received from supervisors and colleagues - participation in decisions that concern their jobs is provided.

WHAT ARE STRESS-RELATED HAZARDS AT WORK?

Stress related hazards at work can be divided into work content and work context.

Work contents includes - job content (monotony, under-stimulation, meaningless of tasks, lack of variety, etc) - work load and work pace (too much or too little to do, work under time pressure, etc.) - working hours (strict or inflexible, long and unsocial,

unpredictable, badly designed shift systems)- Participation and control (lack of participation in decision-making, lack of control over work processes, pace, hours, methods, and the work environment).

Work context includes - career development, status and pay (job insecurity, lack of promotion opportunities, under-or-over-promotion, work of 'low social value', piece rate payment schemes, unclear or unfair performance evaluation systems, being over- or under-skilled for a job) - role in the organization (unclear role, conflicting roles) - interpersonal relationships (inadequate, inconsiderate or unsupportive supervision, poor relationships with colleagues, bullying/harassment and violence, isolated or solitary work, etc) -organizational culture (poor communication, poor leadership, lack of behavioral rule, lack of clarity about organizational objectives, structures and strategies) - work-life balance (conflicting demands of work and home, lack of support for domestic problems at work, lack of support for work problems at home, lack of organizational rules and policies to support work-life balance).

Work-related stress: scientific evidence-base of risk factors, prevention and cost Work-related stress is still an evasive concept to many, although the topic is covered in hundreds of papers published every year. The paper will focus on the main evidence of risk factors extracted from existing research, as concerns in particular work-related stress interventions and related costs. The presentation will provide an overview of the vast amount of knowledge we already have.

RECOGNITION AND RESPECT AT WORK: A FUNDAMENTAL HUMAN NEED

Being respected and appreciated by significant others is one of the most fundamental human needs. Consequently, people go to great pain to

gain acceptance and approval. Recent research in the domain of occupational health psychology shows that many stressful experiences are linked to being offended – for instance, by being offended or ridiculed, by social exclusion, by social conflict, by illegitimate tasks. Such experiences of being treated in an unfair manner constitute an “Offence to Self”, and this may have quite far reaching consequences in terms of health and well-being. Conversely, being appreciated is one of the most important factors that increases motivation and satisfaction as well as health and well-being. The presentation below covers examples from recent research and draws conclusions concerning the many ways in which appreciation and respect (or lack thereof) can be communicated and how this knowledge can be useful for prevention in the field of health and well-being.

COPING WITH WORK STRESS IN TODAY'S UNCERTAIN CLIMATE

For workers everywhere, the troubled economy may feel like an emotional roller coaster. “Layoffs” and “budget cuts” have become bywords in the workplace, and the result is increased fear, uncertainty, and higher levels of stress. Since job and workplace stress increase in times of economic crisis, it's important to learn new and better ways of coping with the pressure.

Emotions are contagious, and stress has an impact on the quality of one's interactions with others. The better you are at managing your own stress, the more you'll positively affect those around you, and the less other people's stress will negatively affect you.

YOU CAN LEARN HOW TO MANAGE JOB STRESS:

There are a variety of steps one 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 one's physical and emotional well-being.
- Avoiding pitfalls by identifying knee jerk habits and negative attitudes that add to the stress one experiences at work.
- Learning better communication skills to ease and improve relationships with management and coworkers.

SOME MORE STRATEGIES TO COPE UP WITH STRESS AT WORKPLACE

1. IDENTIFYING SYMPTOMS OF EXCESSIVE STRESS AT WORKPLACE:

When you feel overwhelmed at work, you lose confidence and may become irritable or withdrawn. This can make you less productive and less effective in your job, and make the work seem less rewarding. If you ignore the warning signs of work stress, they can lead to bigger problems. Beyond interfering with job performance and satisfaction, chronic or intense stress can also lead to physical and emotional health problems.

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF EXCESSIVE JOB/STRESS AT WORKPLACE:

- Feeling anxious, irritable, or depressed
- Apathy, loss of interest in work
- Problems sleeping

- Fatigue
- Trouble concentrating
- Muscle tension or headaches
- Stomach problems
- Social withdrawal
- Loss of sex drive
- Using alcohol or drugs to cope

Common causes of excessive workplace stress

- Fear of being laid off
- More overtime due to staff cutbacks
- Pressure to perform to meet rising expectations but with no increase in job satisfaction
- Pressure to work at optimum levels-all the time!.

2. REDUCE JOB STRESS BY LIFESTYLE OVERHAUL:

When stress at work interferes with your ability to perform in your job, manage your personal life, it's time to take action. Start by paying attention to your physical and emotional health. When your own needs are taken care of, you're stronger and more resilient to stress. The better you feel, the better equipped you'll be to manage work stress without becoming overwhelmed.

Taking care of yourself doesn't require a total lifestyle overhaul. Adopt a healthy lifestyle that will foster a new energy & enthusiasm in your life, will bring positive attitude. Even small things can lift your mood, increase your energy, and make you feel like you're back in the driver's seat. Take things one step at a time, and as you make more positive lifestyle choices, you'll soon notice a reduction in your stress levels, both at home and at work.

Get moving by Yoga & Aerobic exercise

Regular exercise is a powerful stress reliever—even though it may be the last thing you feel like doing. Yoga & Aerobic exercise—activity that raises your heart rate and makes you sweat—is a hugely effective way to lift your mood, increase energy, sharpen focus, and relax both the mind and body. For maximum stress relief, try to get at least 30 minutes of heart-pounding activity on most days. If it's easier to fit into your schedule, break up the activity into two or three shorter segments.

Healthy food choices that keep you going

Low blood sugar can make you feel anxious and irritable, while eating too much can make you lethargic. Healthy eating can help you get through stressful work days. By eating small but frequent meals, you can help your body maintain an even level of blood sugar, keep your energy up, stay focused, and avoid mood swings.

Get sufficient sleep

Not only can stress and worry cause insomnia, but a lack of sleep can leave you vulnerable to even more stress. When you're well-rested, it's much easier to keep your emotional balance, a key factor in coping with job and workplace stress. Try to improve the quality of your sleep by keeping a sleep schedule and aiming for 8 hours a night.

Get support

Close relationships are vital to helping you through times of stress so reach out to family and friends. Simply sharing your feelings face to face with another person can help relieve some of the stress. The other person doesn't have to ret to "fix" your problems; he or she just has to be a good listener. Accepting support

is not a sign of weakness and it won't mean you're a burden to others. In fact, most friends will be flattered that you trust them enough to confide in them, and it will only strengthen your bond.

3. REDUCE JOB STRESS BY PRIORITIZING AND ORGANIZING:

When job and workplace stress threatens to overwhelm you, there are simple steps you can take to regain control over yourself and the situation. Your newfound ability to maintain a sense of self-control in stressful situations will often be well-received by coworkers, managers, and subordinates alike, which can lead to better relationships at work. Here are some suggestions for reducing job stress by prioritizing and organizing your responsibilities.

Time management tips for reducing job stress:-

- Create a balanced schedule. Analyze your schedule, responsibilities, and daily tasks. All work and no play is a recipe for burnout. Try to find a balance between work and family life, social activities and solitary pursuits, daily responsibilities and downtime.
- Don't over-commit yourself. Avoid scheduling things back-to-back or trying to fit too much into one day. All too often, we underestimate how long things will take. If you've got too much on your plate, distinguish between the "shoulds" and the "musts." Drop tasks that aren't truly necessary to the bottom of the list or eliminate them entirely.
- Try to leave earlier in the morning. Even 10-15 minutes can make the difference between frantically rushing to your desk and having time to ease into your day. Don't add to your stress levels by running late.

- Plan regular breaks. Make sure to take short breaks throughout the day to take a walk or sit back and clear your mind. Also try to get away from your desk or work station for lunch. Stepping away from work to briefly relax and recharge will help you be more, not less, productive.

Task management tips for reducing job stress:

- Prioritize tasks. Make a list of tasks you have to do, and tackle them in order of importance. Do the high-priority items first. If you have something particularly unpleasant to do, get it over with early. The rest of your day will be more pleasant as a result.
- Break projects into small steps. If a large project seems overwhelming, make a step-by-step plan. Focus on one manageable step at a time, rather than taking on everything at once.
- Delegate responsibility. You don't have to do it all yourself. If other people can take care of the task, why not let them? Let go of the desire to control or oversee every little step. You'll be letting go of unnecessary stress in the process.
- Be willing to compromise. When you ask someone to contribute differently to a task, revise a deadline, or change their behavior at work, be willing to do the same. Sometimes, if you can both bend a little, you'll be able to find a happy middle ground that reduces the stress levels for everyone.

4. REDUCE JOB STRESS BY IMPROVING EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE:

Even if you're in a job where the environment has grown increasingly stressful, you can retain a large measure of

self-control and self-confidence by understanding and practicing emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence is the ability to manage and use your emotions in positive and constructive ways. When it comes to satisfaction and success at work, emotional intelligence matters just as much as intellectual ability. Emotional intelligence is about communicating with others in ways that draw people to you, overcome differences, repair wounded feelings, and defuse tension and stress.

Emotional intelligence in the workplace:

Emotional intelligence in the workplace has four major components:

- Self-awareness - The ability to recognize your emotions and their impact while using gut feelings to guide your decisions.
- Self-management - The ability to control your emotions and behavior and adapt to changing circumstances.
- Social awareness - The ability to sense, understand, and react to other's emotions and feel comfortable socially.
- Relationship management - The ability to inspire, influence, and connect to others and manage conflict.

The five key skills of emotional intelligence

There are five key skills that you need to master in order to raise your emotional intelligence and manage stress at work.

- Realize when you're stressed, recognize your particular stress response, and become familiar with sensual cues that can rapidly calm and energize you. The best way to reduce stress quickly is through the

senses: through sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch. But each person responds differently to sensory input, so you need to find things that are soothing to you.

- Stay connected to your internal emotional experience so you can appropriately manage your own emotions. Your moment-to-moment emotions influence your thoughts and actions, so pay attention to your feelings and factor them into your decision making at work. If you ignore your emotions you won't be able to fully understand your own motivations and needs, or to communicate effectively with others.
- Recognize and effectively use nonverbal cues and body language. In many cases, what we say is less important than how we say it or the other nonverbal signals we send out, such as eye contact, facial expression, tone of voice, posture, gesture and touch. Your nonverbal messages can either produce a sense of interest, trust, and desire for connection—or they can generate confusion, distrust, and stress. You also need to be able to accurately read and respond to the nonverbal cues that other people send you at work.
- Develop the capacity to meet challenges with humor. There is no better stress buster than a hearty laugh and nothing reduces stress quicker in the workplace than mutually shared humor. But, if the laugh is at someone else's expense, you may end up with more rather than less stress.
- Resolve conflict positively. Resolving conflict in healthy, constructive ways can strengthen trust between people and relieve workplace stress and tension. When handling emotionally-charged situations, stay focused in the present by disregarding old hurts and resentments, connect with your emotions, and hear both the words and the nonverbal cues being used. If a conflict can't be resolved, choose to end the argument, even if you still disagree.

5. **REDUCE JOB STRESS BY BREAKING BAD HABITS:**

Many of us make job stress worse with negative thoughts and behavior. If you can turn around these self-defeating habits, you'll find employer-imposed stress easier to handle.

- Resist perfectionism. No project, situation, or decision is ever perfect, so trying to attain perfection on everything will simply add unnecessary stress to your day. When you set unrealistic goals for yourself or try to do too much, you're setting yourself up to fall short. Aim to do your best, no one can ask for more than that.
- Clean up your act. If you're always running late, set your clocks and watches fast and give yourself extra time. If your desk is a mess, file and throw away the clutter; just knowing where everything is saves time and cuts stress. Make to-do lists and cross off items as you accomplish them. Plan your day and stick to the schedule—you'll feel less overwhelmed.

Flip your negative thinking. If you see the downside of every situation and interaction, you'll find yourself drained of energy and motivation. Try to think positively about your work, avoid negative-thinking co-workers, and pat yourself on the back about small accomplishments, even if no one else does.

Don't try to control the uncontrollable. Many things at work 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.

Four Ways to Dispel Stress:

- Take time away. When stress is mounting at work, try to take a quick break and move away from the stressful situation. Take a stroll outside the workplace if possible, or spend a few minutes meditating in the break room. Physical movement or finding a quiet place to regain your balance can quickly reduce stress.
- Talk it over with someone. In some situations, simply sharing your thoughts and feelings with someone you trust can help reduce stress. Talking over a problem with someone who is both supportive and empathetic can be a great way to let off steam and relieve stress.
- Connect with others at work. Developing friendships with some of your co-workers can help buffer you from the negative effects of stress. Remember to listen to them and offer support when they are in need as well.
- Look for humor in the situation. When used appropriately, humor is a great way to relieve stress in the workplace. When you or those around you start taking things too seriously, find a way to lighten the mood by sharing a joke or funny story.

6. LEARN HOW MANAGERS OR EMPLOYERS CAN REDUCE JOB STRESS:

It's in a manager's best interest to keep stress levels in the workplace to a minimum. Managers can act as positive role models, especially in times of high stress, by following the tips outlined in this article. If a respected manager can remain calm in stressful work situations, it is much easier for his or her employees to also remain calm.

Additionally, there are a number of organizational

changes that managers and employers can make to reduce workplace stress. These include:

Improve communication :

- Share information with employees to reduce uncertainty about their jobs and futures.
- Clearly define employees' roles and responsibilities.
- Make communication friendly and efficient, not mean-spirited or petty.

Consult your employees :

- Give workers opportunities to participate in decisions that affect their jobs.
- Consult employees about scheduling and work rules.
- Be sure the workload is suitable to employees' abilities and resources; avoid unrealistic deadlines.
- Show that individual workers are valued.
- Offer rewards and incentives.
- Praise good work performance, both verbally and officially, through schemes such as Employee of the Month.
- Provide opportunities for career development.
- Promote an "entrepreneurial" work climate that gives employees more control over their work.

CULTIVATE A FRIENDLY SOCIAL CLIMATE

- Provide opportunities for social interaction among employees.

- Establish a zero-tolerance policy for harassment.
- Make management actions consistent with organizational values.

7. GET SOME TIME FOR FUN ALSO

Take-charge approach and a positive attitude, you can reduce stress in your life by yourself you care. If you regularly make time for fun and relax, you have a better life rather than raise the handle when they inevitably will. Healthy rest in order to:

- Engage in playing your favorite game
- Listen to music.
- See comedy movies.
- A hot cup of coffee or tea..
- Take a morning/evening walk.
- Spend time in nature.
- Be in touch with close friend.
- Light scented candles.

Set aside relaxation time. And the rest of your daily schedule includes relief. Do not allow other obligations to encroach on it. This may take a break from all responsibilities and recharge your battery time.

CONCLUSION

This is obvious that stress negatively impacts workers & one cannot ignore stress as being just part of the job, or the price one pay for being successful in his career. Stress has been shown to be either directly or indirectly responsible for stress related illnesses. While the mental and physical health of employees are suffering due to unhealthy work

environments, stress is still seen as a sign of weakness in many organizations, and is kept quiet so as to avoid negative repercussions. Stress tends to be either ignored or dismissed by the very people who are best placed to do something about it, managing and senior directors, personnel and training managers, and departmental managers and supervisors. The opportunity exists for employers and employees to get together and make way for changes that will reduce stress. Change must come from the top, and it is therefore imperative for managers to recognize that they have a legal and moral responsibility to protect the physical and mental wellbeing of their workers. Workplace stress is costly and becoming more so. It has many causes, and these involve complex combinations of physical, social and psychological elements hence a proper attention must be paid by management as well as by employee also.

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