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WORKPLACE STRESS: WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?

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Introduction

Stress is a widespread phenomenon during all humans lifespan. As a normal person, we may feel stress out of personal or family problems, and as an employee, one person feels stress due to organizational demands.

Robbins and Judge (2009) defined stress as a forceful condition in which a person is challenged with a chance, a demand, or resource related to what the person wishes for and the result seems to be very important but unpredictable. The workplace is one of the main sources of stress in our lives (Carr, Kelley, Keaton, and Albrecht, 2011). According to authors, workplace stress is defined as “the perceived difference between professional demands and a person’s ability to carry out those demands.” Stress typically occurs when a person is faced with a risk that the person does not feel to have the ability to cope with. When a person is having a perception that his ability is not as high as expected by managers to perform a particular job demand, it is called as “job stress”. This type of stress can be measured by looking at the difference between expected and actual ability. If there is so much difference, the tendency to have a high workplace stress is there (Leung, Chan, and Dongyu, 2011).

Stress comes in different forms. Physiological stress occurs when the body is reacting to stressful environments. “It appears in the form of headache, back pain, and loss of appetite.” People in stressful environments generally face unattainable job demands (Gmelch, 1982). Some might be experiencing various reactions from the body such as headache, back pain, or feeling thirsty.

Burnout is another type of stress which is “a state of emotional and mental exhaustion caused by long-term chronic, emotional, and interpersonal stress while carrying out a role.” It can be regarded as a psychological withdrawal from work in response to excessive stress. When employees are facing so much stress, their emotion is disturbed, and interpersonal relationship becomes chronic. People in a state of high stress may also have “various subjective feelings, such

as dissatisfaction, unhappiness, sadness, and depression.” (Leung *et al.*, 2011).

Symptoms Of Workplace Stress

Workplace stress can cause an intense impact on employees. It can make people less happy with their jobs and cause depression outside of work. It can also negatively affect motivation and productivity that can ultimately make employees quit jobs. Understanding the effects of organizational stress on employees is important because at the end of the day, work stress gives impacts not only on the employees individually, but also the bottom lines.

Statistics show that stress is a growing problem in many organizations and is contributing to negative impacts on employees. The most visible impact on employees is related to their performance. Stressful employees are always absent from work (Carr *et al.*, 2011). According to the authors, stress often leads to high absenteeism, increased turnover rates, low productivity and low levels of quality. Based on a survey conducted in Spain, “there were greater levels of absenteeism caused by stress in previous years.” Karam (2011) supported that stress has a negative relationship with performance where it often leads to negative employees’ behaviors such as turnover, absenteeism, or accidents. Byron and Peterson (2002) who examined the impact of stress on employees’ behavior came out with a result that suggests, stress was positively related to absenteeism.

Lower performance and productivity are the common effects of stress on employees. When people experience stress at work, they may feel agitated and lose temper. This situation will make them not cooperating with other workers and only do extra work when needed. Then, they may feel like they have already contributed to the company. This can result in lowered performance or productivity, or both. Thus, employees will not focus on their job achievement as they are stressed out (Gomez, 2011). When a person feels overwhelmed at work, they lose confidence and may become ill-tempered. This can make the employees less productive and less effective in their job, and make the work seem less rewarding (Segal, Smith, Robinson, and Segal, 2011). Foy, Dwyer, Nafarrete, Saleh Hammoud and Rockett (2019) also found that there is a negative correlation between job performance and workplace stress.

Dewe and O’Driscoll (2002) added that due to the stress feeling, life at home is also affected. As employees are not able to “switch off” at home; that is bringing the tense and stress feeling home, it makes the relationship with spouse or children becomes bad as they are pursuing a career at the expense of home life. This is the point where stress at work is viewed as harming people’s lives. Supported by Gomez (2011), when employees are stress at work, they will bring it home. Consequently, this will make them feel depress during non-working hours, such as trouble sleeping, social withdrawal and loss of interest in family life. Due to this, some individuals may even turn to alcohol and drugs to help cope with their work-related stress. According to Robbins and Judge (2009), stress is not only affecting performance of employees at work, but it will also

create changes in eating habits, increase smoking or consumption of alcohol, rapid speech, fidgeting and sleep disorders. In the end, this could result in clinical depression requiring therapy and medication. Segal *et al.* (2011) added that chronic or intense stress can also lead to physical and emotional health problems such as feeling anxious, irritable, or depressed, boredom, loss of interest in work, sleep disorder, tiredness, trouble concentrating and many more.

Next is job hopping (Gomez, 2011). This happens when employees who are under severe work stress may finally decide that their jobs are simply not worth the stress. Such employees may look for other job opportunities, even if the new jobs pay less or are not as well suited for their particular skills and expertise. Others may simply quit their jobs without having other employment options. Robbins and Judge (2009) agreed that stress does lead to lower performance and productivity and high turnover which is called as behavioural symptoms of stress. Lastly, although too much stress has a negative impact on human behavior, it was also found that insufficient stress leads to boredom, a lack of concentration and a lack of initiative or motivation to make the best possible effort (Leung *et al.*, 2011).

Conclusion

It is true that stress is needed in the organization to push employees to perform their job. Without stress or low level of stress in the workplace will only make employees feel bored and cannot contribute to their fullest. However, it is the job of the manager to monitor the tasks given to employees as a means to prevent from excessive stress. Managers are required to control complicated projects involving demanding tasks.

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