

ORGANIZATIONAL JOB RELATED STRESS AND ITS CONSEQUENCES ON EMPLOYEES

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ABSTRACT

Workplace condition is an important element to ensure job satisfaction and maintain employee work health and productivity. But in recent years reports of job distress have been seen to be on the rise. Stress related disorders and consequences has been reported to affect job performance, increase turnover rate and induce illnesses among employees in working organizations. This paper describes some of the common work stressors and their consequences in the working environment which needs to be addressed by any organization to avoid negative incidence and low performance from its employees.

INTRODUCTION

Stress is a stimulus interaction, a response interaction or a stimulus-response of an individual and the environment. Gibson et. al. (1988), defined stress as 'an adaptive response, mediated by individual differences and/or psychological processes, that is, a consequence of any external environmental action, situation or event that places excessive psychological and/or physical demands on a person'. Although this definition portrays stress in a more negative light than do most definitions, certainly not all stress are negative. The positive side of stress may be stimulating in a positive sense.

There are two aspects of stress, that is the environmental factors that have the potential to create stress and the stress reactions, which are the psychological reactions of a person to those environmental factors. However, there is another aspect of stress, that is, ways of managing it. One of the models that can be used to illustrate the process of stress is the one proposed by Randolph and Blackburn (1989), as shown in Figure 1.

Stress have been reported to cause a lot of problems in the life and job satisfaction of individuals especially those who are working in organizations all around the world. A majority of the occurrence of stress seems to be job-related (Motawildo et.al. 1986).

SOURCES OF STRESS (STRESSORS)

The model in Figure 1, shows that stress can be caused by workplace stressors or outside work stressors. Among the workplace stressors are; demands of job, role dynamics, role

ambiguity and interpersonal dynamics. Some of the outside work stressors are economics, personal life and family affairs

Job Demands

Occupations that require people to work under great time pressure or with little control over their jobs, under dangerous physical conditions or major responsibilities for either people or money, are high-stress occupations (Randolph, 1985). This has been proven by various research findings, one of those is Karasek in Quick et.al. (1983). Karasek indicated that increased job demands coupled with constricted decision latitude causes stress on workers. This phenomena negatively affects individual's performance. Findings by Maslach (in Seiler and Pearson, 1983), concluded that people in the service professions such as physicians, social workers, nurses and poverty lawyers experience very high level of stress. The end result is poor delivery of services as well as low morale, absenteeism and turnover

Another findings as quoted by Randolph (1989), based on a national survey of over one hundred and thirty occupations, confirmed the positive relationship between job demands and stress. That is, work which require the greatest responsibility for the well being of others are high stress occupations.

Job demands also can cause interrole conflict which latter result in stress. A study cited by Cook and Rousseau (1984), showed that conflict can result from pressures to expand one's work activities beyond the normal working day. Such pressures are felt by many workers. And, as cited by Cook and Rousseau (1984), a Quality Employment Survey conducted in 1977 revealed a number of job demands experienced by workers such as excessive working hours and overtime.

The influence of job demand and job overload was also found to be associated to the individual characteristics with respect to their perception on stress. Froggatt and Cotton (1983), quoted several research findings about Type A and Type B individuals related to the above issues. Individuals classified as Type A are characterised by extreme competitiveness, striving for achievement, aggressiveness, impatience, restlessness, and feelings of being under pressure of time and under the challenge of responsibilities (Gibson et.al. 1988). Type B individuals are those possessing the opposite characteristics, that is, more easy going and less competitive in relation to day-to-day events (Schermerhorn et. al. 1985).

Most studies examining the type A versus Type B personality, have found that Type A individuals experience more stress than Type B individuals under conditions of role overload. However, studies conducted by Froggatt and Cotton (1983) on similar issue revealed the opposite. That is, even though job overload results in experienced stress among individuals, but, Type A did not perceive situations of job overload as more stressful than did Type B. The only difference is that, Type A individuals tend to seek out more stressful situations than Type B. This may be due to the fact that Type A individuals

generally concentrate in objectively more demanding and therefore more stressful situations.

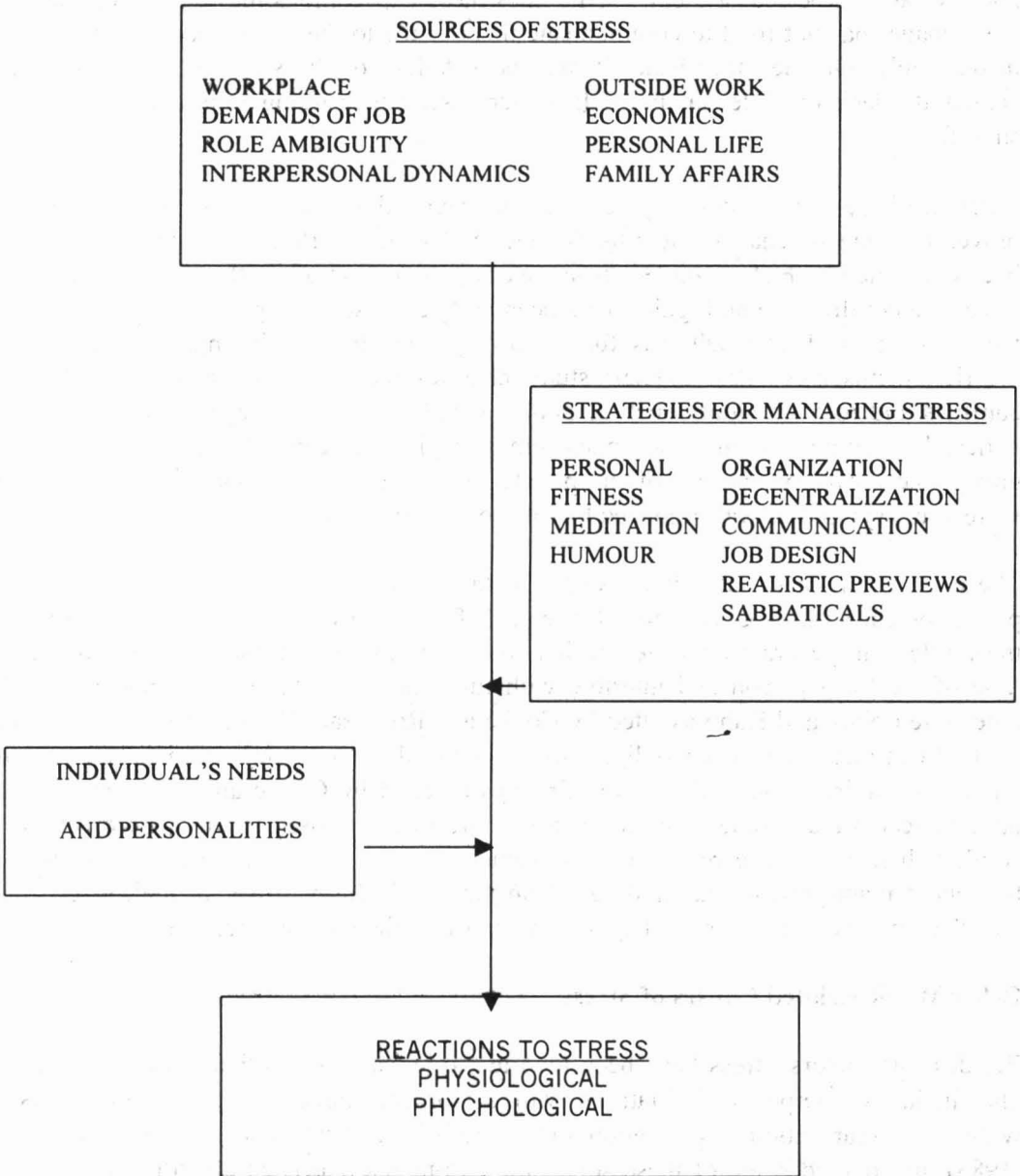


Figure 1: A Model of Stress (Randolph dan Blackburn, 1989)

Role Ambiguity and Role Conflict.

Another cause of stress is the degree of role ambiguity and role conflict. Role ambiguity occurs when the person in the role is uncertain about the role expectations of one or more members of the role set (Schermerhorn et.al.,1985). To do their job well, people need to know what is expected of them. Sometimes these expectations may be unclear because the manager has not tried to communicate them to the subordinate or has done so inadequately. On the other hand, it may be a failure of the subordinate to listen that creates the lack of understanding. In either case, the resulting role ambiguity can be stressful.

Much work have been done by researchers around the world that have indicated and proven this phenomena. As cited by Gardner and Warrick (1983), one such research has been conducted by Fisher and Getelson covering the period of 1970 to mid-1981. Forty-three role conflict-role ambiguity have been mete-analysed and proven to be the causal factor of stress. This result was further strengthened by the findings of Cardner and Warrick themselves (1983). Their study also revealed several elements of the role conflicts and role ambiguity such as poorly scheduled hours of work, monotonous job duties, low autonomy and poor management styles. Researchers also found that the greater the power or authority of the people sending the conflicting role messages, the more stress symptoms was produced by role conflict (Gibson et.al. 1988).

The expectations associated with work and family roles can also lead to physical and psychological strain (Cooke and Rouseau, 1984). Expectations surrounding either of these roles can generate interrole conflict when they involve pressures to coordinate the time of the focal person and interfere with fulfilling expectations associated with the other role (Katz and Kahn as cited by Cooke and Rousseau, 1984). Similarly, interrole conflict can increase as one's obligations to the family expand through marriage and the arrival of children. Several research findings as cited by Cooke and Rousseau (1984), have indicated that women are particularly more often exposed to this type of interrole conflict than man. The reason is that women tend to assume more responsibility for household management and child care than man. All this will end in high level stress which are potrayed by a series of symptoms, most of them being negative.

Other Work-Related Causes of Stress.

Besides role factors, stress have been reported to be caused by other workplace factors. This includes interpersonal relations with coworkers, career issues, group processes within the organization, organizational characteristics and physical environmnts. Martin (1983), has quoted some of these sources of job-related stressors affecting job and life satisfaction from previous researches. These sources are, participation in decision making, group cohesion, equitable organizational treatment and working late shifts. Each or a combination of the above sources contribute to different types of outcoms either in the work arena or outside. Adding up to the above list, a series of other job-related causes of stress have also been reported by other-researchers (Hendrix et. al. 1985). It

seems that factors such as low utilization of abilities, low participation, low complexity of the work, management-supervision, organisational climate and group conflict also cause stress among employees.

In career development, employees at the stage of mid-life crisis, will face stress when their actual success are not as that of their expected success (Blau, 1978). There are also considerable evidence that not being promoted when expected, or not developing or not learning as much as one had hoped, can also be a significant cause of stress (Ivancevich and Matteson, 1980).

With respect to the group processes, group cohesiveness and intergroup conflict can both lead to stress (Mitchell and Larson, 1987). When group cohesiveness is low, there is often low morale, less communication, more conflict, feelings of isolation and role ambiguity which later lead to stress. Intergroup conflict occurs when groups compete for scarce resources or disagree about how things should be done. In these situations, there are usually tension, competition and political activity. These activities can be distracting, time-consuming and emotional which again often result in stress (Mitchell and Larson, 1987).

Interpersonal relations one has with co-workers also seems to be a major factor in producing stress. Mitchell and Larson (1987), cited the work by French and Caplan which demonstrated that low trust, low support, low interest and power differences often cause stress. Adding to the list of stress producers are disagreements and conflict (Steiner in Mitchell and Larson, 1987).

Individual characteristics do play a primary role in one's stress reaction besides all Type A and Type B behaviours (Hendrix et al. 1985). Individual characteristics such as locus of control, age, sex, diet, weight, exercise, smoking level and assertiveness have also been found to be relevant factors for job-related stress.

Gender-Related Workplace Stress

A survey conducted by Davidson and Cooper (1984), on male and female managers revealed that women in management are experiencing higher pressure levels stemming from stressors at work, home/social and individual arenas. Greater manifestations of stress was shown by women managers compared to men managers. This finding also indicated that women in junior and middle management experience the highest overall 'occupational stress' levels; followed by male supervisors; senior women managers; male junior managers, female supervisors and male middle managers; and finally, senior male manager who report the lowest 'occupational stress' levels.

Among the specific problems and pressures which have been isolated as being unique to female managers include; burdens of coping with the role of the 'token women', lack of role models and feelings of isolation, strains of coping with prejudice and sex discrimination from fellow employees, employers and the organizational structure.

These findings were quoted by Davidson and Cooper (1984), based on the work by Hemig and Jardin, 1979; and Jarwood and Wood, 1977. These stressors on top of trying to maintain a family and/or home, appear to be creating enormous pressures on women in management which manifest themselves in a variety of ways.

CONSEQUENCES OF STRESS

When subjected to stress elements, there will be some psychological and physiological reactions which results from chemical changes occurring in the brain (Mitchell and Larson, 1987). The way these reactions manifest themselves are many and varied. Some of course, are positive, such as self-motivation, stimulation to work harder and increased inspiration to live a better life. However, many are destructive and potentially dangerous (Gibson et.al. 1988). Gibson et.al. (1988), cited five categories of potential effects of stress, that is, subjective effects, behavioural effects, cognitive effects, physiological effects and organisational effects.

Subjective Effects

The first category, subjective effects, includes anxiety, aggression, apathy, boredom, depression, fatigue, frustration, loss of temper, low self-esteem, nervousness and feeling alone. A variety of research findings have pointed out these outcomes. Motowidlo et. al. (1986), conducted studies on occupational stress among nurses concluded that, feelings of job-related stress leads to feelings of depression. These feelings cause nurses to perform less effectively in the interpersonal and cognitive or motivational aspects of their job. However, the above study also revealed that consequences such as anxiety and fear of negative evaluation seems to have positive effect such as sensitivity and considerations for co-workers. One explanation might be that, nurses who feel anxious, either because of enduring dispositions toward social anxiety or because of situationally induced feelings of stress, are more concerned about making favourable impression. For that reason, they show warmth and tolerance towards their co-workers.

Aggression resulting from workplace stress have also been associated to abusive behaviours. This was revealed from a study conducted by Barling and Rosenbaum (1986). Their findings pointed out that verifiable objective and subjective negative stressors are associated with wife abuse. The reason is that, stressful work events demand change, and thereby, affect the individual as considerable personal readjustment for successful coping is required. As the number of events increase, the negative impact increases, so too does the uncertainty, unpredictability and uncontrollability of the situation, and more personal adjustment is required. Besides wife abuse, parental abusive behaviours have also been reported to be associated with stressful work events as cited by Barling and Rosenbaum (1986).

Cognitive Effects

Cognitive effects are another group of consequences of stress. The symptoms are characterised by an inability to make sound decisions, poor concentration, short attention span, hypersensitivity to criticism and mental blocks (Gibson et.al. 1988). All these symptoms later may affect the employees' job performance.

Motowidlo et.al. (1986), cited that early studies have reported deleterious effects of a wide variety of stressors on speed and accuracy in tracking, signal detection, verbal reasoning, sentence formation and other kinds of verbal performance. They also cited that stressors create conditions of information overload because they force people to pay special attention. This results in cognitive fatigue and saps energy needed for task performance.

Job performance manifest itself quite differently between men and women. As reported by Davidson and Cooper (1984), middle and junior female managers exhibit poor work performance behaviours not shared with male counterparts. For middle management females, these consisted of being frequently 'unable to influence and persuade people', 'unable to "sell oneself" in competitive conflict situations and frequently making mistakes. According to this research, high stress outcomes manifested in male managers are also different and not shared with their female counterparts. The effects reported include underpromotion, sacking someone, disciplining subordinates and rate of pay. Nevertheless, stress may not always act as a negative influence. In certain situations, stress can be constructive to the performance of employees (Schermerhorn et.al. 1985). Moderate stress can increase efforts, stimulate creativity and encourage diligence in one's work.

Physiological Effects

Another category of stress outcome is the physiological effects such as, coronary heart disease and high blood pressure (Gibson, et.al., 1988). Numerous studies have demonstrated the significant relationship between stress and physiological disorders. One of those is the findings by Steffy and Jones (1988), who indicated job-stress as an important factor leading to increased blood pressure, higher risk of coronary heart disease and peptic ulcers. This supports the earlier findings by Howard and colleagues (1985), about role ambiguity and job dissatisfaction leading to increased occurrence of hypertension and coronary disease. Additionally, Hendrix et.al. (1985), revealed that women exhibit more risk of coronary disease than men. This is consistent with earlier mentioned findings which indicated that women experience more job-stress than men.

Organizational Effects

The last category of the potential effects of stress is the organisational effects (Gibson et.al.,1988). Among the most prominent effects observed by many researchers are

absenteeism, turnover, low productivity, alienation from co-workers, job dissatisfaction, and organizational commitment and loyalty.

Being absent and quitting are two forms of withdrawal behaviour that can temporarily reduce job-stress in some cases. The rationale for the above phenomenon is that, stress is so aversive to most employees that they will try to avoid it by being late, absent., or leaving the job altogether (Bhagat et.al., 1981).

Studies have indicated that there are direct and indirect linkages from role stressors to employee turnover (Cavanaugh et. al. 2000). These findings support the suggestion that the experience of role stressors can ultimately result in employee turnover through a sequence of intervening linkages. This sequencing links the turnover process from dissatisfaction to lowered commitment, to intention to resign.

Motowidlo et. al. (1986) and Bhagat et. al. (1981) suggested human traits and adaptations may explain turnover frequencies in response to stress. That is, those who remain longer with the organization are those with more stress-resistant traits. On the other hand, people will eventually develop coping mechanisms to deal with stress. Because this takes time, senior organizational members are more fully adapted and therefore experience less stress.

Stress was also associated to the levels of job satisfaction of workers. Organizational factors such as organizational climate, job enhancement, decision-making involvement, skill varieties, management and leadership styles can lead to job dissatisfaction (Hendrix et. al. 1985). The negative relationship between job satisfaction due to job stress is consistent with the findings of numerous studies such as Hemingway and Smith (1999), and Cavanaugh et. al. (2000).

CONCLUSIONS

Stress is widespread and costly, and results in many consequences that are harmful to the individual as well as the organization. It is a relationship that reflects an imbalance between the demands on a person and his or her perceived ability to cope. Numerous symptoms of stress can be observed which results from physiological and psychological process and behaviours of a person.

A variety of stressors have been reported to be the causes of stress and a large group of these are related to the job (role ambiguity, role overload and role conflict). Besides that, factors like group cohesiveness, organizational and environmental situation also cause stress. Job stress was widely reported to affect job performance, organizational performance as well as individual well being. All of these outcomes could be sequential or interrelated at any one period or situation. Therefore, in order to maintain and promote individual and organizational well being, effective stress management strategies and approaches need to be employed. Broadly, stress management efforts could be grouped

at two levels, that is, the individual level and the organizational levels will be discussed in another article.

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