Job Stress: Causes, Consequences and Prevention

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Abstract:

Stress is a dynamic condition in which an individual is confronted with an opportunity, demand or resource related to what the individual desires and for which the outcome is perceived to be both uncertain and important. This is a complicated definition. Job stress results from the interaction of the worker and the conditions of work. Views differ on the importance of worker characteristics versus working conditions as the primary cause of job stress. The differing viewpoints suggest different ways to prevent stress at work. During stress, the adrenal gland releases corticosteroids, which are converted to cortical in the blood stream. These have an immunosuppressive effect. 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.

Keywords: Causes of work stress, Job Stress, Reducing Stress, Stress Management

Introduction:

Work Stress is a major challenge to Workers health and the healthiness of their organizations. Workers who are stressed are also more likely to be unhealthy, poorly, motivated, less productive and less safe at work. Their organizations are likely to be successful in a competitive market. Stress can be brought about by pressures at home and work. Employers cannot usually protect workers from stress arising outside of work, but they can protect them from stress that arises through work. Stress at work can be a real problem to the organization as well as for its workers. Good management and good work organization are the best forms of stress prevention. If employees are already stressed, their managers should be aware of it and know how to help. 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 and where they have little control over work or how they can cope with its demands and pressures.

Historical Context:

The epidemic of workplace stress can be seen as a result of changing workplace and economic conditions over the past 20 to 30 years. Hoel, Zapf, & Cooper (2002) explain the changes that have taken place specifically relating to industrialized countries: In most developed countries, the 1980s could be described from a business perspective as the decade of the 'enterprise culture.' Workplaces were transformed by globalization, privatization, process reengineering, mergers and acquisitions, strategic alliances, joint ventures and the like. In the short term, there was an improvement in economic competitiveness in international markets and the countries that embraced these changes. But eventually, strains began to show, and the concept of 'burnout' became well known within organizations.

However, it was business as usual as work was carried out in essentially the same way in large or medium sized businesses. During the 1990s, a major restructuring of work was beginning to take place. Organizations dramatically 'downsized', 'delivered', 'flattened', and 'right sized'. The result was redundancy, constant restructuring, and substantial organizational changes. Modern workers now find themselves in smaller organizations, with fewer people doing more and feeling much less secure. New technology has added the burden of information overload and accelerated the pace of work. Two major effects that have stemmed from these economic changes are known as 'work intensification' and 'job insecurity'. The former refers to the extent to which employees are being forced to work faster and harder than they have been before, while the latter refers to the subjective feelings about the risk of job loss, as expressed by employees themselves

This new economic culture has created more stressful work environments, as seen through the increasing physical and mental tolls on employees, as well as increasing costs for employers in the way of lost productivity, absenteeism, turnover, and disability leave.

What is Stress?

Stress is a dynamic condition in which an individual is confronted with an opportunity, demand or resource related to what the individual desires and for which the outcome is perceived to be both uncertain and important. This is a complicated definition.

Stress is not necessarily bad in and of itself. Although stress is typically discussed in a negative context, it also has a positive value. It's an opportunity when it offers potential gain. Consider for example, the superior performance that an athlete or stage performer gives in "clutch" situations. Such individuals often use stress positively to rise to the occasion and perform at or near their maximum. Similarly, many professionals see the pressures of heavy workloads and deadlines as positive challenges that enhance the quality of their work and the satisfaction the get from their job.

However, it is different in the case of bank employees. The bank employees are the people who also have to achieve the certain target and so for the non-achievement of target the employees remain stressed and tensed. The employees who have the simple table work also have to face the problem of stress. Due to recession the banking sector is also facing the problem of employee cut-offs and so the workload of the existing employees increases and the feel stressed.

Hence, it is evident that some form of positive stress can add more color and vibrancy to our lives. The presence of a deadline, for example, can push us to make the most of our time and produce greater efficiency. It is important to keep this in mind, as stress management refers to using stress to our advantage, and not on eradicating the presence of stress in our lives.

On the other hand, negative stress can result in mental and physical strain. The individual will experience symptoms such as tensions, headaches, irritability and in extreme cases, heart palpitations. Hence, whilst some stress may be seen as a motivating force, it is important to manage stress levels so that it does not have an adverse impact on your health and relationships.

Part of managing your stress levels include learning about how stress can affect you emotionally and physically, as well as how to identify if you are performing at your optimal stress level (OSL) or if you are experiencing negative stress. This knowledge will help you to identify when you need to take a break, or perhaps seek professional help. It is also your first step towards developing techniques to managing your stress levels. Modern day stresses can take the form of monetary needs, or emotional frictions.

Competition at work and an increased workload can also cause greater levels of stress. How do you identify if you are suffering from excessive stress? Psychological symptoms commonly experienced include insomnia, headaches and an inability to focus. Physical symptoms take the form of heart palpitations, breathlessness, excessive sweating and stomachaches.

Stress in the Workplace:

The term 'job stress' refers to distress resulting from a situation where the demands of a job are not matched by the resources provided to get the job done. Either or both sides of this equation can be modified to prevent or reduce job stress – modifying demands or stressors and improving job resources. Resources might include a worker's occupational skills, job experience or education, or organisational resources such as machinery, raw materials, or staffing levels available to produce goods or provide services. Job stressors are working conditions that increase the risk of job stress and consequent impacts on health.

There are numerous job stress terms, concepts, models and theories, all of which can be understood in the context of the job stress process. The process initiates with exposure to stressors. Stressors arising from the work environment are classified as psychosocial or physical. Psychosocial stressors, include job demands, job control, job insecurity, bullying, harassment and more. Physical stressors include noise and ergonomic exposures

Exposure to stressors can lead to perceived distress strictly speaking; job stress is short for job related distress. Perceived distress can in turn lead to adverse short-term responses, which can be physiological or behavioural. Distress, as well as short-term responses, increase the risk of enduring health outcomes of a physiological, or behavioural. Importantly, job stress can affect health both directly through neuro-endocrine mechanisms and indirectly through health behavioural pathways.

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.

Causes of Workplace Stress:

Job stress results from the interaction of the worker and the conditions of work. Views differ on the importance of worker characteristics versus working conditions as the primary cause of job stress. The differing viewpoints suggest different ways to prevent stress at work. According to one school of thought, differences in individual characteristics such as personality and coping skills are most important in predicting whether certain job conditions will result in stress-in other words, what is stressful for one person may not be a problem for someone else. This viewpoint leads to prevention strategies that focus on workers and ways to help them cope with demanding job conditions. Although the importance of individual differences cannot be ignored, scientific evidence suggests that certain working conditions are stressful to most people. Such evidence argues for a greater emphasis on working conditions as the key source of job stress, and for job redesign as a primary prevention strategy. Personal interview surveys of working conditions, including conditions recognized as risk factors for job stress, were conducted in Member States of the European Union in 1990, 1995, and 2000. Results showed a trend across these periods suggestive of increasing work intensity. In 1990, the percentage of workers reporting that they worked at high speeds at least one-fourth of their working time was 48%, increasing to 54% in 1995 and to 56% in 2000.

Similarly, 50% of workers reported they work against tight deadlines at least one-fourth of their working time in 1990, increasing to 56% in 1995 and 60 % in 2000. However, no change was noted in the period 1995–2000 (data not collected in 1990) in the percentage of workers reporting sufficient time to complete tasks. A substantial percentage of Americans work very long hours. By one estimate, more than 26% of men and more than 11% of women worked 50 hours per week or more in 2000. These figures represent a considerable increase over the previous three decades, especially for women. According to the Department of Labor, there has been an upward trend in hours worked among employed women, an increase in extended work weeks (>40 hours) by men, and a considerable increase in combined working hours among working couples, particularly couples with young children.

Stress and Decision-making, Perception and Cognition:

Stress can affect an individual's decision-making process and ability to make effective judgments. For example, Easterbrook proposes a "cue utilization model" and argues that when exposed to stressors, individuals experience "perceptual narrowing" - meaning that they pay attention to fewer perceptual cues or stimuli that could contribute to their behaviour or decision. Peripheral stimuli are likely to be the first to be screened out or ignored. Decision making models proposed by Janis and Mann support this hypothesis and suggest that under stress, individuals may make decisions based on incomplete information. Friedman and Mann suggest that when under conditions of stress, individuals may fail to consider the full range of alternatives available, ignore long-term consequences, and make decisions based on oversimplifying assumptions. Furthermore, the individuals may suffer from performance rigidity as a result of their reduced search behaviour and reliance on fewer perceptual cues to make decisions. Research on decision making under stress supports these theoretical models. Observe the decision-making processes of individuals under time pressure. We find that individuals under time pressure tend to focus their attention only on a few salient cues. Larsen finds that, like other types of stressors, sleep deprivation can reduce an individual's ability to reason, to analyze complex situations, and to make effective decisions.

Sleep-deprived (stressed) individuals in his study were more likely to obey orders without thinking and to ignore cues that implied the presence of something unusual. Stress can also contribute to performance decrements by slowing cognition and individual information processing. Stress can be looked at as a form of "task overload" (e.g., asking an individual to perform more than one task under a time constraint) and it is seen that the addition of multiple required tasks reduces the quality of individual performance and increases the magnitude of the performance decrement as compared with the case in which the individual has only one task to perform.

Theoretical Explanations of Workplace Stress:

Much research attention has been focused on the issue of workplace stress, so much so that theories have emerged to explain the relationship that exists between stress and the work environment. The three most influential and prevalent theories of occupational stress include the person environment (PE) fit theory, the framework of occupational stress, and the demand, control, support model.

The basic premise of the person environment (PE) fit theory is that stress arises from a misfit between person and environment – not from the two components separately, but as the factors of each relate to one another. When individuals perceive that their work environments are not good, or do not fit well with the needs, wants, and desires that they personally would like fulfilled from work, the discrepancies create diverse strains, which are then hypothesized to affect workers' health and wellbeing.

Environmental demands here include job requirements, role expectations, and group and organizational norms. Countering these demands are the individual's abilities represented through aptitudes, skills, training, time and energy the person uses to meet the demands. The idea is that the larger the discrepancy between person and environment, the greater the likelihood that strain, and a need for coping, will arise.

The framework of occupational stress is based around the same foundation as the PE Fit theory. They share two basic premises, first, that stress arises from the misfit between person and environment, and second, that subjective perceptions of work environments primarily determine strains. The difference between the two viewpoints is the framework's core definition. It states that occupational stress is a total process including the environmental sources of stress and the individual's perception of them, short term and long term physiological, psychological, and behavioural responses, as well as a number of modifying factors that influence the relationships among variables in the stress process (such as social support, and the quality of interpersonal relationships within the work environment). Perceived stress and the resulting strains are explained as a "snowball effect", a reciprocal association where the negative feelings regarding work increase strains, which in turn contribute even more to the negative feelings. The end result is that the accumulation of physiological, psychological and behavioural strains will eventually result in long term outcomes such as acute depression, alcoholism, unemployment, physiological problems (e.g., cardiovascular problems) and other costly results.

Finally, the demand, control, support model emphasizes the role of work content as the major source of workplace stress. Work content here is divided into two components: worker perceptions regarding the tasks that need to be completed in performing the job (job demands), and worker perceptions about the degree of control or discretion they have in performing the job tasks (job control). These two constructs are thought to interact with one another in affecting the amount of strain experienced by employees. The strongest levels of strain, and hence, the greatest levels of occupational stress were expected to occur in situations where there were extremely high demands, and very low control.

Trade Union and Stress:

Stress can also be created and reduced by Trade unions. Cunnison defines a trade union as monopolistic combination of wage earners who stand to the employers in a relation of dependence for the sale of the labour and even for its production; and that the general purpose of the association is in view of that dependence to strength their power to bargain with the employees.

Protection given by trade unions many reduce stress Cole defines a trade union as an association of workers in one or more occupations an association carried on mainly for the purpose of protecting and advancing the members economic interests in connection with their daily work. A trade union as an association of employees designed primarily to maintain or improve the conditions of employment of its members.

According to Section 2(b) of the Trade Unions Act of 1926, a trade union is any combination of persons, whether temporary or permanent, primarily for the purpose of regulating the relations between workers and employers, or between workers and workers for imposing restrictive conditions on the conduct of any trade or business, and includes the federation of two or more trade unions. Thus, a trade union is an important service organization for the employee who enables a group, a class in industry or trade to bargain with any other class or group on equal footing. Bargaining power may also reduce stress to a higher extent.

Stress and Industrial Dispute:

Industrial disputes create stress in the organization and among employees. Modern industrialization has not been an unmixed blessing. It has created a yawning gulf between management and labour because of the absence of workers ownership of the means of production. Power has been concentrated in the hands of few entrepreneurs, while a majority has been relegated to the insignificant position of mere wage earners. The workers have how come to realize that post of their demands can be satisfied if they resort to concerted and collective action while the employers are aware of the fact that they can resist these demands. This denial or refusal to meet their genuine demands has often lead to dissatisfaction of the part of the workers, to their as distress, and even to violent activities on their part, which has hindered production and of the harmed both the workers and the employers.

Disputes according to the code of industrial relations introduces in United Kingdom in 1972 are of two kinds. Disputes of Right, which relate to the application or interpretation of an existing agreement or contract of employment and Disputes of interest, which relate to claims by employees or proposals by a management about the terms and conditions of employment.

According to section 2(K) Industrial Disputes Act, 1947 the term industrial dispute means any dispute or difference between employers and employers or between employers and workmen or between workmen and workmen, which is connected with the employment or non employment or the term of employment or with the conditions of labour of any person.

Dispute becomes an industrial dispute only if it satisfies the following essentials: these must be a dispute between employer and employer or between employer and workmen or between workmen and workmen. Dispute should be connected with the employment or non-employment or the terms of employment or with the condition of labour of any person (but not with the manager or supervisor) or it must be pertaining to any industrial matter.

For an industrial dispute, the relationship between employer and workmen should be in existence. Thus, from the legal standpoint, industrial dispute does not merely refer to differences between labour and capital as is generally thought but it refers to differences that groups of workmen and employers engaged in an industry, it is necessary for a dispute to assume the form of an industrial dispute within the meaning of the Act that it involves direct and substantial interest of the workmen concerned.

Stress and Grievance Redressal:

Grievance may increase stress and redressal may reduce stress. A grievance is any dissatisfaction that adversely affects organizational relations and productivity. However, it is impracticable to adopt such definition since no management has the including emotionalized grievances and unexpressed dissatisfactions. To be workable, a definition must be restricted. A grievance may thus said to be, the representation by a worker, a group or workers or their union to the management relating to the terms and conditions of employment, breach of the freedom of association or the provisions of the standing orders or non-implementation of the Government Orders, conciliation agreements or adjudicator's awards.

Complaints may be outcome of higher stress. Dale yoder defines it as a written complaint filed by an employee and claiming unfair treatment. Davis defines it and any real or imaged feeling or personal injustice, which an employee has concerning his employment relationship.

Wrong activities may increase stress. Jucius defines, a grievance is any discontent or dissatisfaction whether expressed or not, whether valid or not arising out of anything connected with the company which an employee thinks, believes or even feels to be unfair, unjust or inequitable.

Calhoon Richard says that described as anything, which an employee thinks or feels is wrong and is generally accompanied by an actively distributing feeling. The international Labour Organization defines a grievance as a complaint or one or more workers in respect of wages, allowances, and conditions of work and interpretation of service stipulations covering such areas such as overtime, leave, transfer, promotion, seniority, job assignment and termination of services.

In the opinions of National Commission on Labour, complaints affecting one or more individual workers in respect of wage payments, overtime, leave transfer, promotion, seniority, work assignment and discharges constitute grievance. Based on the above definitions it is evident that grievance covers dissatisfaction and which has the following characteristics. It may be expressly stated by an employee. It may be written or verbal. It may be valid and legitimate, untrue or completely false or ridiculous and it may arise out of something connected with the organization or work.

Stress is created when there is injustice done. An employee feels that an injustice has been done to him. Thus, grievances are feelings sometimes real sometimes imagined which an employee may have in regard to his employment situation. Grievance redressed methods may reduce stress to maximum extent.

Stress and Industrial Safety:

Safeties in industrial area reduce. Stress industrial safety refers to the various measures taken by the management to prevent the occurrence of accidents in the factory. Stress may increase accidents. Accidents defined as an undesirable consequence when contract is made between an energy sources and a person or object resulting in damage or injury to the person or object.

The National Safety Council of the U.S.A describes an accident as an even or a rapidly occurring series or evens, arising out of an unsafe act or an unsafe condition and culmination in an unpremeditated injury. In any such series of events, it will be found that, some agency such as machine, tool object or material was involved; the injured was performing some task or job at the time, and contact was made an some manner between his body and the agency.

It is thus clear from the above concepts that, the employees constitute the most valuable asset of any organization and consequently any neglect of this important source is liable to result in an increased cost of production, in terms of wages and salaries, benefits and services; working conditions, increased labour turnover, absenteeism, indiscipline, strikes and lockouts; transfer on the ground of discontent and the like besides deterioration of quality or goods and strained relations between the employees and management.

Good human relationship reduces stress. Maintenance of good human relationship is the main theme of industrial relations, because in its absence the whole edifice of organizational structure may crumble down. No industry can survive, if it does not create a congenial industrial relationship with its employees. No doubt, a sound financial position is needed for its growth and expansion, but more than that a good industrial relation will certainly promote good understanding leading to further development and consolidation.

Many of the out ward signs of stress in individuals should be noticeable to managers and colleagues. Look in particular for changes in a person's mood or behaviour, such as deteriorating relationships with colleagues, irritability, indecisiveness, absenteeism or reduced performance.

Those suffering from stress may also smoke or drink alcohol more than usual or even turn to drugs. They might also complain about their health: for example, they may get frequent headaches.

First, take informal feedback to get some idea of what problems may exist: for examples, see if staffs are disillusioned with their work. This may show up as an increase in absenteeism (especially frequent short spells of sickness) lateness, disciplinary problems or staff turnover, or a reduction in output or quality of product or service. There may, of course, be other reasons for these symptoms, but if they could be related to stress at work, get staff to tell people about it by: talking and listening to them. People could base the discussion on the sort of pressures mentioned in the middle of this booklet: asking them to describe the three 'best' and the three 'worst' aspects of their job, and whether any of these put them under uncomfortable pressure.

People can use the information people collect to indentify common and persistent pressures, and who might be harmed by them. Several off-the-shelf questionnaires do the same kind of thing. These can be helpful but tend to be lengthy and may not ask the type of questions that are relevant to organization. In addition, interpreting the findings may require specialist knowledge. There is no single best way of tackling work-related stress, what people do will depend on working practices and the causes of the problem. But only providing training or help (or both) for sufferers won't be enough – it won't tackle the source of the problem! The boxes in the middle of this booklet show some of the pressures at work that might be relevant to smaller organizations, along with some suggestions about what to do. Most of the 'things to do' boil down to good management. They are ongoing processes that need to be built into the way organization is run. Show that people take stress seriously, and be understanding towards people who admit to being under too much pressure. Encourage managers to have an open and understanding attitude to what people say to them about the pressures of their work, and to look for signs of stress in their staff.

Signs of Workplace Stress:

Mood and sleep disturbances, upset stomach and headache, and disturbed relationships with family; friends and girlfriends or boyfriends are examples of stress-related problems. The effects of job stress on chronic diseases are more difficult to see because chronic diseases take a long time to develop and can be influenced by many factors other than stress. Nonetheless, evidence is rapidly accumulating to suggest that stress plays an important role in several types of chronic health problems-especially cardiovascular disease, musculoskeletal disorders, and psychological disorders.

Prevention:

A combination of organizational change and stress management is often the most useful approach for preventing stress at work.

How to Change the Organization to Prevent Job Stress:

- Ensure that the workload is in line with workers' capabilities and resources.
- Design jobs to provide meaning, stimulation, and opportunities for workers to use their skills.
- Clearly define workers' roles and responsibilities.
- Give workers opportunities to participate in decisions and actions affecting their jobs.
- Improve communications-reduce uncertainty about career development and future employment prospects.

- Provide opportunities for social interaction among workers.
- Establish work schedules that are compatible with demands and responsibilities outside the job.
- Discrimination inside the workplace (e.g. nationality and language)

St. Paul Fire and Marine Insurance Company conducted several studies on the effects of stress prevention programs in hospital settings. Program activities included; (1) employee and management education on job stress, (2) changes in hospital policies and procedures to reduce organizational sources of stress, and (3) establishment of employee assistance programs. In one study, the frequency of medication errors declined by 50% after prevention activities was implemented in a 700-bed hospital. In a second study, there was a 70% reduction in malpractice claims in 22 hospitals that implemented stress prevention activities. In contrast, there was no reduction in claims in a matched group of 22 hospitals that did not implement stress prevention activities.

Coping With Stress at Work Place:

With the rapid advancement of technology, the stresses faced at work have also increased. Many people dread going to work, hence the term "Monday Blues". What is the reason for this? There is partly the fear from being retrenched in bad times, leading to greater job insecurity on the part of those who remain. Undoubtedly, occupational stress is one of the most commonly cited stressors faced by people all over the world.

Stress refers to the pressure and reactions to our environment which results in psychological and physical reactions. Whilst some stress is good for motivation and increasing efficiency, too much stress can result in negative impacts such as reduced effectiveness and efficiency. More and more people are feeling isolated and disrespected at work, and this has led to greater occupational stress. Many companies have taken to consulting experts and professionals on ways to increase connectedness and motivation of their employees.

Some companies organize parties and make their employees feel valued at work. These are measures to motivate employees and help them to feel secure at their jobs, translating into greater productivity. However, not all companies have such measures in place, and some have not gotten it quite right. Hence, it is up to you to make sure that you can cope with stress at your workplace, and use it to help you work better. Here are 3 simple steps to help you with coping with stress in the workplace.

Step 1: Raising Awareness

Help yourself to identify when you are facing rising levels of stress, tipping the scales from positive to negative. This is important, as being able to identify signs of being stressed can help you to take steps to ensure that your overall quality of life does not drop. If left unacknowledged, the problem will only snowball, leading to disastrous consequences to your health and overall wellbeing.

You can identify if you are feeling stressed by checking if you have any physical or psychological reactions, such as excessive sweating or heart palpitations, or the onset of headaches, irritability or the need to escape. If you experience any of these reactions, identify if you are feeling any overwhelming negative emotions, and if you are constantly worried.

Step 2: Identify the Cause

You need to be able to analyze the situation and identify what is causing the rise in stress. These stressors can be external and internal. External stressors refer to things beyond your control, such as the environment or your colleagues at work.

Internal stressors refer to your own thinking and attitude. Often, we only start reacting to stress when a combination of stressors working together exceeds our ability to cope.

Keep a diary or a list of events that have caused you to feel strong negative emotions, or that are likely stressors. This will help you to identify the causes of your stress. Whilst it is not always possible to eradicate them, we can change the way that we cope with it.

Step 3: Coping with Stress

In order to deal with the situation that is causing you stress, you need to calm your mind and body so as to stave off the reactions and cope with it in a positive way. This can be through different methods, such as taking time off. If a situation is triggering your stress and you are unable to calm down, remove yourself from it. Go outside and take a walk to calm down. Alternatively, you can try implementing relaxation techniques such as deep breathing. If it is an internal stressor, stop your thought process until you are able to deal with it logically.

The key to making these 3 steps work for you is to practice them. These are not instantaneous solutions, and you need to condition your mind and practice them so that you can implement it when you are feeling stressed.

Reducing Stress:

1. Job analysis:

We have all experienced that appalling sense of having far too much work to do and too little time to do it in. We can choose to ignore this, and work unreasonably long hours to stay on top of our workload. The risks here are that we become exhausted, that we have so much to do that we do a poor quality job and that we neglect other areas of our life. Each of these can lead to intense stress.

The alternative is to work more intelligently, by focusing on the things that are important for job success and reducing the time, we spend on low priority tasks. Job Analysis is the first step in doing this.

The first of the action-oriented skills that we look at is Job Analysis. Job Analysis is a key technique for managing job overload – an important source of stress.

To do an excellent job, you need to fully understand what is expected of you. While this may seem obvious, in the hurly-burly of a new, fast-moving, high-pressure role, it is oftentimes something that is easy to overlook.

By understanding the priorities in your job, and what constitutes success within it, you can focus on these activities and minimize work on other tasks as much as possible. This helps you get the greatest return from the work you do, and keep your workload under control.

Job Analysis is a useful technique for getting a firm grip on what really is important in your job so that you are able to perform excellently. It helps you to cut through clutter and distraction to get to the heart of what you need to do.

2. Rational & Positive Thinking:

You are thinking negatively when you fear the future, put yourself down, criticize yourself for errors, doubt your abilities, or expect failure. Negative thinking damages confidence, harms performance and paralyzes mental skills.

Unfortunately, negative thoughts tend to fit into our consciousness, do their damage and flit back out again, with their significance having barely been noticed.

Since we barely realize that they were there, we do not challenge them properly, which means that they can be completely incorrect and wrong.

Thought Awareness is the process by which you observe your thoughts and become aware of what is going through your head. One approach to it is to observe your "stream of consciousness" as you think about the thing you are trying to achieve which is stressful. Do not suppress any thoughts. Instead, just let them run their course while you watch them, and write them down on our free worksheet as they occur. Then let them go.

Another more general approach to Thought Awareness comes with logging stress in your Stress Diary. When you analyze your diary at the end of the period, you should be able to see the most common and the most damaging thoughts.

Rational Thinking

The next step in dealing with negative thinking is to challenge the negative thoughts that you identified using the Thought Awareness technique. Look at every thought you wrote down and challenge it rationally. Ask yourself whether the thought is reasonable. What evidence is there for and against the thought? Would your colleagues and mentors agree or disagree with it?

Looking at the examples, the following challenges could be made to the negative thoughts we identified earlier:

- **Feelings of inadequacy:** Have you trained yourself as well as you reasonably should have? Do you have the experience and resources you need to make the presentation? Have you planned, prepared and rehearsed enough? If you have done all of these, you've done as much as you can to give a good performance.
- **Worries about performance during rehearsal:** If some of your practice was less than perfect, then remind yourself that the purpose of the practice is to identify areas for improvement, so that these can be sorted out before the performance.
- **Problems with issues outside your control:** Have you identified the risks of these things happening, and have you taken steps to reduce the likelihood of them happening or their impact if they do? What will you do if they occur? And what do you need others to do for you?
- **Worry about other people's reactions:** If you have prepared well, and you do the best you can, then you should be satisfied. If you perform as well as you reasonably can, then fair people are likely to respond well. If people are not fair, the best thing to do is ignore their comments and rise above them.
- When you challenge negative thoughts rationally, you should be able to see quickly whether the thoughts are wrong or whether they have some substance to them. Where there is some substance, take appropriate action. However, make sure that your negative thoughts are genuinely important to achieving your goals, and don't just reflect a lack of experience, which everyone has to go through at some stage.

Positive Thinking & Opportunity Seeking:

By now, you should already be feeling more positive. The final step is to prepare rational, positive thoughts and affirmations to counter any remaining negativity. It can also be useful to look at the situation and see if there are any useful opportunities that are offered by it.

By basing your affirmations on the clear, rational assessments of facts that you made using Rational Thinking, you can use them to undo the damage that negative thinking may have done to your self-confidence.

3. Laughter:

During stress, the adrenal gland releases corticosteroids, which are converted to cortical in the blood stream. These have an immunosuppressive effect. Dr. Lee Berk and fellow researcher Dr. Stanley Tan at Loma Linda University School of Medicine have produced carefully controlled studies showing that the experience of laughter lowers serum cortical levels, increases the amount and activity of T lymphocytes—the natural killer cells. Laughter also increases the number of T cells that have suppresser receptors.

What Laughter Can Do Against Stress And Its Effects?

i. Laughter lowers blood pressure and reduces hypertension. It provides good cardiac conditioning especially for those who are unable to perform physical exercise.

ii. Reduces stress hormones (studies shows, laughter induces reduction of at least four of neuro-endocrine hormones—epinephrine, cortical, dopac, and growth hormone, associated with stress response).

iii. Laughter cleanses the lungs and body tissues of accumulated stale air as it empties more air than it takes in. It is beneficial for patients suffering from emphysema and other respiratory ailments.

iv. It increases muscle flexion, relaxation and fluent blood circulation in body.

v. Boosts immune function by raising levels of infection-fighting T-cells, disease-fighting proteins called Gamma-interferon and disease-destroying antibodies called B-cells.

Conclusion:

Stress is not something to be dismissed as being just part of the job, or the price you pay for being successful in your career. Stress has been shown to be either directly or indirectly responsible for early and untimely deaths through heart attack, stroke, high blood pressure, and a multitude of other 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, occupational health workers, and departmental managers and supervisors. The opportunity exists for employers and employees to get together and make way for changes that will reduce stress - related illness. 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 (Clark, 2002).

It is the intention of this report to educate on the damaging effects of workplace stress, and increase awareness of the widespread nature of this problem. It is hoped that this knowledge will motivate organizations to explore the stressors that are present in their own work environments, and to take steps to reduce and/or prevent stress in the workplace, thereby working to maintain the health and wellbeing of employees.

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