Work Stress and its Management: A Practical Case Study

Yara Hamdan

E-mail:eng.yhamdan@hotmail.com

Abstract

This research studies work stress, and how it is related to performance and productivity in an organization. At first, definitions and types of stress are defined, along with its sources and effect on individual. Then, a demonstration of the subsequent consequences of individual stress on an organization is discussed, hence showing the importance of stress management in an organization.

Stress management policies and procedures are then explained and specified for each significant type of a stressor. This is done using a practical case study of an organization, where it shows how this firm deals with each kind of different stressors.

Keywords: stress, productivity, time management, conflict management, workplace diversity.

1. Introduction

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

Organizations are mainly concerned with work stress. Nevertheless, organizations provide training to their employees how to manage other personal stresses, since it affects work performance. In addition, organizations always follow up with economical, environmental and political stresses, since they all directly affect organizational work and increase their internal stress.

2. Types of Stress

a) Challenge Stressors (Beneficial stressors): Stress associated with workload, pressure to complete tasks, and time urgency. They enhance motivation, energy, alertness, and positive attitude.
b) Hindrance Stressors (Negative stressors): Stress that keeps you from reaching your goals, and leave a feeling of depression, anxiety, or pressure, such as red tape, role ambiguity, role conflict, role overload, job insecurity, etc, and they cause greater harm than challenge stressors

3. Sources of Stress

a) Environmental factors
b) Organizational factors
c) Personal factors

3.1 Environmental Factors

a) Economic uncertainties of the business cycle: many organizations are downsizing, so workers are afraid of losing their job
b) Political uncertainties of political systems
c) Technological uncertainties of technical innovations, where many technologies are replacing human forces, and others require high technical education in order to   use, which forces employees to always keep learning and following up with these technologies.

3.2 Organizational Factors

1) Long working Hours
2) Work-Life Balance
3) Manager's inability to find solutions for stress
4) Security Hassles
5) Retirement Plans
6) Safety Fears
7) Job stability and fear of downsizing.
8) Stress to produce
9) Stress to abide by rules
10) Stress to live up to expectations
11) Task demands related to the job
12) Role demands of functioning in an organization
13) Interpersonal demands created by other employees, stress to interact with co-workers, supervisors, and to do this without causing hardship to ourselves or others
14) Workplace Diversity

3.3 Personal Factors

1) Family and personal relationships

2) Economic problems from exceeding earning capacity

3) Personality problems arising from basic disposition

4. Consequences of Stress

Stressors are additive. High levels of stress can lead to the following symptoms:

a) Physiological: Blood pressure, headaches, stroke
b) Psychological: Dissatisfaction, tension, anxiety, irritability, boredom, and procrastination. These effects are greater when roles are unclear in the presence of conflicting demands
c) Behavioral: Changes in job behaviors, increased smoking or drinking, different eating habits, rapid speech, fidgeting, sleep disorders

5. Cost of Stress on Organization

a)   Lowered productivity

b)   Excessive absenteeism

c)   Increased insurance costs

d)   Increased turn over

6. Case Study: An Organization Implementation of Stress Management

The following is a demonstration of several kinds of stressors and the solutions that the organization's management implements for them:

6.1 Long working hours:

1) Management teaches and trains its employees on the following:
    a)   Good time-management techniques, never to delay work for the last minute, etc.
    b)   Change employees' attitudes and encourage positive self-talk: how to think of stressful situations as a challenge to your creative thinking, Always say: "I am capable of doing it, it's good for me to enhance my capabilities and learn new tough skills, etc."

2) Managers give positive reinforcement: they tell their employees when they do a good job, and complement them on it.
3) The Organization applies recognition and rewards programs

6.2 Work-Life balance

1) Applying Flex-time, especially for females who have children and house responsibilities, where they do not have to be restricted to come and leave at a specific time, as long as the total sum of working hours still the same.
2) Establishing nurseries in the organization for day care for employees' children
3) Applying Labor Law that states to offer paid vacations of minimum 21 days for employees (this varies according to each country)

6.3 Technology

1) The Organization employs a specialized IT professional who is only responsible for assisting all employees on their IT related issues
2) The organization provides specialized training courses on any topic required for work advancement

6.4 Manager's inability to find solutions for stress

1) The organization encourages communication and always asks for feedback, where the HR manager is always directly accessible to any employee to listen to.

2) The organization always try to follow up with all corporate and business news, in addition to new studies published regarding work stress, how to spot it and solve it

6.5 Security Fears

The Organization has done great efforts in making employees and people feel safe by applying laws for security checks, checking identities of visitors to the firm and not allowing unauthorized people to enter

6.6 Retirement Plans

Applying Social Security system and pension funds, which is a great insurance and relief for employees in order not to worry about their retirement any more.

6.7 Job stability and fear of downsizing

The Economic Crisis is very complex. Unfortunately, layoffs and downsizing are forced on many organizations, and there is nothing that management can do internally to stop this issue.

6.8 Task demands related to the job and Role demands of functioning in an organization

1) The organization applies the technique of "Improved personnel selection and job placement" which states that it is not only enough to assign a task to a person only according to his technical skills, but also his personality, tolerance of a specific type of stress, should be taken into consideration.
2) The organization also tries its best to set realistic goals and priorities. This is related to goal-setting motivation theory that states that goals must be difficult, but specific and attainable, and not impossible.
3) The organization implies the "Redesigning of jobs" concept as follows:
   a) Taking responsibility: it encourages employees to take responsibility for their own job and for their contribution to the success of the company as a whole. This encourages a feeling of control over their life and let them know how important their efforts are to the overall plan.

b) Increased employee involvement in decision making

6.9 Interpersonal demands created by other employees, stress to interact with co-workers and supervisors

The organization tries to apply the most recent and proper Conflict management techniques as follows:

1) Setting ground rules of what is acceptable and what is not, and documenting them formally in the firm's policies.
2) Encouraging civilized communication.
3) Applying conflict management that focuses on issues not on personalities
4) Applying conflict management that also focuses on present not on past conflicts.
5) Applying compromising techniques that are a win-win scenario for both parties involved.
6) Applying forcing techniques when necessary after using all previous techniques.
7) Applying penalty rules for breaking any of the ground rules.

6.10 Workplace Diversity

The firm hires all kinds of experiences from all ages, genders, and from all levels of educations.

The following are some major points in managing workplace diversity:

1) Female participation:
   a) The organization encourages a lot female participation, not just in entry and mid levels, but also in executive levels.
   b) It hires a large number of females.
   c) It forces male co-workers to cooperate, and respect them, and even to abide to their instructions when they are in higher positions.
2) Experience, age and education diversity:
   a) Older employees, executives and managers do not treat younger employees with superiority, instead, they treat them as their sons, teaching them and advising them.
   b) Younger employees should respect older and higher executives and managers and abide to their instructions and learn from them.

Conclusion

People are the core base of any organization, so, caring and concerning about their individual issues is a pillar for success, and that is what stress management fulfils, where it is a declaration that an individual's health is the overall health of the organization.

This is also an indication that separation among employees' different life aspects is no longer an option, hence organizations are becoming responsible and involved in these other life aspects, all in an attempt to reduce levels of stress as possible, which means improving work productivity as much as possible.

Reference:

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