Analysis on Individual and Organizational Stress Coping Mechanisms

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Abstract – Stress is a term in psychology and biology, borrowed from physics and engineering and first used in the biological context in the 1930's which has in more recent decades become commonly used in popular parlance. It refers to the consequence of the failure of an organism – human or animal to respond adequately to mental, emotional or physical demands, whether actual or imagined. In this paper the researcher focused on stress coping mechanisms.

Keywords: Stress, Coping Mechanisms.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The term stress was first employed in a biological context by the endocrinologist Hans Selye in the 1930s. He later broadened and popularized the concept to include inadequate physiological response to any demand. It covers a wide range of phenomena, from mild irritation to drastic dysfunction that may cause severe health breakdown, as reported in Indian Journal of Industrial Relations, 1992. 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. Stress is the spice of life and the absence of some degree of stress makes life dull, monotonous and spiritless. The life of employees have turn out to be antagonistic due to occupational pressures, tight scheduling that never seems to end on time, unsupportive colleagues, critical bosses , incompetent subordinates and other irritating factors may all have a cumulative effect in making the day to day life quite disconsolate. Stress may be considered as a situation of tension experienced by individual facing extra ordinary demands. It is found that major reasons for stresses are role conflict, role ambiguity, over load and under load, internal relationship, ineffective communication, sharing of responsibilities and job changes climate within the company. Excessive stress harms the individual performance and experience illness, absenteeism, turnover, errors, accidents, dissatisfaction and reduced performance.

An optimum level of stress is needed to spur employees to peak performance. It is observed that various soft skills can be adopted in the organizations to manage stress, and boost work performance. It advocates certain positive measures which if adopted can facilitate employees perform well and contribute professionally towards the growth and success of the organization. Azizi Yahaya, Noordin Yahaya, atl (2009) attempted to find out the causes of occupational stress within the organization and the implication on job satisfaction and intention to leave and absenteeism. The finding showed that occupational stress does not have direct effect on intention to leave and absenteeism but have direct negative effect on job satisfaction. Job satisfaction has negative effect on intention to leave and absenteeism. Bhattacharya Sunetra and Basu Jayanti (2007) in the article "Distress, Wellness and organizational Role Stress among IT Professionals: Role of Life Events and Coping Resources", attempted to explain the effect of sex and age as well as the predictability of the variables from stressful life events. Results of the study revealed that women experienced greater wellness and older personnel experienced more distress. Nasurdin, Aizzat Mohd Ramayah, T. Kumaresan, S(2005) in their study tried to identify the influence of organizational variables (conflict, blocked career, alienation, work overload, and unfavorable work environment) on job stress among managers and to examine whether this relationship varies according to the individual's level of neuroticism. The results of the study conveyed the fact that neuroticism was found to moderate the effects of the three organizational stressors

(alienation, work overload, and unfavorable work environment) on job stress.

A. Khetarpal& G. Kochar (2006) in their study attempted to provide a preventive and positive approach to women experiencing stress at work and at home. To find out the level of role stress and to identify key role stressors, the OSI inventory by A. Krivastava was used. It was found that majority of women were under moderately low level of stress. The key stressors which affect maximum number of women are Poor Peer Relations, Intrinsic Impoverishment and Under-participation. A study conducted by LeRouge, et al (2006) concluded that role stress was positively related to both job satisfaction and organizational commitment and that self-esteem significantly moderated the relationship between role stresses fit and job satisfaction.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURES:

Stress in the current scenario is considered to be universal and people in almost all walks of life experience stress to a very great extent. Due to the impact of globalization the influence of Stress in this era of high technology speed, global competition and consumerism is found to be increasing at a faster rate. Taking its toll on the physical and psychological health of the employees especially the managers, it is also found to be affecting the productivity and functioning of an organization. The direct and indirect costs associated with stress are found to be even greater. Due to its cost, the critical importance of a stress free work life has been recognized. Work stress is thought to affect individuals' psychological and physical health, as well as organizations' effectiveness, in an adverse manner. Workers who are stressed are also more likely to be unhealthy, poorly motivated, less productive and less safe at work. The impact of stress free work atmosphere on the competitive advantage of the organization cannot be under estimated. Researches carried out in the Indian perspective support the fact that work related stress and mental fatigue is found to affect the Indian employees at the managerial cadre to a very great extent. In such an environment, it becomes the responsibility of the employing organizations and the individual to identify the causes of stress at the workplace and make efforts to reduce them for the effectiveness and efficiency of both individuals as well as the organization.

At workplace, stress related to the role performed by the employee in the organization is one of the important determinants of successful adjustment and subsequent performance of an employee. Stress induced due to roles performed by individuals as employees has been considered as a potent organizational stressor. Role stress is the stress experienced by the persons because of their roles they play in the organization pertaining to jobs. Considering role stress as a debilitating syndrome, this study has been undertaken with an aim to systematically investigate the factors causing role stress amongst managers in both public and private sector. The causes of role stress are important not only for its potential implications for stress management at public and private sector organizations among managers but also for enhancing an understanding of strategic human resource management. With this aim, the study makes an effort to identify the sources of role stress experienced by the managerial employees.

Role stress refers to the conflict and tension due to the roles being enacted by a person at any given point of time. (Pareek, 2003). Enacted in the context of organizations, such role stresses are called organizational role stress. Any organization may be perceived as a system of roles. These roles are different from positions or offices in the organization. According to Katz and Kahn (1966), office is a relational or power related concept. Pestonjee and Pareek (1997) explain role as the totality of formal tasks, informal tasks and acts as organized by an individual. Each individual is a member of social systems and the expectation as well as demand of one may put pressure on the other. There are 2 role systems: Role Space and Role Set. Stress results from a mismatch between the demands and pressures on the person, on the one hand, and their knowledge and abilities, on the other. It challenges their ability to cope with work. This includes not only situations where the pressures of work exceed the worker's ability to cope but also where the worker's knowledge and abilities are not sufficiently utilized and when there is a conflict in roles played by them in the organization.

Beehr and Newman (1978) define occupational stress as "A condition arising from the interaction of people and their jobs and characterized by changes within people that force them to deviate from their normal functioning".

Stress is often developed when an individual is assigned a major responsibility without proper authority and delegation of power. Interpersonal factors such as group cohesiveness, functional dependence, communication frequency, relative authority and organizational distance between the role sender and the focal persons are important topics in organizational behavior.

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Occupational stress relates to the experience of stress in one's place of work, occupation or employment. Occupational stress is a state of tension that is created when a person responds to the demands and pressures that come from work, family, and other external sources, as well as those that are internally generated from self-imposed demands, obligations and self-criticism. The terms work stress, job stress, or occupational stress is used interchangeably [Dollard, M.F, 2003]. Employers and governments have had increasing concern about occupational stress for over twenty years [Le Fevre, M., Matheny. J., &Kolt, G. S., 2003]. The cost of occupational stress is a recognized problem around the world [Dollard, M.F, 2003].

In a survey of 23 different banks which included public , private, and foreign banks in Pakistan stated that the banking sector is becoming increasingly competitive around the country and the level of product and service quality being offered to the customers is almost the same [Rahim, S. H., 2010]. Hence, the bank management adds more responsibilities on the shoulders of its employees, resulting in more pressure on them, with increasing

psychological problems, i.e. Stress, strain, anxiety, depression, sleep disorders, etc. Sankalp, S Pushpa N. Jeetendra in their article in 2010 found that the privatebank employees experienced higher organizational role stress than their public bank counterparts. Katyal, S, Jain M. &Dhanda B. in 2011 studied 100 employees from nationalized and non-nationalized banks having minimum one year of job experience in a bank in Chandigarh. The findings revealed a highly significant difference in the job stress of employees working in nationalized and non-nationalized banks, with employees of non-nationalized banks having higher job stress as compared to their counterparts working in nationalized banks. Malik Nadeem, 2011, in his study on the occupational stress of employees in public and private sector banks in Quetta city, Pakistan stated that occupational stress is higher among private bank employees as compared to public bank employees. In sectors, the role overload, role authority, role conflict, and lack of senior level support were the major stressors. Sharma J. & Devi A., in their paper on "Role stress among employees: an empirical study of commercial banks" stated that public sector employees feel stressful by being pigeonholed in one position for long.

Shahid, N., M. Latif, K., Sohail, N. S. & Muhammad, A., in his study on branch level managers, operational managers, supervisors, and officers (credit officers, remittance officers, customer services officers and relationship officers) of a bank stated that bankers are under a great deal of stress due to many antecedents of stress such as lack of administrative support, excessive work demand, problematic customer relations, coworker's relationship, family and work life balance, and risk involved in the job. Paruk, N. & Singh A. M., studied four banks in South Africa. The research proves that the age of the respondents and the level of stress experienced by the respondents were related in terms of where they were in their life cycle. Different age groups felt the effects of stress differently and as stated in the literature this could be due to different pressures and responsibilities being placed on the individual within a particular age bracket and level in the organization. Adunola, O. & Patrick, D in their study in 2012 has analyzed on Nigerian bank employee's state that negative perceptions of the culture within the organizations contribute to workplace stress.

3. STRESS COPING MECHANISMS

Each individual needs a moderate amount of stress to be alert and capable of functioning. The consequences of stress are multifaceted, most of them are interdependent i.e., an outcome of psychological effects due to stress situations may develop in the form of physiological problems, and

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this in turn, may affect individuals behavior at home and at workplace, thus, organization suffers from these bad effects of stress, that could be more dangerous. Many researchers sought to find what could be done to counteract stress so as to prevent its negative outcomes. Normally, coping is known as a response that intends to reduce the factors that cause stress or to modify the behavioral reaction of an individual towards stressful circumstances in a beneficial way.

Stress does not have to be viewed as a bad thing, for there is only one kind of person without conflicts-a dead one. However, too much stress is harmful and measures should be taken to tackle it with the hope of eventually reducing it. Many strategies have been developed to help manage stress in the work place.

Individual and organizational factors are the reasons for stress and the consequences may found to be negative at both individual and organizational levels. On this basis, stress management mechanisms have been identified as under:

i)   Individual stress coping mechanisms; and

ii)   Organizational stress coping mechanisms.

3.1 INDIVIDUAL STRESS COPING MECHANISMS:

The variety of ways of preventing, diverting, or controlling stress is probably as great as the variety of stressors and such measures and techniques may be directed at any one or more of the three factors in the stress situation: stressors, context, vulnerability. Individual stress management includes a training to be given through education and employee assistance programs to deal with the stress. In such programs workers are taught about nature and sources of stress, its effects, and the use of personal skills to help them reduce and manage their stress. Individuals to reduce stress continually in order to be in a free state of mind always adopt coping ways. Pareek (1993) has "distinguished between effective and ineffective coping strategies; effective coping strategies are approach strategies, which confront the problem of stress as a challenge and increase the capability of dealing with it by including efforts to increase physical and mental preparedness for coping through physical exercises, yoga and meditation". The various individual stress management mechanisms are:

Time Management: If an individual inadequately and improperly utilizes the time, it causes anxiety. If one follows a proper time scheduling as mentioned below, it is easy to overcome and reduce stress. Time allocation to various activities is to be done on the basis of the importance and time demands; and some minor task can be delegated to the subordinate for effective use of time.

Physical Management: Physical exercises are of great help in relieving tension and stress. Physical exercises include practice of deep breathing and relaxation skills that helps in diverting one's mind from work stress and becomes a source to "let off stream". A physical exercise helps body to inhale oxygen in a right way, thereby, increasing blood flow to the entire body that helps in promoting a healthy secretion from body glands keeping body organs active. It increases the immunity of the individual to deal with the stress. Physical exercise includes walk, swimming exercises, dancing, lifting, and outdoor games, etc., that provides a body to deal with stressful situations.

Psychological Management: It manages stress arising because of psychological tensions. To manage this type of stress, the following are the techniques that one can use are stated as follows: Relaxation-The relaxation of the mind can be done through meditation, hypnosis, biofeedback, Antigenic training, and progressive relaxation. Relaxation can be achieved in a variety of ways, like listening to music, going for walk, vocation, biofeedback or meditation. The purpose is to get that stage where there is a deep physical relaxation thereby detaching one from the stressful situations.

3.2   ORGANIZATIONAL   STRESS   COPING MECHANISMS

At organizational levels, stress levels of employees can be reduced by actually, giving them the job as per their capabilities and skills. A total removal of stress is impossible at workplace, rather, certain amount of stress is desired to be active and work properly. Enthusiasm is very much required in life, whether at home or workplace, to be fit and for leading a good life, and also to develop a happy atmosphere all over, thereby, reducing stress. Stress levels should be reduced to a particular level of patience of an individual and should not be fully eliminated. The following stress coping mechanisms can be adopted by the organization:

Selection and Placement- The job of the individual must match with his /her personality characteristics otherwise; it will be a major cause of stress. For this, proper individual selection and placement is required. Goal Achievements- If goals are not set clearly in the organization, then challenging and unattainable goals causes stress in individuals. To eliminate stress arising out of this, organization can involve employees in setting targets through participation, thus, motivating them and reducing their frustration and lack of clarity of goals. The technique of Management by Objectives (MBO) can be used for goal setting.

Unambiguous Role-If roles are not clear to individuals in the organization, then role stress increases that may be in the form of role ambiguity, role overload, and role conflicts. To reduce role stress, role should be defined clearly by the organization that helps in reducing the chance of role conflict. Guiding, negotiating, and sharing can be used to avoid stress. Communication and

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Counseling-Formal communication in organization is a cause of number of problems related to inter-personal misunderstandings leading to stress. Various methods such as building a communication path, etc., can be used to deal with the stress. The client gets an opportunity to deal with his own problems creatively and to look for solutions himself. Support and guidance from professionals like psychiatric social workers and psychologists is necessary. One way in which firms can give managers the opportunity to spot stress in their staff is the organization of once or twice yearly 'appraisal and counseling sessions'. Such sessions enable and should provide an opportunity for the employee to raise problems without having to take the initiative to approach his senior colleague. The employee under stress must be tactfully encouraged to admit his problem and accept help. In general, such counseling should be non-directive, and consist of patient and sympathetic listening rather than the provision of slick answers.

Career Planning and Guidance-Organization must aim at employee career guidance and development. If one gets overburdened, it should be possible to turn to an easier, but nevertheless satisfying job, in which one's knowledge and experience is of special value. A company policy can be made to keep employees for a shorter period in specialist jobs than we do now, and to reserve a number of those specialist jobs for our older employees. This means that in specialist functions the 'practical experience in a management function' element may be brought in more strongly, while management positions in the line organization will be occupied by more vital, younger subordinates and with the technical and social developments taking place in the line departments. Efforts should be made by the organization to develop career programs, education, and development programs. Organizational Structure and Climate- If organizational climate is not good, e.g., bureaucratic, autocratic, authoritative, and ambiguous administration, it will lead to high stress levels. One can think of altering the organizations formal structure by making it less bureaucratic by 'flattening' the organization in order to shorten the chain of information or by integrating various departments in order to facilitate the smooth functioning at workplace.

Welfare Programs- Wellness programs are activities that organizations sponsored to promote good health (Gebhart & Crump 1990). There are three main types of wellness programs (Robert & Harris 1999; Jeffrey 1986). The first are programs aimed at raising awareness and providing information. The second type of wellness programs involves employees in ongoing efforts to modify their lifestyles. The third type of wellness programs has as its goal the creation of an environment that will help employees maintain the healthy life style developed in the other programs; these programs are directed towards employee's physical and mental conditions. Such program aims at developing a positive attitude in employees towards life.

Management of Functioning- Being prepared to look continuously for indication of employee's functioning enables us to take action at an early stage. Building up a clear picture of how someone typically fulfils his or her job of his or her capabilities and incapability's, gives us a chance to notice relatively minor deviations or crisis with more substantial impact. We may thus be prompted to discuss their functioning with employees and so work towards attacking problems and setting new goals. It might be a suggestion, if someone is exposed to stress, not to focus on what he still does, but on what he neglects. It is very probable that his problems are in this area. Stress management is increasingly drawing attention of the management experts not only as a remedial measure but also as a way to resource management. If the workplace can be made little better, the increase in the achievement of the organization may be many times more.

CONCLUSION

Each individual needs a moderate amount of stress to be alert and capable of functioning. Most of the stress in the organization is caused by the climate and strategies of the organization. The coping mechanisms and regulatory measures are the tactical means for dealing with the stress; they may be implemented as needed for the short term relief of occasional undue stress. If one is seriously interested in managing one's own stress levels so as to enjoy maximum benefits of stress while reducing to a minimum the adverse effects of distress, a more comprehensive approach, a long term strategy may be required.

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