

Effective Techniques to Manage Stress at the Workplace

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Abstract:

Suffering from stress is a very common experience nowadays but, sometimes, stress affects one's feelings, thought process, and controls bodily activities. Thus, the frequent checking of stress and its triggers is very necessary for everyone, especially for jobholders. The negligence of checking of stress leads to many problems such as unproductive outcomes, health issues, etc. The unchecked stress and its triggers greatly affect one's health and mental conditions. The imbalance of the mind is one of the outcomes of stress. Stress damages the mental equilibrium of the individuals. When individuals lose mental balance, they cannot perform perfectly. Stress at the workplace affects the productivity of an organization and it also tells upon the well-being of the employees. The organization loses its profits. Thus, it becomes a must activity to deal with stress at the individual level as well as organizational level. At the organization level, the HR departments and the management of the organizations have to take necessary steps, first of all, to prevent the stress triggers and to manage the prevailing stress. At the individual level, the employees should try to deal with workplace stress. Keeping the above factors in mind, the authors of this paper aim to identify the problems faced by staff in the workplace due to stress; to analyze stress triggers and their results at the workplace. This paper focuses on finding the remedies to minimize or neutralize stress at the workplace and suggests what necessary techniques should be followed by both management and employees to negate stress at the workplace.

Keywords: stress at workplace, types, symptoms, reasons, consequences, techniques

Introduction

Stress is an emotional imbalance and/or physical ailment that is caused by an unexpected experience or occurrence. A mental and/or bodily reaction to a change or sudden occurrence can be termed as stress, The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines, "pressure or worry caused by the problems in somebody's life." "Stress is our body's response to pressure. Many different situations or life events can cause stress. It is often triggered when we experience something new, unexpected or that threatens our sense of self, or when we feel we have little control over a situation" (Mental Health Foundation).

The imbalanced responses of body and mind to the work environment and work demands can be termed as workplace stress. Workplace stress can be an outcome of the conflict between job performance requirements and the inability of an employee to meet the job demands. Beehr and Newman (1978) opine, "Stress is 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." Employees and professionals across the globe experience some sort of stress at their workplace while discharging their duties. "Workplace stress is the reaction that individuals have when some types of work demands do not suit their capacities and knowledge, or when work pressures exceed one's ability to handle it effectively" (Semmer, 2007). The recent reports of the American Psychology Association (APA) reveals that in recent years, the quantity of stress increases among the employees as the management of the organizations put a lot of pressure on the employees by asking them to complete the tasks within the extremely impossible time schedules; by fixing unreal targets and unclear expectations; by placing unreachable deadlines; by using the word 'urgent' for everything, etc. without facilitating sufficient accommodations for finishing the tasks or targets.

It is widely acknowledged by private organizations, particularly the IT companies and their related organizations, that recently the health care cost is doubled at the individual level and organizational level. The most important factor in doubling the healthcare cost is the stress-related illness. The duration of stress is decided by the level of stress trigger. Based on the duration of stress, it can broadly be divided into short-term stress and long term-stress. Acute stress and episodic acute

stresses are categorized under short-term stress. This short-term stress can also be called eustress that does less harm. The short-term stress is desirable stress and good for getting motivated to finish the tasks within time and that highly influences productivity. The best performances of the individuals come out when this type of stress prevails. Chronic stress is long-term stress and this is also called distress. This undesirable stress is the most dangerous and harmful to relationships, work, and health. This type of stress demeans the morale and motivation of the employees and causes long-lasting physical problems and chronic diseases. Sometimes, people who suffer from long-term stress, show suicidal tendencies.

Types of Stress

Since Stress is responsible for both behavioral and physiological effects, it can broadly be divided into two kinds. They are; Mental/ Emotional stress and physical stress.

Mental stress is also called Emotional stress or Psychological stress. Unnecessary fears for the future, fear of being insulted, fear of committing a mistake, feeling guilty for having done wrong, a sense of inferiority complex, stage fear, etc. are major reasons for manifesting mental or emotional, or psychological stress.

Physical Stress occurs when the body as a whole starts to suffer as a result of a stressful situation and overload of work. The most common physical symptom is a headache because stress causes people to unconsciously tense their neck, forehead, and shoulder muscles. Muscles tense or tight muscles cause headache, and pain in other parts of the body.

Who are prone to feel stress?

The studies of the American Psychological Association reveal that people between the ages of 18-33 are more prone than other age group people. Sensitive people become victims of stress. Individuals with an inferiority complex are prone to stress. Women are more liable to fall prey to stress than men.

Symptoms of Stress

The symptoms or signs of stress or stress triggers can broadly be divided into two types such as signs of psychological stress and signs of physical stress.

Signs of Psychological Stress: Anxiety, depression, mental irritation, frustration, anger, memory problems, lack of concentration, mood swings, compulsive behavior, over-reaction to everyday problems, etc., can be considered as signs of psychological stress.

Signs of Physical Stress: The signs of physical stress are headache, high blood pressure, speedy heartbeat, digestive problems, muscle tension, chest pain, fatigue, difficulty sleeping, low sex drive, etc. A feeling of losing energy is a type of symptom of physical stress.

Identifying the Sources or Reasons of Stress

The first step in the process of avoiding stress at the workplace is to identify the sources or stress triggers for getting stress. Based on the characteristics, the sources of stress can be divided into three categories. By taking the following things into consideration, the individual can identify the responsible elements for creating stress.

Interpersonal and intrapersonal conflicts play a major role in the rise of stress at home and at the workplace. Negative thinking causes for getting stress. The constant thinking of something bad will happen causes the raise of stress. Over ambition is another cause for getting stress. Unnecessary fears or worries about the future may cause stress.

General Reasons

Loss of a dear one or property or job can cause stress; family disturbances lead to suffering from stress; divorce is one of the reasons for having the feeling of stress; financial burdens can cause stress; the uncertainty of future results in having stress; unexpected change in life can cause stress; unproductive results lead to having stress; etc. An individual may feel stressed when their demands exceed the personal and social resources that are available to them. Poor health may cause the raise of stress constantly. Poverty or poor financial conditions or inconsistent income can be a source of the rising stress. Making excuses unnecessarily and lying frequently can be a cause for raising stress at both the workplace and home. Attitude, habits, living style, unlimited wants, unpractical expectations, etc., can be the root causes of stress at home and the workplace. Stress comes into

existence as a result of failure in an attempt, unknown fear, an upsetting situation, facing undeserved humiliation, or a failure.

Psychological Reasons for Causing Stress

The irony of stress is that anxiety, depression, mental irritation, memory problems, unable to concentrate, mood swings, compulsive behavior, etc. are both the common triggers and resultants of stress. They are the outcomes of stress and, at the same time, they are the root causes for raising stress. A sense of depression; high levels of anxiety causes a feeling of stress; a strong feeling of nervousness can be a reason for feeling stress; a feeling of restlessness raises a feeling of stress; a prolonged tensed feeling may cause the feeling of stress; the grief over the loss of somebody or something can cause the feeling of stress; a feeling of guilty cause the feeling of stress; a feeling of uncertainty causes the rise of stress; improper management of stress leads to feeling more stress; etc. One feels stress when things happen out of one's perception. The imbalance of the mind is one of the outcomes of stress.

Workplace reasons for causing stress

Over workload is the main source of stress at the workplace. One's inability to perform equally with their co-workers can be a source of stress. Peer pressure and the unnecessary comparisons between one's work performance and that of their co-workers will lead suffer from stress. When more work is assigned than the actual workload, one feels stress. Unhealthy competition among colleagues for getting hikes or perks or promotions can cause raised stress. One's feeling of being paid less comparatively with fellow workers leads to experience stress. Doing many tasks simultaneously leads to feeling stress. Unreasonable long working hours and unpaid overtime duties lead to feeling stress. Improper working plans or poor management skills of work will lead to the rise of stress. Hazardous working conditions can cause the rise of stress. A suspicion of termination can lead to feeling stress. Deliberate discrimination in work distribution causes the rise of stress. Physical or oral harassment at the workplace causes stress. When there are few chances for growth and advancement in the job, one feels stressed. An unsociable organizational environment or overcrowded workplace can be a source of stress. Unpractical expectations by an employee or the employer can lead to the rise of stress. When there is more work or irrelevant

work than the abilities or skills of an employee causes raised stress. Improper treatment by co-workers or superiors or management will lead to suffering from stress.

The Consequences of Stress

Reorganization and evaluation of the consequences or results of stress at the workplace are very essential since they cramp the work performance and productivity. Stress damages the mental equilibrium of the individuals and when individuals lose mental balance, they cannot perform perfectly. Thus the organization loses its profits. According to Willingham of the United States says, “An estimated one million workers miss work each day because of stress, costing companies an estimated \$602 per employee per year. And absenteeism is to blame for 26 percent of health-related lost productivity in business” (Willingham, 2008).

It is very difficult for one to work properly under stress and it is a known fact that things will go wrong when one is under stress. Workplace stress will definitely affect the employees’ personal life and family relationships because “Stress flows both ways,” says Baime. At the same time, home stress comes to the office and that affects work at the office. Organization cannot produce things within time so it loses their market share and it loses their brand value. Failing to deal with stress will lead to unwanted results such as leaving the job or undergoing a long spell of stress that may cause chronic disease. Those who suffer from psychological stress are prone to suffer from other diseases. Those who fail to withstand the stress and mental strain are susceptible to falling prey to other physical ailments. Those who fail to deal with stress withdraw from their efforts. Stress causes lowering the immunity power of individuals and thus, they become vulnerable to other diseases. There are chances of becoming drug addicts in the case of those who cannot withstand stress. In case of failing to deal with stress, the employees become victims of memory loss. Overeating, addiction to gambling, unnecessary shopping, smoking are other outcomes of untrammelled stress.

Effective Techniques to Manage Stress at the Workplace

Arising and survival of stress is an inevitable phenomenon in every walk of human life so, there is no exception to the organization in this regard. It becomes most challenging for an organization

to take necessary steps to deal with the prevailing stress in their organization and how best the employees and organization manage stress at the workplace is very important. Stress affects the work performance and health of the employees and the revenue of the organization. Workplace stress damages both the employees and the management of organizations. Thus, both employees as individuals and the management have to work on how to check stress at the workplace. To be productive, an organization has to treat it as a must activity to deal with stress at the employee's level as well as organizational level.

Techniques Useful at Organizational Level to Minimize Stress

At the organization level, the HR departments and the management of the organizations whose responsibility is to update occupational skills and to improve the safety and health of employees, have to take necessary steps, first of all, to prevent the stress triggers and to manage the prevailing stress. Dr. Michael Baime explains it well, “If changes are to be made to reduce costly stress in the workplace, employers must truly value the health as well as the productivity of their workers,” he says. “Additionally, the strategy must be a dual approach of organizational changes and encouraging individuals to learn to manage their stress, no matter what the source” (Baime).

Stress in any form and size is the most worrying problem for both employees and organizations as it creates psychological disturbances, emotional imbalance, and physical inactivity that affect the quality of production and decision-making ability. The continual stress demoralizes and demotivates the spirit of the employees. Thus the managements see that there must be some talks, sessions to motivate and mentally energize the employees so that they can effectively handle the stress and can take preventive steps to avoid or pre-manage the stress triggers.

The process of managing stress at the workplace involves many steps: the first step is to identify the problems faced by employees at the workplace due to stress; the second step is to recognize and stress triggers; the third step is to evaluate the consequences of stress at the workplace; the fourth step involves in finding the remedies to minimize or neutralize stress at the workplace.

The management should take feedbacks regularly regarding stress and its management and take necessary interventions promptly to minimize stress at the workplace. The Managements should fix the job targets based on the abilities of the individual employees. The Managements should ensure them of job security, pay salaries perfectly and sufficient to their duties. The management should provide training to the employees on the newly implemented technologies in the workplace. The management should appoint or temporarily hire professional counselors for helping the employees in managing their stress. The management should allow their employees to participate in brief relaxation activities at the workplace. The management should bring change in the workplace environment if necessary. The management should also provide their employees with awareness programs on how to manage stress, mindfulness training, etc.

Techniques Useful at Employee Level to Combat Stress

Stress Management is a program that intends to reduce or avoid (unnecessary) stress in order to improve everyday functioning. In the process of developing an effective stress management program, the first and foremost step that the employees have to take is to make a strong decision to beat down the stress. In the next step, the employees have to identify the stress-causing factors. Since there are internal and external factors that are responsible for manifesting stress, the employees should be careful in identifying the stress-causing factors. After identifying the stress-causing factors, the employees, on their part, have to find out the various intervention methods which effectively deal with these factors.

The more the employees think negatively, the more stress they feel, and their suffering increases more. It is a known fact that thoughts prompt actions and the results of the actions decide the fate of the employees. So, the individual has to think positively. When an individual starts looking at the bright side of their depressed thoughts, there will be a remarkable relief from stress. Once the employees start thinking and behaving positively, the stress gradually disappears from them.

The employees should see the balance between professional life and personal life. The best technique to ease stress is to realize the fact that stress is an integral part of both personal and

professional life. At the same time, they realize the fact that no one can control everything in one's life. This realization gives them great relief from stress.

The employees can effectively manage stress at the workplace by observing others how they cope with stress; by avoiding unnecessary and stress-generating activities, by changing the stressful situation, by adapting to the frequent stressor, by accepting the things they can't change, etc. By sharing their suffering with their superiors or colleagues, the employees can get relief from stress. By learning how to say 'No' to additional tasks, requests that are unnecessary to them, the employees can effectively check the stress at the workplace.

The employees should be in a position to distinguish short-term stress from long-term stress and their triggers. Thus, the process of dealing with stress will become easier. It does not take much time to deal with short-term stress. In case of short-term stress, the employees should take breaks from the work they are doing, during the break, they should involve in small pleasant talks, reading books, watching comics, listening to their favorite and soothing music, etc. They should spend time in a pleasant environment and meet people in whose company they get pleasure. Brisk walks-walking on the lawn, corridor, etc.- can help deal with small-term stress. Managing the time spent on social media can help to get relief from short-term stress.

In case of long-term stress, participate in prayers, or other religious practices which can divert your mind from the present situation. In case of long-term stress, it is better to consult a therapist. By studying and practicing relaxation techniques, the employees can get relieved from stress.

The ability to cope with stress is a must for every employee since suffering from stress is an inevitable phenomenon at the workplace. Thus, it is very important that how effectively the employees can deal with it.

General Techniques to Manage Stress

Apart from the aforesaid techniques, individuals can use the following steps to minimize or avoid stress. Either in private life or professional life, individuals can effectively check stress by

choosing a profession that suits their tastes and interest as well as their knowledge and skills, by finding alternative goals, by making time for having fun and relaxation, by adopting a healthy lifestyle, by taking healthy food on time, by doing exercises for both body and mind regularly, by doing yoga and meditation, by taking deep breaths wherever they feel low-level stress, by having sufficient sleep, by avoiding harmful habits such as overeating, smoking, alcohol, drugs, etc.

Conclusion

Everyone must realize the fact that it is high time to concentrate on how to minimize stress at the workplace. If the root causes of stress are not checked, there will be a great loss for both employees and the management. The quality and quantity of production will be decreased and the profits will shrink. This brings a great loss for the organizations. At the employees' level, the employees' performance of the employees will go down if they continuously work under stress for a long time. Moreover, they cannot update their knowledge and skills since they cannot be mentally and physically ready to concentrate on anything due to the effects of stress. They will have to spend a lot of money on their health issues in the future. If the employees and management do not deal with the stress triggers, it will be a great loss not only for them but it will be a great loss for the nations also. If individual work under continual stress, this persistent stress show a negative impact on health in their old age and have to suffer mentally, physically, and financially at the ripen age. Thus, effective stress management must be the essential prerequisite for the employees and the management of the organizations. It is noteworthy that there are some advantages of having stress. Stress helps you avoid a dangerous situation or incident, finish your task in time, etc.

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