

Strategies for managing stress in the workplace

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Abstract

Job stress comes in different forms and affects your mind and body in different ways. Small things can make you feel stressed, such as a copy machine that never seems to work when you need it or phones that won't quit ringing. Stress at work is one of the leading causes of people being off sick. The majority of people experience stress at some point during their working life. Major stress comes from having too much or not enough work or doing work that doesn't satisfy you. Conflicts with your boss, coworkers, or customers are other major causes of stress. One of the most common forms of stress is that related to our careers and the workplace. In today's economic difficulty, work related stress is even more pronounced than ever before. Though a person may work for long hours to complete the work and he may achieve his work target but still the output would not be productive or would be ineffective. An attempt has been made in this paper to identify the areas of stress at workplace and to suggest some ways of removing stress.

Keywords: Stress, Productivity, Performance

Introduction

Managing Job Stress

"Finding your passion isn't just about carriers and money. It's about finding your authentic self. The one you have buried beneath other people's need."

Stress refers to a state of mental or emotional strain or tension resulting from adverse or demanding circumstances. In today's competitive scenario the people are facing stiff competition at workplace and they strongly feel that their survival is in danger. They are ignoring their own self, identity and are working beyond their inner capacity or under stress. Stress is a phenomenon which kills a person, his creativity and his identity. Work performance under stress is surely affected. Worries about whether or not people will be able to keep their job, their health insurance, and even keep their homes, plays a large role in stress, and the possibility of losing a job can be scary. Another word for stress is tension or anxiety. When someone experiences stress, there are many different symptoms and repercussions.

Depending on the level and frequency of stress, some of these symptoms can become serious and cause a myriad of problems. Stress affects people both mentally and physically. The heart rate increases, headaches can develop, and often people become irritated much more easily. Individuals who work in high stress or dangerous jobs as well as those who are employed at a place where there is a high pressure environment are often prone to experiencing stress. Work environment, coworker relations, and customer pressures can all contribute to stress at work. Understanding how to manage, minimize, and deal with stress can help people feel more relaxed and react when stressful situations as they arise.

Stress is a mounting dilemma around the world that affects not only the health and welfare of employees, but also the efficiency of organizations. Work-related stress arises where work demands of various types and combinations exceed the person's capacity and capability to cope. Work-related stress

can be caused by various events. Such as a person might feel under pressure if the demands of their job (such as hours or responsibilities) are greater than they can comfortably manage. Other sources of work-related stress include conflict with co-workers or bosses, constant change, and threats to job security, such as potential redundancy. It can be seen with the growing number of absenteeism and employees turnover.

Everyone who has ever held a job has, at some point, felt the pressure of work-related stress. Any job can have stressful elements, even if you love what you do. In the short-term, you may experience pressure to meet a deadline or to fulfill a challenging obligation. But when work stress becomes chronic, it can be overwhelming — and harmful to both physical and emotional health. Unfortunately such long-term stress is all too common. In 2012, 65 percent of Americans cited work as a top source of stress, according to the American Psychological Association's (APA) annual Stress in America Survey. Only 37 percent of Americans surveyed said they were doing an excellent or very good job managing stress.

A 2013 survey by APA's Center for Organizational Excellence also found that job-related stress is a serious issue. More than one-third of working Americans reported experiencing chronic work stress and just 36 percent said their organizations provide sufficient resources to help them manage that stress. You can't always avoid the tensions that occur on the job. Yet you can take steps to manage work-related stress. Most working people don't realize that stress is a vital part of their job. Without some job stress you wouldn't be very productive. That's why, when your boss places reasonable demands on you (like giving you a deadline you both agree on) it can actually help you get the job done more efficiently. There are many (stress-related) factors that can effect your performance at work. For one thing, each worker handles stress differently. So the right amount of job stress for one person might be too much for another.

In addition, not all jobs are created equal. An air traffic controller, coal miner, stock broker, emergency medical

worker or an inner-city school teacher is thought to have more job stress than workers in other professions. But everyone experiences stress differently. That's why some people love roller coasters and other people hate them. So you can't predict whether a job is going to be stressful strictly based on objective measures (if there were such a thing) of how stressful a job might be. That's why determining how much job stress is too much is a tricky proposition. But you can start this process by asking yourself three questions.

1. How adept am I at handling job stress?
2. How much control do I have in my occupation?
3. Is my job environment more stressful than other job environments? How adept am I at handling job stress? Take a look at your coping skills. You can improve your coping skills by learning standard relaxation techniques like progressive muscle relaxation, deep breathing and mindfulness. Meditation and regular exercise will also help. Even getting organized can help you cope better with job stress. How much control do I have in my occupation? Nurses often have more stress than doctors; air traffic controllers often have more stress than pilots; and assistant managers often have more stress than managers. Why?

There is a correlation between responsibility and control when it comes to job stress. If you have lots of responsibility in your job and little or no control you are going to have more stress. But if your levels of responsibility and control are in balance chances are your stress will be lower.

Workplace Factors Causing Stress

The workplace is an important source of both demands and pressures causing stress, and structural and social resources to counteract stress. The workplace factors that have been found to be associated with stress and health risks can be categorised as those to do with the content of work and those to do with the social and organisational context of work. Those that are intrinsic to the job include long hours, work overload, time pressure, difficult or complex tasks, lack of breaks, lack of variety, and poor physical work conditions (for example, space, temperature, light).

Unclear work or conflicting roles and boundaries can cause stress, as can having responsibility for people. The possibilities for job development are important buffers against current stress, with under promotion, lack of training, and job insecurity being stressful. There are two other sources of stress, or buffers against stress: relationships at work, and the organisational culture. Managers who are critical, demanding, unsupportive or bullying create stress, whereas a positive social dimension of work and good team working reduces it.

An organisational culture of unpaid overtime or "presenteeism" causes stress. On the other hand, a culture of involving people in decisions, keeping them informed about what is happening in the organisation, and providing good amenities and recreation facilities reduce stress. Organisational change, especially when consultation has been inadequate, is a huge source of stress. Such changes include mergers, relocation, restructuring or "downsizing", individual contracts, and redundancies within the organisation.

Most of the time, it's the major sources of stress that lead to job burnout and health problems. Job stress can affect your home life too. Here are some common sources of major job stress, with examples of each:

- **Lack of control:** Feeling as if you have no control over your work or job duties is the biggest cause of job stress. People who feel like they have no control at work are most likely to get stress-related illnesses.
- **Increased responsibility:** Taking on extra duties in your job is stressful. You can get more stressed if you have too much work to do and you can't say no to new tasks.
- **Job satisfaction and performance:** Do you take pride in your job? If your job isn't meaningful, you may find it stressful. Are you worried about doing well at work? Feeling insecure about job performance is a major source of stress for many people.
- **Uncertainty about work roles.** Being unsure about your duties, how your job might be changing, or the goals of your department or company can lead to stress. If you report to more than one boss, juggling the demands of different managers can also be stressful.
- **Poor communication.** Tension on the job often comes from poor communication. Being unable to talk about your needs, concerns, and frustrations can create stress.
- **Lack of support.** Lack of support from your boss or coworkers makes it harder to solve other problems at work that are causing stress for you.
- **Poor working conditions.** Unpleasant or dangerous physical conditions, such as crowding, noise, or ergonomic problems, can cause stress.

Stress Can Be Physical, Psychological and Behavioral

Some of the symptoms of stress are:

- Fatigue and Muscular tension
- Depression
- Sleeping difficulties, such as sleeplessness
- Anxiety
- Discouragement
- Bad temper
- Pessimism
- Feelings of being overwhelmed and unable to cope
- Absenteeism
- Violent behavior
- Kills creativity
- Lack of productive performance
- Problems with interpersonal relationships
- Mood swings and irritability
- Impatience
- Disinterest
- Isolation.

Stress is specifically caused when we are either overburdened or we feel that we are overburdened i.e., when we are not able to manage ourselves.

All the following issues have been identified as potential stressors at workplaces. A risk management approach will identify which ones exist in your own workplace and what causes them. They include:

- Organization culture
- Frequent changes in work profile
- Unfriendly attitude of boss
- Bad management policies
- Job content and demands

- Physical work environment
- Relationships at work
- Lack of support
- Role conflict
- Trauma
- Long hours
- Excessive workload
- Changes within the organization
- Changes to duties
- Job insecurity
- Lack of autonomy
- Insufficient skills for the job
- Over-supervision
- Inadequate working environment
- Lack of proper resources
- Lack of equipment
- Few promotional opportunities
- Harassment
- Discrimination
- Poor relationships with colleagues or bosses
- Crisis incidents, such as an armed hold-up or workplace death.

How to Manage Stress?

- Set your daily targets
- Always think positively
- Spare some time for your family and for your self
- Involve yourself in the work which you like the most
- Have respect for your Job
- Take healthy diet
- Give priority to work according to their importance
- Exercise daily

Work-related stress is a growing problem around the world that affects not only the health and well-being of employees, but also the productivity of organisations. Work-related stress arises where work demands of various types and combinations exceed the person's capacity and capability to cope. Work-related stress can be caused by various events. Stress level varies person to person. There is no single successful way of managing stress for every kind of person. If one wishes to come out of stress, then he has to help himself as he better knows the technique which may be best for him to come out of Stress. Success in managing and preventing stress also depends on the culture in the organization. Stress should be seen as helpful information to guide action, not as weakness in individuals. A culture of openness and understanding, rather than of blame and criticism, is essential. Building this type of culture requires active leadership and role models from the top of the organization, the development and implementation of a stress policy throughout the organization, and systems to identify problems early and to review and improve the strategies developed to address them.

Strategies for Managing Job Stress

While many of the methods of preventing job stress need to be developed and supported by the organization, there are things that workers can do to help you better manage job stress.

Here are some tips for dealing with the stress from your job:

1. Modify your job situation. If you really like your employer, but the job has become too stressful (or too

boring), ask about tailoring your job to your skills. And if you got promoted into a more stressful position that you just are not able to handle, ask about a lateral transfer — or even a transfer back to your old job (if that's what you want).

2. Get time away. If you feel the stress building, take a break. Walk away from the situation, perhaps walking around the block, sitting on a park bench, taking in a little meditative time. Exercise does wonders for the psyche. But even just finding a quiet place and listening to your iPod can reduce stress.
3. Nobody is perfect. If you are one of those types that obsess over every detail and micromanage to make sure "everything is perfect," you need to stop. Change your motto to performing your best, and leave perfection to the gods.
4. Put it in perspective. Jobs are disposable. Your friends, families, and health are not. If your employer expects too much of you, and it's starting to take its toll on you, start looking for a new job/new employer.
5. Fight through the clutter. Taking the time to organization your desk or workspace can help ease the sense of losing control that comes from too much clutter. Keeping a to-do list — and then crossing things off it — also helps.
6. Talk it out. Sometimes the best stress-reducer is simply sharing your stress with someone close to you. The act of talking it out — and getting support and empathy from someone else — is often an excellent way of blowing off steam and reducing stress. Have a support system of trusted people.
7. Cultivate allies at work. Just knowing you have one or more co-workers who are willing to assist you in times of stress will reduce your stress level. Just remember to reciprocate and help them when they are in need.
8. Find humor in the situation. When you — or the people around you — start taking things too seriously, find a way to break through with laughter. Share a joke or funny story.
9. Have realistic expectations. While Americans are working longer hours, we can still only fit so much work into one day. Having unrealistic expectations for what you can accomplish sets you up for failure — and increased stress.
10. Maintain a positive attitude (and avoid those without one). Negativism sucks the energy and motivation out of any situation, so avoid it whenever possible. Instead, develop a positive attitude — and learn to reward yourself for little accomplishments (even if no one else does).

There is no doubt that stress can cause adverse affects to workplace productivity: poor work performance, increased absenteeism, and diverted administrative and time management. Instead of taking a passive approach, we need be pro-active and take responsibility for our actions and limit the amount of anxiety a person can acquire in a given situation. If no action is taken, it will likely cause inefficiencies, health problems, and ultimate burnout of the employee in the workplace. Every employee has a different breaking point. Ken Seis, Senior Partner of Consulting Resource Group International states, "These things (stress) accumulate over time and erode productivity."

Since the causes of workplace stress can vary greatly, so too do the strategies to reduce it. Here are some strategies on how

to minimize job stress so that you can be more efficient and productive in the workplace:

1. **Provide a Fun Working Environment** - Sense of humor and laughter is the key.
2. **Give Employees Variety** - Assign jobs to provide meaning, stimulation, and opportunities for workers to use their skills and talents.
3. **Don't Procrastinate** - Procrastination only breeds stress! It increases the amount of work you need to do to at a given situation. Do the most important tasks first and eliminate the things that take less priority.
4. **Encourage** - Encourage employees that they are doing a good job, encourage them to get enough sleep, and encourage them eat a balanced diet and exercise regularly. Studies have shown that companies who encourage employees to take a "body break" will work more effectively than those who do little or no exercise.
5. **Don't Demand Too Much** - The workload has to be in line with workers' capabilities. Pace tasks so that they are reasonably demanding but not based on pure endurance. The human body can only take on so much in a day!
6. **Promote Participation** - Give employees opportunities to participate in decisions and actions affecting their jobs. Delegate responsibility if you have to and allow others to call their own shots. When they feel they are part of the decision, they are more likely to take responsibility, rather than grumble against their boss and their company.
7. **Define Employee Responsibility** - More often than not we wear "too many hats". Our work roles need to be clear, understandable, and shouldn't be conflicting or uncertain. We need to encourage employees to take responsibility for their own job and for their contribution to the success of the company so that they won't be bogged down with too many responsibilities.
8. **Manage Your Time Effectively** - A good time management tool will help you stay organized, plan and prepare, schedule in advance, and keeping good records helps get things accomplished on time, and thus reduces stress.

Reducing stress will allow for a better work environment and will promote mutual effort amongst your team, resulting in higher quality of work. As things get more efficient in your company you will soon notice an improved bottom line. Stress is inevitable, but there are ways in which we can lessen the load and make the workplace more manageable. Having a supportive management team, organizing your time effectively, and having fun around the workplace are effective ways to minimize stress. If you follow some or all of these examples above, you're on your way to being more efficient and productive!

- **Track your stressors:** Keep a journal for a week or two to identify which situations create the most stress and how you respond to them. Record your thoughts, feelings and information about the environment, including the people and circumstances involved the physical setting and how you reacted. Did you raise your voice? Get a snack from the vending machine? Go for a walk? Taking notes can help you find patterns among your stressors and your reactions to them.
- **Develop healthy responses:** Instead of attempting to fight stress with fast food or alcohol, do your best to make

healthy choices when you feel the tension rise. Exercise is a great stress-buster. Yoga can be an excellent choice, but any form of physical activity is beneficial. Also make time for hobbies and favorite activities. Whether it's reading a novel, going to concerts or playing games with your family, make sure to set aside time for the things that bring you pleasure. Getting enough good-quality sleep is also important for effective stress management. Build healthy sleep habits by limiting your caffeine intake late in the day and minimizing stimulating activities, such as computer and television use, at night.

- **Establish boundaries:** In today's digital world, it's easy to feel pressure to be available 24 hours a day. Establish some work-life boundaries for yourself. That might mean making a rule not to check email from home in the evening, or not answering the phone during dinner. Although people have different preferences when it comes to how much they blend their work and home life, creating some clear boundaries between these realms can reduce the potential for work-life conflict and the stress that goes with it.
- **Take time to recharge:** To avoid the negative effects of chronic stress and burnout, we need time to replenish and return to our pre-stress level of functioning. This recovery process requires "switching off" from work by having periods of time when you are neither engaging in work-related activities, nor thinking about work. That's why it's critical that you disconnect from time to time, in a way that fits your needs and preferences. Don't let your vacation days go to waste. When possible, take time off to relax and unwind, so you come back to work feeling reinvigorated and ready to perform at your best. When you're not able to take time off, get a quick boost by turning off your smartphone and focusing your attention on non-work activities for a while.
- **Learn how to relax:** Techniques such as meditation, deep breathing exercises and mindfulness (a state in which you actively observe present experiences and thoughts without judging them) can help melt away stress. Start by taking a few minutes each day to focus on a simple activity like breathing, walking or enjoying a meal. The skill of being able to focus purposefully on a single activity without distraction will get stronger with practice and you'll find that you can apply it to many different aspects of your life.
- **Talk to your supervisor:** Healthy employees are typically more productive, so your boss has an incentive to create a work environment that promotes employee well-being. Start by having an open conversation with your supervisor. The purpose of this isn't to lay out a list of complaints, but rather to come up with an effective plan for managing the stressors you've identified, so you can perform at your best on the job. While some parts of the plan may be designed to help you improve your skills in areas such as time management, other elements might include identifying employer-sponsored wellness resources you can tap into, clarifying what's expected of you, getting necessary resources or support from colleagues, enriching your job to include more challenging or meaningful tasks, or making changes to

your physical workspace to make it more comfortable and reduce strain.

- **Get some support:** Accepting help from trusted friends and family members can improve your ability to manage stress. Your employer may also have stress management resources available through an employee assistance program (EAP), including online information, available counseling and referral to mental health professionals, if needed. If you continue to feel overwhelmed by work stress, you may want to talk to a psychologist, who can help you better manage stress and change unhealthy behavior.

Conclusion

Work-related stress arises where work demands of various types and combinations exceed the person's capacity and capability to cope. Work-related stress can be caused by various events. Such as a person might feel under pressure if the demands of their job (such as hours or responsibilities) are greater than they can comfortably manage. Stress is a phenomenon which kills a person, his creativity and his identity. Work performance under stress is surely affected. When someone experiences stress, there are many different symptoms and repercussions. Stress affects people both mentally and physically. Work environment, coworker relations, and customer pressures can all contribute to stress at work. Understanding how to manage, minimize, and deal with stress can help people feel more relaxed and react when stressful situations as they arise. Stress can cause adverse affects to workplace productivity: poor work performance, increased absenteeism, and diverted administrative and time management. We need be pro-active and take responsibility for our actions and limit the amount of anxiety a person can acquire in a given situation.

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