

# Essentials of Managing Stress in the Era of Globalization - An Organizational Perspective

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## ABSTRACT

*Stress is experienced by everybody in today's fast changing life, amidst modernization and globalization. There can be no individual with absence of the problem in real terms. It is omnipresent in every day's life of a person, irrespective of his or her position, status, occupation, credentials, etc. Nonetheless, the level and kind of stress constantly varies. All human beings do not possess the same or uniform degree of stress or similar class of pressure. It definitely varies. Many a times, stress or anxiety depends on several factors such as occupation, family environment, friends, relatives, personal etc. A study carried out by Associated Chambers (ASSOCHAM) suggests that many organizations and sectors have the issue related to stress among their employees. Industry bodies such as Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) and Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) have already started creating awareness on the subject throughout India. On the human resource front, personnel are being shifted frequently, adoption of quick hire and fire policies, changes in pay structure, different recruitment and promotion policies to different personnel, etc. happen to be on the rise. Because of these and other factors such as power games, politics and management tactics, employees suffer much. Apart from that, much advanced technological revolutions have made things complex in one way or other. Other issues pertain to working duration, infrastructure, changes in environment, relations with peers, superiors, subordinates and others happen to impact upon employees physically and psychologically.*

*The researcher has developed a few models of stress management. The Factor Model states that whenever, quality in a specific job increases or decreases, it will have a definite impact on the total amount of stress undergone and increase in the quantity of work leads to an increase in the amount of stress experienced by the employee. The Ability Model states that higher the level of ability to perform, lower the effects mentally and physically and the individual might lead a healthier life and vice versa. The level of stress depends on the rate of work demand and as such when the work exerted from an employee increases, the performance comes down and the employee might suffer out of increased anxiety.*

## Introduction

Stress is common to all individuals. It is omnipresent in every day's life of a person, irrespective of his or her position, status, occupation, credentials, etc. Nonetheless, the level and kind of stress constantly varies. All human beings do not possess the same or uniform degree of stress or similar class of pressure. It definitely varies. Many a times, stress or anxiety depends on several factors such as occupation, family environment, friends, relatives, personal etc. In the words of Hans Selye, an undisputed authority on the subject, 'stress in an individual is the rate of all wear and tear caused by life changes'. However, there happens to be no standard definition for the term 'stress'. At the organizational perspective, stress becomes a too often discussed issue and management sometimes involves itself in the process. A specific research done by scientists rating around 250 different jobs revealed that the highest level of stress is experienced by the President of the United States<sup>1</sup>. Other different jobs or professionals wherein a high degree of stress prevailed were academics, medical professionals, fighters, air traffic controllers, public relations officers, etc.

The term 'stress' had been in practice since 15<sup>th</sup> century. A great quantity of research has been carried out from then-on in the discipline. Two different types of stress include Eustress and Distress. The former emerges out of a more positive outlook and the latter drags a person towards negative experiences such as depression, distrust, pessimism and detachment. A study

carried out by Associated Chambers (ASSOCHAM) suggests that many organizations and sectors have the issue related to stress among their employees. Industry bodies such as Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) and Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) have already started creating awareness on the subject throughout India. James Quick and Jonathan<sup>2</sup> in their book '*Organizational Stress and Prevention Management*', opine that the two variants of stress are life stressors and organizational stressors. Life stressors occur due to life changes and life trauma. Organizational stressors are caused due to various factors such as occupations, job security, work overload, physical demands such as temperature, office design, role demands such as conflicts and ambiguity, interpersonal demands such as group pressures, leadership styles and personalities. As the business world is constantly pressurizing employees and technologies towards effectiveness, research on this issue has become an imminent and much desired one. In simple terminology, the level of stress in an individual depends on the quantity of work load multiplied with the quality of work assigned. The model developed by the researcher is given below.

### Organizational Reaction to Stress

The millennium era has witnessed a number of changes in companies around the world. Several forms of strategic alliances, mergers and conglomerations have emerged around the corner.

Oftentimes, quick hire and fire policies are getting stronger day by day, simply because of stringent employee competition. In contrary, the promulgation of regulations and acts regarding employment in organizations and companies are being developed and enacted so as to safeguard the interests of employees. And because of these complex natures of organizations, employees attain several physical as well as mental tribulations. The figures from the British Registrar General's Occupational Mortality Tables<sup>3</sup>, show that the company directors are seven times as likely as clerical workers to have a heart attack; five times as likely to develop ulcers; seven times as likely to commit suicide and approximately, twenty times as likely to have a stroke. Large scale organizations have their own mechanism to tackle the menace of stress.

General Motors, the largest automobile company in the world; for instance has developed a unique identity programme (UIP) to find out the personnel affected by the problem and provide training programmes such as group meditation and yoga<sup>4</sup>. Researchers and scientists around the world acknowledge and have identified that stress has been the single most important destructive force affecting employees in business. The 21<sup>st</sup> century organizations grow with several strategies to answer this particular problem. Newman (1979)<sup>5</sup>, has grouped stress reduction strategies into four categories. These were: psychological condition comprising planning, self awareness and realistic aspirations in life. The physiological conditions

include diet conditioning, sleep orderliness, regular exercise; relaxation and meditation and better anger management. Changing behaviour include: drawing time off from the job, building social belongingness and developing assertive qualities. The last but not the least important aspect includes environmental changing since, environment acts pertinently as the highest active source of anxiety in a human being.

Organizations today adopt several strategies and techniques in drawing up success plans to gain profitability. Commonly, joint ventures, conglomerations, mutual sharing and understanding and other types of resource sharing functions are in practice with the support of governments in many cases. On the human resource front, personnel are being shifted frequently, adoption of quick hire and fire policies, changes in pay structure, different recruitment and promotion policies to different personnel, etc. happen to be on the rise. Because of these and other factors such as power games, politics and management tactics, employees suffer much. Apart from that, much advanced technological revolutions have made things complex. Howsoever, internet and computerization have really made things easier to employees as well as organizations. Other issues pertain to working duration, infrastructure, changes in environment, relations with peers, superiors, subordinates and others happen to impact upon employees physically and psychologically.

## Objectives

The following are the objectives:

- To understand the basic nature of stress and its consequences in working environment
- To understand the method, techniques and strategies of managing stress and its consequences
- To develop and analyze conceptual models on stress management

## Research reviews

Dileep Kumar M (2010), attempted to investigate and compare the level of stress experienced by the employees of the nationalized and non-nationalized banks in Kerala State, India. The researcher found that there is significant difference in the level of occupational stress experienced by the employees. Occupational stress is found to be higher among employees of non-nationalized banks compared to employees working in the nationalized banking organizations.

In yet another research done by Akingunola Richard Oreoluwa (2010), it was found that 83 percent of the total respondents of banking organization in Nigeria were of the opinion that stress affects health negatively and there was evidence of higher level of stress among the executives than the non-executives of the banking organizations.

Kavitha G (2009) found that stress level was very high among the bank employees due to frequent transfers and this reflects family relocation, financial problems and illness of family members.

A study was conducted in the banking industry by Chand and Sethi (1997)<sup>6</sup>, to examine the organizational factors namely role overload, role ambiguity, role conflict under participation, responsibility for persons, poor peer relations, and strenuous working conditions as predictors of job related stress. The study was conducted in a variety of nationalized banks and 150 executives (middle level officers) were selected through purposive and incidental sampling to represent functional areas like administration, general banking, savings, lending, general service, auditing, accounting, rural development etc. The study empirically demonstrated role conflict, strenuous working conditions and role overload to be the clearest and significant predictors of job related stress.

A study by the European foundation for the improvement of living and working conditions in 1997 provided more detailed pictures about sickness, absence and the health of work force. This study, conducted in 1996 among the working population of European Union (EU) surveyed 15800 workers from all over Europe. The findings highlight how pollution and noise cause stress and skeletal disorders among the rising occupational hazards in the EU.

<b>Causes of Absence</b>	<b>Percentage: Recorded on the Sick Note</b>	<b>Percentage: In the Managers' opinion</b>
Cold / flu	93	64
Stomach upset/ food poisoning	76	32
Headaches	59	22
Back problems	46	19
Stress/emotional problems and personal problems	33	52
Monday morning blues	02	32
Sickness of other family members and child care problems	19	35

*Source: The Industrial Society, 1997 – cited Personnel Today, 1997 in Valerie J Sutherland and Cary L Cooper, 'Strategic Stress Management – an organizational approach, Macmillan Publication, 2000)*

From the above table it is clear that cold or flu happened to be causing the highest absenteeism among workers. 33 percent of the workers had opined that stress, emotional and personal problems were the reasons for their absence. In the case of managers' opinion, it stood at 52 percent. Stress had the second largest percentage of workers according to the managers' opinion.

The University of Canterbury<sup>7</sup> recognizes that there are three general strategies for dealing with stress. They are:

- Prevention that aims to identify work related source of stress and eliminate, reduce and

control the source of stress where practicable.

- Management that aims to develop the skills and knowledge which employs and their managers require to recognize the signs and symptoms of stress in themselves and others and developing the coping skills required to cope more effectively with demands that cannot be eliminated or modified
- Treatment that aim to treat stress symptoms through the provision of appropriate professional medical and psychological support

A regularly cited research done by North Western National Life Insurance Company during 1991 found that approximately 35 percent of their employees opined that stress related problems would make them burnout sooner than later<sup>8</sup>. If this is a fact, more meaningfully; the issue needs to be looked into.

A study by Vasanthakalyani<sup>9</sup>, reveals that the pain score of cancer patients was high before installation of music therapy (M=8.35 SD 1.39), in comparison with score after the music therapy (M=2.49 SD 0.09). The difference in pain was statistically significant at 95 percent level of confidence. The level of anxiety in cancer patients was high (M=51.66 SD=7.40) and after music therapy it was found to be less. There were significant changes in physiological variables after the therapy concerning heart rate, respiratory rate, systolic blood pressure and diastolic blood pressure among the patients.

### **Sources and consequences of stress**

Notionally, there exists factors such that, physical ones, psychological and behavioral factors contributing to the level of anxiety. The physical factors relate to occupation, job itself, quantitative and qualitative work load, environment, technology, mechanics and machinery, so on and so forth. Issues such as conflicts, role misunderstanding, ambiguity, information anxiety

and others impact upon the behaviour of employees. However, one can understand that there are both positive and negative effects of stress due to be caused by different factors. Researchers opine that all individuals require some sort of minimum level of pressure for their performance. The positive effects include the following: Increased happiness quotient, increased determination and success in job, healthy aspirations, better health, creativity and innovation, increased motivation and morale, maintaining good relations with others, application of self-examination techniques etc. However, the negative aspects include physical as well as mental exhaustion, tiredness, job hallucinations, increased amount of blood pressure, health hazards, mental decay, disposition, frustration, anger, nervousness, pessimism, thoughtlessness, wrong decisions, problem children, mental illness, unhappiness, decreased efficiency, burnout, unclear decisions, etc. Stress has other dimensions such as acute and chronic stress. Acute stress is the result of temporary stressors and is usually quite intense, but disappears sooner than expected. A good example could be a surprising inspection in a department without any prior intimation; causing emotionally unstable and depressed state of employees. On the other hand, chronic stress prolongs. This can also be termed as grinding stress. It is usually the result of long term problems such that of health and physical issues.

**The Factor Model** - Let the total amount or quantity of stress be denoted as (fAS). The quantity of workloads be denoted by fQWL and quality of work assigned to an employee be denoted as fQWA. Then let us say,  $fAS = fQWL \times fQWA$ . Thus, increase in the quantity of work load leads to increase in the amount of stress (e.g. typist facing heavy tasks to type in a single day). Increase in the quality; leads to decrease in job satisfaction and increased stress (e.g. head of department or organization; without specific instructions on the quantity of work load to be done and being idle for hours together). Whenever quality in a specific job increases or decreases, it has a definite impact on the total amount of stress undergone. If either of the quality or quantity increase or decrease, the value of fAS gets altered.

**The Ability Model of Stress** - The researcher has made provision for the following assumptions in order to develop the model:

### The assumptions

- Ability of a person in performing a specific task; be denoted as (aT)
- Rate of 'employee – demand' exerted by a specific task; be denoted as (eD)
- Degree of stress created in a person; be denoted as (dS)
- Effects of stress - (eS)

### Proposition 1:

Higher the level of ability to perform a specific task (aT); lower the degree of stress (dS) suffered by employee and consequently, lower degree of stress (dS) results in lower consequences (Effects)

### Proposition 2:

Higher the demand exerted from an employee in performing task; higher the degree of stress (dS) as well as effects (eS) and vice versa

### Proposition 3:

Higher the ability to perform; while higher the demand in a task, the individual will relatively suffer lower level of stress, resulting in slighter effects

### Proposition 4:

Lower the ability; while higher the demand exerted upon, the employee will experience severe stress related problems

**The Model Finale** - To conclude; higher the level of ability to perform (aT), lower the effects mentally and physically and the individual might lead a healthier life and vice versa. Henceforth, organizations shall train and educate in order to increase the ability of employees in performing tasks. The employer shall also see that employees are not exerted higher amount of work. If the employer does so, the organization shall see that the employee capabilities are scaled up. Further,

level of stress depends on the rate of work demand and as such when the work exerted from an employee increases, the performance comes down and the employee might suffer out of increased anxiety.

Another important reason pertains to communication barriers prevalent in organizations. Although, the world is much better accustomed with latest technology on communication, barrier in the same will lead to congestion and emulate greater amount of stress among all stakeholders. Hence proper communication saves time, energy, material, methods and financial resources of an organization. Improper communication and gaps lead to diminishing of morale and interest among employees. Therefore, companies shall instill strict rules in closing communication gaps and imitate better MIS systems.

### **Strategies and Techniques**

Apart from the individual coping ways, organizational strategies might help reduce harmful effects of stress. The following steps are necessary from an organizational perspective: Step 1: identification of the factors responsible for causing stress in an individual, Step 2: try to develop coping mechanism on a case to case basis and provide counseling to the affected persons, Step 3: follow up results by testing the affected people

medically and physically. Organization can deploy regular stress related lectures in order to create awareness about the same and instill self-confidence among employees. Organizational tactics aimed at reducing or eliminating stress often includes the following:

- Highlighting the importance of physical working environment and job study
- Modifications in workloads and deadlines set to complete a set of tasks
- Initiation of training on the subject to create awareness and to teach mechanisms
- Development of programmes and lectures on stress management
- Administering several personality development programs such as MDPs, SDPs, Employee Training Programmes, Assistance Programmes, Medical Programmes, etc.

Several stress tackling or reduction mechanisms have been propounded in consultation with academics and subject experts by many companies especially, MNCs. Tata, for instance, as a socially responsible company, was one of the first organizations in the world to have adopted several stress management techniques for its employees. The company is also famous for pioneering corporate social responsibility activities in India. Many a times, employees are greatly affected by stress related problems and as a result the



productivity suffers, which further results in less profitability and lower job satisfaction levels. For these and other reasons, building some sort of action packed strategies becomes imperative particularly, in organizational perspective. The following strategies could be undertaken at the individual level:

- Muscle breathing Exercise and Space
- Biological verification and response
- Implantation of meditation and yoga therapies
- Intellectual streamlining and
- Effectual time and task management.

**Muscle breathing space:** The relaxation techniques involve full profound breathing, relaxation of body muscles and altering the state of consciousness physically. This is necessarily an inexpensive technique and in special cases might require trained experts to help the individual.

**Biological verification and response:** Normally, machines are being used to detect people's stress and to control stress related symptoms. Some of the symptoms include high / low blood pressure, higher heart / pulse rate. This type of machine is available in medical colleges and hospitals. Based on the symptoms, physicians administer medicines to patients.

**Meditation and yoga therapies:** Research shows that practicing meditation as well as yoga therapies induces a great amount of positive energy in an

individual. Also, listening to music liked by employee might be an effective stress tackling mechanism. However, there requires a dearth need for research on the role of music in reducing stress<sup>8</sup>. Occasionally, employees could be exposed to meditation teachings of spiritual gurus.

**Intellectual / cognitive streamlining:** The control of mind necessarily makes things easier. Therefore, it becomes imperative to control and regulate the mental conditions. Mental conditioning involves encouraging employees towards working effectively, continuously and constantly. The wrongdoers shall be provided counseling regularly to minimize negative thoughts and perform effectively.

### General Techniques in Managing Stress

Some other techniques which can act as an efficient deterrent might involve the following:

- Transition from one line of thinking to another or changing the environmental conditions in order to minimize the level of stress.
- Job rotation – one of the techniques to reduce stress levels might act as a balancing strategy
- Openness and clearly communicating to others, including superiors on personal as well as organizational problems and sufferings.
- Administering compulsory yoga / exercise to the employees

- Adoption of regular counseling necessarily to the aggrieved personnel
- Games / sports / exercise at regular intervals
- Provisioning employment opportunities in close concerns where a spouse works
- Arranging regular events / picnics / lunch systems near working place
- Appointment of additional workers / assistants to higher level officers to fulfill necessary conditions on important tasks

Learning humors while at work and at home with family members. This is one of effective tools in mitigating the problem. There is a great deal of acumen in this research as of now. An investigation of 36 female executives revealed that women who

scored higher in a humor test had really higher levels of self-esteem and suffered relatively less frustration<sup>9</sup>. Identifying the factors that were responsible for the problem perhaps, shall be the first step in the management of stress. Once the factors are identified, solutions must be found out in consultation with experts or consultants and choosing the better alternatives. Taking break once in a while is an effective mechanism. Breaks shall be comprised of short trips and tours or activities that make the individual happier. After breaks, the individual shall get back to business as usual; planning, prioritizing and deciding on unfinished tasks and plans for action. Feedback of the entire system is yet another important assignment in managing stress. Thus, feedback may be obtained from juniors, peers, colleagues, superiors and others.



## **Managing Stress – An Action Plan**

The chart above attempts to provide the necessary steps in managing stress:

Therefore, the steps involved in tackling the difficulty of stress can briefly be pointed out in the action plan:

Step 1: Identify and list down in the order of importance the entire causes responsible for pressure / stress / anxiety

Step 2: Develop more than one solution for a particular problem for the sake of convenience

Step 3: Decide and choose the best alternative completely based on your own decisions and act in the given way without much interruptions

Step 4: Once a specific task gets over, sit calm and take a good break – more closely routing towards a short trip or extravaganza entertainment

Step 5: After the off-mood, get back to business as usual. And try not to break-up the planned priorities

Step 6: Jot down unfinished tasks and get feedback yourself

Step 7: Forget not to give a short but effective break and follow steps routinely

## **Conclusion**

Stress related problems pertinently do have a deeper impact upon workers and employees. Developing the working environment and

infrastructure more enjoyable will cause to reduce stress levels and improve morale; deducting stress-related health disasters and also helps develop job performance and quality. A majority of MNCs have understood that it has no other choice but to provide some sort of stress management programme for its employees. The 21<sup>st</sup> century organizations can think of selective music and tunes as an effective mechanism in making employees happier and relaxed while working.

Typically, the era of globalization is witnessing several changes such as, communication tools in the form of email, internet and other electronic, business gadgets like fax machines; Computerized Decision Support Systems; Computer Information Systems; Computerized tools and systems; Advanced Manufacturing Technology (AMTech); Computer Aided Designs (CAD-CAM); Flexible Manufacturing System (FMS), Artificial Business Intelligence etc. Stress affects employees in every organization irrespective of its nature. There are however several strategies to minimize the level of stress in the era of internet and globalization. Companies need to have an investment mindset to sort out this problem although, stress as a whole cannot be completely removed or as such eliminated.

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