

## MANAGEMENT OF STRESSFUL JOBS IN KNOWLEDGE BASED ORGANIZATIONS

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**ABSTRACT:** The issue of stress in organizations has been attached great importance in many debates and studies, being a theme often invoked by managers, employees and HR consultants given the fact that one quarter of workers in Europe report feeling stressed at work all or most of the time, and a similar proportion say that work affects their health negatively. Psychosocial risks for example, monotonous tasks, high work intensity, tight deadlines, work-life unbalance, contribute to work-related stress in workplaces in all EU Member States. So, stress is well present in our lives. The aim of this article is to emphasize the role of stress in employees work, the influence that stress plays in quality of life and to propose some stress prevention measures. **KEYWORDS:** employees' health, stress prevention, organization, human capital, occupational stress.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Employees in a knowledge based organization are increasingly affected by occupational stress, a phenomenon that generates lack of productivity and significant costs.

Technological development, scientific organization of production, development of the means of communication and transportation and the tightening of the competitive environment creates stress, which affects the ability of employees and managers to work efficiently, while also generating high costs for the organization as a whole.

Numerous studies have highlighted the positive effects of work on health: through work, we become better organized; it increases our sense of self-esteem, as well as our efficiency and allows us to develop a social network. At the same time, nevertheless, work can have negative effects on our health. The most rigorous researches have focused on the effects of stress at the workplace and especially on employees' performance. Stress due to the lack of autonomy, role conflict, tense interpersonal relationship among colleagues, employees and superiors, the lack of formal/informal unfair organizational policy have dramatic consequences on the health of employees. In relation to sustainable employment performance, employees' health is seen as a complex state of physical, emotional and social normality. Organizational health is about adapting to the present and shaping the future faster and better than the competition. Healthy organizations don't merely learn to adjust themselves to their current context or to challenges that lie ahead of them; they create a capacity to learn and keep changing over time. Health starts with the right understanding of how it relates to performance. Performance is what an enterprise delivers to shareholders in financial and operational terms. It is evaluated through such indices as net operating profit, return on capital employed, total returns to shareholders, net operating costs and stock turns. Health is the ability of an organization to align, execute and renew itself faster than the competition to sustain exceptional performance over time. It comprises core organizational skills and capabilities, such as leadership, coordination and external orientation, that traditional metrics don't capture [1].

### 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Stress was defined as a stimulus and a response or as a result of stimulus-response interaction, which expresses a certain imbalance of the person's relationship with his or her environment. As the knowledge of the relationship between the person and the environment has increased,

researchers have focused on the nature of this interaction and, still more important, on the mental processes through which these interactions occur. Stress is a term that refers to a sum of physical, mental and emotional strains or tensions on a person or feelings of stress which result from interactions between people and their environment that are perceived as straining or exceeding their adaptive capacities and threatening their well-being [2]. Managers in all industries have made employee engagement a hot button issue because of growing evidence that engagement has a positive correlation with individual, group and organizational performance in areas such as productivity, retention, turnover, customer service and loyalty [3].

Any knowledge management strategy are designed to increase business performance and shall address three components: the work processes or activities that create and leverage organizational knowledge, a technology infrastructure to support knowledge capture, transfer and use, and, a behavioural norms and practices- organizational culture, that are essential to effective knowledge use. (4). In this circumstances, is important to recognise the appearance of stress at work and the methods to deal with it.

Empirical research has shown a negative relationship between empowerment and job stress, suggesting that, as employees are more empowered, their job stress decreases [4]. In addition to stress, increased employee satisfaction helps reduce employee turnover, leaves of absence, and lower work-related disability and violence claims [5]. Morrison [6] have outlined several ways in which the lack of engagement and high turnover rates impact health care organizations. Some of these factors include turnover costs, which, according to Waldman & Kelly [7], range between 3.4% and 5.8% of their operating budget. The most commonly mentioned benefits of investing in employee well-being would be: increased productivity; reduced number of sickness absences; reduced staff turnover and increased retention of skills; and improved staff morale. Also cited are: reduced recruitment and training costs; improved company reputation as a good employer; and improved financial performance and competitiveness. Employees who believe that their organization is supporting them to achieve their goals, allows them to work in decent jobs and has their well-being at heart are most likely to reciprocate with positive discretionary behavior. In what is often referred to as the 'psychological contract', the employment and human resource policies of an employer organization are considered to help shape workers' attitudes and behavior, their satisfaction and well-being [8].

### **3. WORK STRESS AND ITS EFFECTS ON EMPLOYEES**

Prof. Cary Cooper and Prof. Les Worrall identified by studies that managers in UK business have experienced substantial change both in organisational structures and organisational lives, due to the rapid changes in operating environments. Globalization has had a major impact on many business organisation. In UK , around 90% of managers from utilities sector report organisational change in every each year. The incidence of organisational change was found to be very persistently even in manufacturing sector and in public as well. All this changes effect managers and employees in the same times, and have caused a deterioration in quality of their working lives, and can be manifested by stress.

Psychosocial risks and stress at work are among the biggest challenges for safety and health at work. They have a significant impact on the health of people, organizations and national economies. About half of the European workers consider that stress is a common factor at the workplace and that it is the cause of almost half of the total working days lost. As well as other issues affecting mental health, stress is often misunderstood or stigmatized. However, when they are viewed from organizational level and not as an individual problem, psychosocial risks and stress can be managed to the same extent as any other hazard to health and safety at work. Psychosocial risks are rooted in unprofessional conceiving, poor organization and management of the activity, as well as in the inappropriate social context at work and they can have negative effects on the physical, psychological and social health, such

as stress at work, exhaustion or depression. Some common conditions that generate psychosocial risks are:

- excessive volume of work;
- conflicting requirements and lack of clarity regarding the role that has been assigned to the worker;
- lack of involvement in decision-making that affects the worker and the lack of influence on the way of business;
- organizational changes improperly managed, the uncertainty of the workplace;
- Ineffective communication, lack of support from management or colleagues; psychological harassment and sexual violence on the part of third parties.

Overload and under-load at work are potential sources of stress in the workplace. The optimal performance is reached if at the workplace we feel creative, calm and highly motivated to do the job well. When the level of stress is overload, the employees feel the burnout syndrome, exhaustion, can feel tense, sleeplessness, irritable, can do mistakes or accidents.

When the level of stress is under load, employees can experience feelings of apathy, boredom, poor or low morale and lack of self-worth, absence.

Quantitative overload occurs when the employee is given too many tasks to complete in a specified period of time. Quantitative overload occurs when the individual does not feel capable of doing the prescribed tasks. Similarly quantitative under-load means long periods without being occupied; and quantitative under-load means the task does not utilize the skills, ability or potential of the worker.

Lack of control over the place of work is manifested in some occupations, such as fire fighters, air traffic controllers, the ambulance service, pilots and anesthetists. All of them deal with periods of inactivity followed by periods of maximum concentrations. Occupational stress is above average and continuously for certain categories of jobs as doctors, nurses, drivers, salespeople and police officers.

When considering the requirements of the work, it is important not to confuse the psychosocial risks, such as excessive workload, with the conditions under which the work environment, although particularly stimulating and sometimes a challenge, is favorable, the employees are well trained and motivated to pursue better service tasks. Favorable psychosocial environment can enhance performance and personal development, as well as mental and physical well-being of workers. When the requirements of the work exceed the ability of workers to lead them to fruition, the latter are affected by stress. In addition to mental health issues, workers experiencing prolonged stress may subsequently develop serious physical health problems, for example, cardiovascular or musculoskeletal disorders. At the level of the organization, the negative effects include poor general economic performance, increased absenteeism and the increase of injuries and accidents. Absences tend to be longer than those based on other causes and stress in the workplace can contribute to a higher rate of early retirement. Estimates of the costs incurred by enterprises and society due to work stress are considerable, amounting to billions of Euros at a national level.

So in order to deal with psychosocial risk must be taken measures like:

- Provision of training;
- Changes to the way work is organized;
- Confidential counseling for the employees;
- Redesigning the working area;
- Changing to working time management;
- Set-up of conflict resolution procedure.

There is growing recognition of the importance of a holistic approach in the promotion and cultivation of a healthy work environment [8]. A holistic approach aims to address all aspects of the work environment, including both physical and social determinants. This holistic

approach should be part of any comprehensive management approach that aims to protect workers' health and safety through prevention and management initiatives, and to promote resilience, engagement and well-being through health promotion activities.

The evidence indicates that interventions have a better chance of having an impact upon psychosocial working conditions and the health and well-being of employees if they follow a structured process that involves the active involvement and participation of employees and social dialogue [9] [10] [11]. All the models used are based on the first models developed, such as Deming's Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) model developed in the 1950s [12]. The basic principle of the PDCA model is that a strategy is made (Plan) and implemented (Do) before it is evaluated (Check) and then improved (Act). The PDCA model will not be developed in this paper but it is important to be emphasized the importance of the evaluation phase that should take place after every cycle of the PDCA model.

The evaluation stage aims to critically assess the short-term and long-term outcomes of an intervention, as well as the process of implementation and the changes that have taken place (for example, in working conditions and procedures, in the health and well-being of employees, and in turnover and absenteeism) [11]. Evaluation will allow organisations to determine how well and in what respect the intervention worked. Therefore, the aim of the evaluation process is to show what is, and what is not, working; and it seeks to identify factors inherent to the content and context of the intervention that are important for success [13] [14] [11].

#### **4. QUALITY OF LIFE AND STRESS PREVENTION**

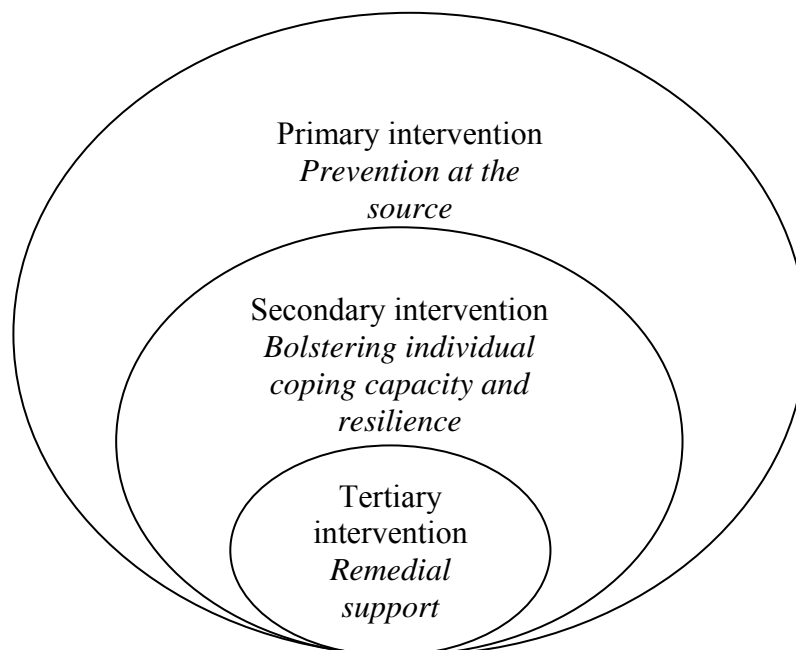
"Quality of life" is a multidimensional concept that deals with issues related to the context in which a person lives, the life conditions, the subjective well-being, up to perceptions regarding society at large. Thus, the quality of life is a subjective perception of the amount of an individual in connection with his or her position in society, involving personal standards and expectations of an economic (financial), cultural, physical (absence of pain, mobility), social (interpersonal relationships, communication, social roles) and political nature [15].

With a view to protecting the employees' health, the importance attached to human resources for the effective fulfillment of the objectives and for augmented strength in a market in continuous development and competition has been increasing throughout the years. Under the process of globalization, rapid changes have been taking place at the technological, legal, professional and communication levels, with significant and beneficial effects. However, such changes in the conditions of work cause the pressure to get higher, the quantity and complexity of information to grow, demanding higher efficiency and speed in carrying out the tasks [16]. Work becomes more complex, if we take into account such aspects as the more comprehensive working environment, rewards, positive feedback, communication, employee well-being, aspects that influence the status of the organization in terms of performance and productivity. At the same time, the lack of health staff has been bringing the companies the burden of ever higher costs due to medical expenses (paid holidays, treatments, severance wages); in developed countries these expenses have reached even 12-15% of GDP according to World Health Organization.

Incidentally, "the State of physical and mental health of a community is the most relevant indicator of the degree of culture and civilization: it is the measure or potential for survival and development" [17]. This outlook can be applied to the organizational framework, in which the relationships and processes follow up the dynamics of a company. Firstly, there is the excessive bureaucratization of the institutions, which has the effect of rendering the main generators of anxiety, stress and physical and mental exhaustion. Then, disorganization and lack of coherence, together with the existence of a management style with the organization, leading to a high degree of insecurity and lack of motivation among employees, known by the name of "the entropy factor" in organizational psychology. Motivation and performance, on the one hand, and inter-personal conflicts affecting staff morale, on the other, make up the climate in which individuals carry out their activities. In a poorly structured organization, the

control and morale are affected, the distrust in the future, the feeling of insecurity and social alienation arise.

There are three different approaches to the problem of occupational stress, each addressing different issues (figure 1).



**Figure 1.** Comprehensive interventions for the management of psychosocial risks

The most common approach is to offer medical services to people with such problems, most often in the form of employee assistance programs. This is a reactive approach, when the problem already exists, and major efforts focus on the consequences of the treatment. This approach typically involves efforts to identify and reduce the factors that cause stress. In contrast, primary prevention seeks to identify and reduce sources of stress, which may be linked to factors that may or may not work. This approach can be reactive (namely, dealing with existing problems that produce stress) or proactive (prevent provocative stress conditions from becoming a problem), but it deals directly with the source(s) of stress at work, and not just with the results of exposure to stress factors. At an intermediate level between primary and tertiary approach there is secondary prevention, which aims to reduce symptoms of stress before they have striking consequences. Commonly called “management of stress”, these programs are geared towards individuals and, in the usual way, try to educate employees regarding the nature of stress and teach them specific techniques for reducing the symptoms of physiological and psychological stress by offering them relaxation.

A qualitative meth analysis of several studies about occupational stress management reveals till now the superiority and the higher efficiency of the individual oriented management strategies in different organizations, although in the future it is recommendable a larger interest and application for organizational management strategies – despite higher costs, but better effects after a longer period of time [18].

The most common types of stress management strategies are progressive relaxation of muscles, biofeedback, meditation and cognitive-behavioral skills.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

In order for employees to be able to develop in an optimal way, both in terms of their own needs, talents and values and in terms of organizational goals, the organization tries to meet the individual needs of training and to develop individual talents in a mutually beneficial way. Organizational interest lies in keeping high-performance, optimizing personnel motivation and results, and developing employees from the professional point of view so that they can

deal with the key positions in the organization in the near future. This involves the possibility for employees to be able to prepare themselves in time and in due course for their future steps in their career.

Health promotion at work is not only a compliance with the legal requirements in the field of health and safety, but also a way of actively supporting employees by employers in order to improve the general state of health and comfort. In this process, it is important to involve employees and to take account of their needs and opinions regarding the organization. By improving the health and well-being of workers, health promotion at the workplace has many positive effects, such as reducing staff turnover and absenteeism, increasing motivation and productivity, and improving the image of the employer as an organization with a positive and responsible attitude.

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