

An Overview of Stress Management at Work Place

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Abstract

We all experience stress in our lives. Because the vast majority of health problems are caused or influenced by stress, it's important to understand how stress affects our body and learn effective stress management techniques to make stress work. Stress is a feeling of emotional or physical tension. It can come from any event or thought that makes us to feel frustrated, angry, or nervous. Stress is our body's reaction to a challenge or demand. In short bursts, stress can be positive, such as when it helps us to avoid danger or meet a deadline. But when stress lasts for a long time, it may harm our health.

Introduction

What is Stress?

Stress is a general term applied to various psychologic (mental) and physiologic (bodily) pressures experienced or felt by people throughout their lives.

Stress is a normal feeling. There are two main types of stress:

- **Acute stress.** This is short-term stress that goes away quickly. You feel it when you slam on the brakes, have a fight with your partner, or ski down a steep slope. It helps you manage dangerous situations. It also occurs when you do something new or exciting. All people have acute stress at one time or another.
- **Chronic stress.** This is stress that lasts for a longer period of time. You may have chronic stress if you have money problems, an unhappy marriage, or trouble at work. Any type of stress that goes on for weeks or months is chronic stress. You can become so used to chronic stress that you don't realize it is a problem. If you don't find ways to manage stress, it may lead to health problems.

Definition of Stress

Stress is defined as “a state of psychological and physiological imbalance resulting from the disparity between situational demand and the individual's ability and motivation to meet those needs.”

Dr. Hans Selye, one of the leading authorities on the concept of stress, described stress as “the rate of all wear and tear caused by life.”

Stress can be positive or negative:

1. Stress is good when the situation offers an opportunity to a person to gain something. It acts as a motivator for peak performance.
2. Stress is negative when a person faces social, physical, organizational and emotional problems.

Factors that are responsible for causing stress are called stressors.

Causes of Stress

The major causes of stress at work or in organization:

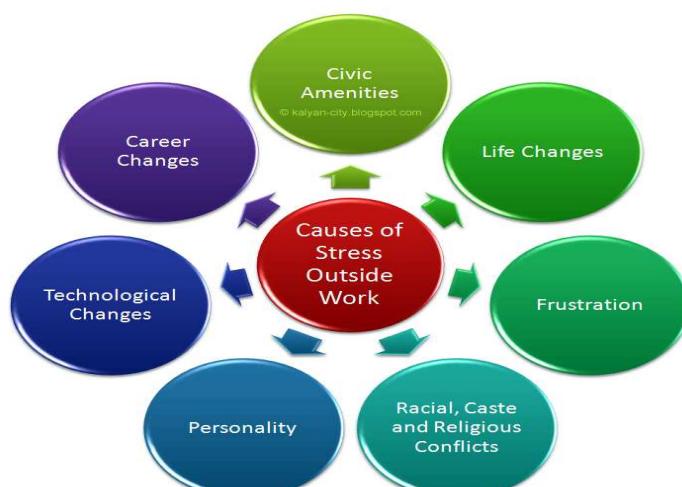


1. **Career Concern:** If an employee feels that he is very much behind in the corporate ladder, then he may experience stress. If he seems that there are no opportunities for self-growth, he may experience stress. Hence, unfulfilled career expectations are the significant source of stress.
2. **Role Ambiguity:** It occurs when the person doesn't know what he is supposed to do, on the job. His tasks and responsibilities are not clear. The employee is not sure what he is expected to do. It creates confusion in the minds of the worker and results in stress.
3. **Rotating Work Shifts:** Stress may occur in those individuals who work on different work shifts. Employees may be expected to work on day shift for some days and then on the night shift. That may create problems in adjusting to the shift timings, and it can affect not only personal life but also family life of the employee.
4. **Role Conflict:** It takes place when people have different expectations from the person performing a particular role. It can also occur if the job is not as per expectation, or when a job demands a certain type of behavior that is against the person's moral values.
5. **Occupational Demands:** Some jobs are more demanding than others. Jobs that involve risk, and danger are more stressful. Research findings indicate, job that cause stress needs constant monitoring of equipments and devices, unpleasant physical conditions, making decisions, etc.
6. **Lack of Participation in Decision-making:** Many experienced employees feel that management should consult them on matters affecting their jobs. In

- reality, the superiors hardly ask the concerned employees before taking a decision. That develops a feeling of being neglected, which may lead to stress.
7. **Work Overload:** Excessive workload leads to stress as it puts a person under tremendous pressure. Work overload may take two different forms:
 - a. Qualitative work overload implies performing a job that is complicated or beyond the employee's capacity.
 - b. Quantitative work overload is a result of many activities performed in a prescribed time.
 8. **Work Underload:** In this, case, too little work or very easy work is expected on the part of the employee. Doing less work or jobs of routine and simple nature would lead to monotony and boredom, which can lead to stress.
 9. **Poor Working Conditions:** Employees may be subject to poor working conditions. It would include bad lighting and ventilation, unhygienic sanitation facilities, excessive noise, and dust, presence of toxic gasses and fumes, inadequate safety measures, etc. All these unpleasant conditions create physiological and psychological imbalance in humans thereby causing stress.
 10. **Lack of Group Cohesiveness:** Every group is characterized by its cohesiveness, although they differ widely in its degree. Individuals experience stress when there is no unity among work group members. There are mistrust, jealousy, frequent quarrels, etc., in groups and this lead to stress to employees.
 11. **Interpersonal and Intergroup Conflict:** These conflicts take place due to differences in perceptions, attitudes, values and beliefs between two or more individuals and groups. Such conflicts can be a source of stress for group members.
 12. **Organizational Changes:** When changes occur, people have to adapt to those changes, and this may cause stress. Stress is higher when changes are significant or unusual like transfer or adoption of new technology.
 13. **Lack of Social Support:** When individuals believe that they have the friendship and support of others at work, their ability to cope with the effects of stress increases. If this kind of social support is not available, then an employee experiences more stress.

Certain factors outside the scope of an organization also cause stress.

The main causes of stress outside work or organization:



1. **Civic Amenities:** Poor civic amenities in the area in which one lives can be a cause of stress. Inadequate or lack of public facilities like improper water supply, excessive noise or air pollution, lack of proper transport facility can be quite stressful.
2. **Life Changes:** Life changes can bring stress to a person. Life changes can be slow or sudden. Gradual life changes include getting older, and abrupt life changes include death or accident of a loved one. Sudden life changes are highly stressful and very difficult to cope.
3. **Frustration:** Frustration is another cause of stress. It arises when goal-directed behavior gets blocked. Management should attempt to remove barriers and help the employees to reach their goals.
4. **Racial, Caste, and Religious Conflicts:** Employees living in areas, which are often prone to conflicts among people based on differences seen in their race, caste and religion do suffer more from stress. In the case of a religion, the minorities and lower-caste people (especially in India) are subject to more stress.
5. **Personality:** We can classify people as 'Type A' and 'Type B'.
The 'Type A' people:
 - a. They feel guilty while relaxing.
 - b. They get irritated by minor mistakes of self and others.
 - c. They feel impatient and dislike waiting.
 - d. They also multitask and prefer to do several things at one time.

The 'Type B' people are exactly opposite and hence are less affected by stress due to the above factors.

6. **Technological Changes:** When there are any changes in technical fields, employees are under the constant fear of losing jobs or need to adjust to new technologies. It can be a source of stress.
7. **Career Changes:** When a person suddenly switches to another job, he is under stress to shoulder new responsibilities adequately. Under-promotion, over-promotion, demotion and transfers can also cause stress.

Stress Management Techniques

Stress management can help to:

- remove or change the source of stress
- alter the way you view a stressful event
- lower the impact that stress might have on your body
- learn alternative ways of coping

Stress management therapy pursues one or more of these approaches.

Techniques for stress management can be gained from self-help books, online resources, or by attending a stress management course. A counselor or psychotherapist can connect an individual who has stress with personal development courses or individual and group therapy sessions.

Stress management strategy #1: Avoid unnecessary stress

Not all stress can be avoided, and it's not healthy to avoid a situation that needs to be addressed. You may be surprised, however, by the number of stressors in your life that you can eliminate.

- Learn how to say “no” – Know your limits and stick to them. Whether in your personal or professional life, refuse to accept added responsibilities when you’re close to reaching them. Taking on more than you can handle is a surefire recipe for stress.
- Avoid people who stress you out – If someone consistently causes stress in your life and you can’t turn the relationship around, limit the amount of time you spend with that person or end the relationship entirely.
- Take control of your environment – If the evening news makes you anxious, turn the TV off. If traffic’s got you tense, take a longer but less-traveled route. If going to the market is an unpleasant chore, do your grocery shopping online.
- Avoid hot-button topics – If you get upset over religion or politics, cross them off your conversation list. If you repeatedly argue about the same subject with the same people, stop bringing it up or excuse yourself when it’s the topic of discussion.
- Pare down your to-do list – Analyze your schedule, responsibilities, and daily tasks. If you’ve got too much on your plate, distinguish between the “shoulds” and the “musts.” Drop tasks that aren’t truly necessary to the bottom of the list or eliminate them entirely.

Stress management strategy #2: Alter the situation

If you can’t avoid a stressful situation, try to alter it. Figure out what you can do to change things so the problem doesn’t present itself in the future. Often, this involves changing the way you communicate and operate in your daily life.

- Express your feelings instead of bottling them up. If something or someone is bothering you, communicate your concerns in an open and respectful way. If you don’t voice your feelings, resentment will build and the situation will likely remain the same.
- Be willing to compromise. When you ask someone to change their behavior, be willing to do the same. If you both are willing to bend at least a little, you’ll have a good chance of finding a happy middle ground.
- Be more assertive. Don’t take a backseat in your own life. Deal with problems head on, doing your best to anticipate and prevent them. If you’ve got an exam to study for and your chatty roommate just got home, say up front that you only have five minutes to talk.
- Manage your time better. Poor time management can cause a lot of stress. When you’re stretched too thin and running behind, it’s hard to stay calm and focused. But if you plan ahead and make sure you don’t overextend yourself, you can alter the amount of stress you’re under.

Stress management strategy #3: Adapt to the stressor

If you can't change the stressor, change yourself. You can adapt to stressful situations and regain your sense of control by changing your expectations and attitude.

- Reframe problems. Try to view stressful situations from a more positive perspective. Rather than fuming about a traffic jam, look at it as an opportunity to pause and regroup, listen to your favorite radio station, or enjoy some alone time.
- Look at the big picture. Take perspective of the stressful situation. Ask yourself how important it will be in the long run. Will it matter in a month? A year? Is it really worth getting upset over? If the answer is no, focus your time and energy elsewhere.
- Adjust your standards. Perfectionism is a major source of avoidable stress. Stop setting yourself up for failure by demanding perfection. Set reasonable standards for yourself and others, and learn to be okay with "good enough."
- Focus on the positive. When stress is getting you down, take a moment to reflect on all the things you appreciate in your life, including your own positive qualities and gifts. This simple strategy can help you keep things in perspective.

Adjusting Your Attitude

How you think can have a profound effect on your emotional and physical well-being. Each time you think a negative thought about yourself, your body reacts as if it were in the throes of a tension-filled situation. If you see good things about yourself, you are more likely to feel good; the reverse is also true. Eliminate words such as "always," "never," "should," and "must." These are telltale marks of self-defeating thoughts.

Stress management strategy #4: Accept the things you can't change

Some sources of stress are unavoidable. You can't prevent or change stressors such as the death of a loved one, a serious illness, or a national recession. In such cases, the best way to cope with stress is to accept things as they are. Acceptance may be difficult, but in the long run, it's easier than railing against a situation you can't change.

- Don't try to control the uncontrollable. Many things in life are beyond our control—particularly the behavior of other people. Rather than stressing out over them, focus on the things you can control such as the way you choose to react to problems.
- Look for the upside. As the saying goes, "What doesn't kill us makes us stronger." When facing major challenges, try to look at them as opportunities for personal growth. If your own poor choices contributed to a stressful situation, reflect on them and learn from your mistakes.
- Share your feelings. Talk to a trusted friend or make an appointment with a therapist. Expressing what you're going through can be very cathartic, even if there's nothing you can do to alter the stressful situation.

- Learn to forgive. Accept the fact that we live in an imperfect world and that people make mistakes. Let go of anger and resentments. Free yourself from negative energy by forgiving and moving on.

Stress management strategy #5: Make time for fun and relaxation

Beyond a take-charge approach and a positive attitude, you can reduce stress in your life by nurturing yourself. If you regularly make time for fun and relaxation, you'll be in a better place to handle life's stressors when they inevitably come.

Healthy ways to relax and recharge

- Go for a walk.
- Spend time in nature.
- Call a good friend.
- Sweat out tension with a good workout.
- Write in your journal.
- Take a long bath.
- Light scented candles
- Savor a warm cup of coffee or tea.
- Play with a pet.
- Work in your garden.
- Get a massage.
- Curl up with a good book.
- Listen to music.
- Watch a comedy

Don't get so caught up in the hustle and bustle of life that you forget to take care of your own needs. Nurturing yourself is a necessity, not a luxury.

- Set aside relaxation time. Include rest and relaxation in your daily schedule. Don't allow other obligations to encroach. This is your time to take a break from all responsibilities and recharge your batteries.
- Connect with others. Spend time with positive people who enhance your life. A strong support system will buffer you from the negative effects of stress.
- Do something you enjoy every day. Make time for leisure activities that bring you joy, whether it be stargazing, playing the piano, or working on your bike.
- Keep your sense of humor. This includes the ability to laugh at yourself. The act of laughing helps your body fight stress in a number of ways.

Learn the relaxation response

You can control your stress levels with relaxation techniques that evoke the body's relaxation response, a state of restfulness that is the opposite of the stress response. Regularly practicing these techniques will build your physical and emotional resilience, heal your body, and boost your overall feelings of joy and equanimity.

Stress management strategy #6: Adopt a healthy lifestyle

You can increase your resistance to stress by strengthening your physical health.

- Exercise regularly. Physical activity plays a key role in reducing and preventing the effects of stress. Make time for at least 30 minutes of exercise, three times per week. Nothing beats aerobic exercise for releasing pent-up stress and tension.
- Eat a healthy diet. Well-nourished bodies are better prepared to cope with stress, so be mindful of what you eat. Start your day right with breakfast, and keep your energy up and your mind clear with balanced, nutritious meals throughout the day.
- Reduce caffeine and sugar. The temporary "highs" caffeine and sugar provide often end in with a crash in mood and energy. By reducing the amount of coffee, soft drinks, chocolate, and sugar snacks in your diet, you'll feel more relaxed and you'll sleep better.
- Avoid alcohol, cigarettes, and drugs. Self-medication with alcohol or drugs may provide an easy escape from stress, but the relief is only temporary. Don't avoid or mask the issue at hand; deal with problems head on and with a clear mind.
- Get enough sleep. Adequate sleep fuels your mind, as well as your body. Feeling tired will increase your stress because it may cause you to think irrationally.

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