

## Stress Management Policies adopted by the IT Companies- An overview

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### Abstract

The growing trend of work pressure and cut throat competition for success the IT industry becomes the new segment where employee stress becomes an important issue. The pressure to perform at any cost often forces the employees to leave the organization in the middle which added as the cost to the company. Every company spends huge amount of money to train the workforce that may become wasted due to sudden departure of the people. Right at this point of time there is no way out to make the industry stress free. With increasing application of technology and new age facilities this kind of pressure is bound to increase. So, the sector has decided to face the problem rather than avoid it. This is a good sign as it may be added significant value for the betterment of the industry. But to get an understanding about the issues related to stress and its driving mechanism it is important to highlight the major causes of stress which exclusively affecting the industry. Thus, the present paper tried to highlight various factor contributing the stress and policies adopted by the IT companies to overcome this problem.

**KEYWORDS-** Stress, IT industry, employees and organization

Stress is a hot-button issue for a daily life. It is a key challenge for the organizations because organizations with stressed employees are more likely to be unsuccessful in the market. Probably, the employees belonging from IT sector are witnessing maximum stress. Stress is a complex fact in an individual's life with no easy answer. Generally, it is a condition of pressure or tension on an individual that affects individual's health and performance at workplace. Many organizations are facing day-to-day challenges to handle stress in a proper way. It is no-wonder that in today's fast paced society dealing with stress and adopting an effective stress management approach is a challenge for each and every organization. Individuals reflect a different behavior when they are stressed. The level of stress experienced by individuals differs from person to person, not because of their age or gender but it results out of variety of situations they come across. Stress among the employees is a great matter of concern both for the organizations as well as the working employees. It is influenced mainly by occupational position and the culture of the organization. Stress becomes more complicated and shows a more unfavorable result if left unhandled. The reasons that results stress are known as Stressors. Mostly, every human being reacts differently to the stressors. In present organizations, it has become a strong predictor of job satisfaction. It can be viewed from two directions:

- ❖ From Individual point of view- It can cause various physical and psychological imbalances leading to various diseases.
- ❖ From Organizational point of view-It can lead to ineffectiveness of organization, poor productivity, increase in employee turnover and absenteeism.

However, stress is not always bad or shows negative results. Some stress is also good and helpful in improving the performance of an individual. Hence, certain level of stress is always

necessary to motivate us to and perform at a higher level. For example: When you are stressed for a given project you give your best efforts and dedication to finish the project within the stipulated time frame and perform best. But at times, stress beyond certain level may show opposite reactions or poor results. For example: When you are stressed because of the poor health of your kid you may not perform your best at the workplace as a result of which you show low productivity. Thus, stress can broadly be divided into two main types:

- ❖ Eustress: Stress that motivates a person to perform better and show positive results.
- ❖ Distress: Stress that hinders the performance and show negative results.

Whether a situation is stressful or not is always determined by the individual experiencing the situation. No two people perceive a given situation in the same way because persons differ with their coping skills. Situations are viewed differently by different persons. Hence, handling stress effectively is a skill that we should learn so that it will not harm our health as well as our performance. In the crude meaning, stress management can be defined as being aware of the stressors we are facing and their sources and learning how to respond these stressors in a positive way. People believe that they have inadequate skills to deal with the higher degree of stress which they are facing. Thus, eventually every individual needs a proper stress management program to stay fit.

The best thing that the organization can do is to identify the stress so that they can prevent it for further hampering the health of the workforce because if workers affected then surely it will affect the health of the organization as well. Sometimes, confusion may arise between work pressure or challenging work and stress. It may be noticed that most of the workforce realize the importance of work pressure and under any circumstances it can't be mixed with stress. Work pressure is inevitable and it basically motivates the workforce to perform better. It gives them some sort of accomplishment and achievement. It also motivates the employees in a way that they take the challenge and able fulfill it, which ultimately helps the organization to grow. This surely adds value for their future prospect. So, work pressure is a factor which is manageable realistic and the workforce is able to do it with their existing knowledge base and expertise. But, sometimes the same work pressure may become unachievable and become unrealistic then surely it will go to create a stress in the mind of the consumers. This should be avoidable under any circumstances. Thus, stress is a situation where the pressure of workforce may exceed the existing capacity of the worker as well as the working environment where they are working that may not upto the mark. In both the cases it will either affect the physical or mental condition of the people working for the organizations and that is the reason why this needs to identify first and if any gaps identified that need to be resolved at the earliest.

### **Major Causes of Stress in IT Industry**

As the industry is growing so as the expectation; the nature of factors which causes stress among the employees are also keep on changing over the time period. The types of stress the employees are facing that may be personal or some of them may be related to organizational factors. Although, organizational issues may be handled by the company but most of the time they failed to identify the stress that the employees may be facing due to various types of personal issues. Sometimes, these personal issues may come as a result of organizational work pressure when the employees failed to perform the work and tries to do it at home or sometimes it is totally personal in nature which has a direct link with the family lives of the employee. In second case, the role of organization to reduce the level of stress may become ineffective. But still today's organizations are trying to highlight both issues so as to get the

best out of an employee. Thus, to understand the situation of stress it is best to identify the probable causes of stress which the industry as whole is facing.

### **Atmosphere**

The change in the tangible environment or atmosphere again and again over a period of time is a reason of stress. Some of the examples are as follows - Over crowded traffic, natural calamities, unsafe roads and housing and criminal offense in the society, safety of family members etc.

### **Societal**

We experience a variety of stress because of the demands of the various roles we play in the society like neighbours, family relations, caretaker and employee to an organization. Example- workplace tensions that includes assignments, projects, presentations, achieving targets, unemployment or job search, bad marriage, death of a family member.

### **Long Working Hours**

Long working hours is surely an issue for employees working in an IT company in India. Probably this may be the one of the important reasons for high rate of attrition rate that the industry is experiencing. The longer working hours become a norm as most of the workers are on a project basis where timely completion of jobs is very crucial. As it directly related to performance evaluation of the employees, most of the time it is being observed that they are working for 12 – 14 hours at a stretch with little breaks or no breaks at all. The odd working hours due to 24 x 7 working conditions also cause a huge amount of stress which makes the employees less productive less susceptible in tune with the nature of the job and its demand as witnessed by the employees.

### **New Age Demand for Innovation**

As the world is changing, the demands for new facilities are also keeps on changing. The demand for customer driven customized product increases the demand for new age facilities which surely added pressure to the workforce. Since in a service industry product differentiation can only be made with the help of kind extra facilities which can be added to the existing products or a new facility can be incorporated by introducing a new product, and then only the competition can be dealt with proper care. But inventing a new product all the time may not be possible so most of the time emphasis has been given to modify the existing facilities. This not only helps the organizations to reduce the cost of innovation but also able to help the product to sustain for a longer duration in the product life cycle. Another issue which forces the employees to go for an innovation is due to typical nature of the services that the product may be offering. As the products are most of the time B2B product a customized version need to be supplied according to the specific needs of the client. This ultimately forces the workforce to work under an innovative environment where application of new technologies becomes a norm.

### **Fear of Losing the Job**

Due to work pressure and high profit it is quite visible that the sector is paying a handsome remuneration to its employees. This helps the employees to the change the life style. This changing life style sometimes may come as a result of increased amount of disposable income or it may come because of increasing pressure of peers to maintain the status among

the working group members. Although, the attractions for lifestyle products are huge, on the other hand because of increased competition the fear of losing a job is also not new. As the job is project based and sometimes short duration in nature most of the time the IT firms recruit employees based on the project requirement. This practice makes the employees feel insecure related to jobs. Since, within a short span of time they are trying to achieve lots of things this situation all the time creates huge amount of stress in the mind of the employees.

### **Physical & Mental Harassment**

Harassment in the workforce is not new and this actually makes the organizations to establish various cells to tackle the harassment of the people engage in the workforce. Among the most common victim of harassment of workforce are the women employees. The sexual harassment and exploitation is often noticed in most of the organizations and sometimes this becomes a major issue for the proper functioning of the people engage in the organization. Since, this is a trivial issue the conditions under which the harassment took place need to be addressed and handled diligently.

### **Cognitive Issues**

It is our opinion or belief or the mind that perceives a particular situation is stressful or not. If we consider a situation a normal circumstance arising out in our life then we may not feel threaten for the situation and can deal with it more effectively and properly.

### **Role Conflict**

It is a situation that arises when employees have more than one boss or supervisors with different sets of expectations which is difficult to fulfill. This conflicting prospect from a particular employee leads to a stressful situation for the employee. Sometimes it may be the situation that one employee is doing two different types of jobs which are conflicting in nature or they may not have a good exposure towards any one of the particular jobs that have been allotted to them. Sometimes the personal conflict may affect the productivity if the employee failed to adopt the organizational culture. Each and every organization has their own organizational culture which the employees should adopt so that any conflict may not arise in work place. But sometimes that may not happen which ultimately leads to stressful situation in the workplace.

### **Improper Job Definitions**

As the job is dynamic in nature, where continuous improvement in technology field becomes necessary; it sometimes become difficult for the employees to understand the exact nature of the job unless and until it is clearly defined within an organizational set up. The employees who are joining new in the organizations or working in a new platform, a sudden change in project without a proper briefing may lead to create an amount of stress which directly affects both individual as well as organizational productivity.

### **Change in Work Schedule**

If an employee is habituated in specific working environment or specific duration of a day then sudden change of timings or different working hours may hamper the overall productivity of the employee if the same is not being accepted by the individuals. This is a tricky HR issue which needs to be handled carefully as it may lead to employee

dissatisfaction and this may ultimately leads to create a level of stress in the mind of the worker.

### **Conflict with Other Group Members**

It has been observed that most of the IT organizations are working as matrix organization module where representative from different departments comes together to form a unique group for a specific project. This group is temporary in nature and will remain till the completion of the project. It is being observed that there may be some group relations exist among the members of the same department but when it comes to deal with members of other departments there is a chance of conflict often arises which affects the entire group and subsequently the project. So, it is very important to develop a relationship among the group members to a great extent. But, sometimes it may not be possible for any particular individual which may leads to a stressful situation in the mind of the individuals.

### **Relationship with Superiors**

In any assignment the relationships among co – workers not only important, along with that the relationships between superiors and the subordinates also acting as a main acting force for successful completion of the same. Sometimes the superior may not be very open mind and most of the time the nature is of dictatorship type where the roles of subordinates are only to implement the order as given by the top boss. So, even if the order is not correct, then also there is no scope for further improvement. This leads to a situation where the subordinates failed to perform the job properly. In most of the time sharing of knowledge is not happening which also de - motivates the employees and this ultimately leads to a situation of stress.

### **Role Overload**

It refers to a situation when an individual is not having adequate ability and skill to perform the tasks that the job demands. This also creates a stressful situation for an employee.

### **Job Appreciation**

Work related stress can arise when one is not praised or appreciated for his good performance or satisfied outcomes. The lack of appreciation discourages the person to give his best efforts at workplace and further gives tension and pressure on him.

### **Policies Adopted by IT Companies for stress management**

The method of stress management is a new domain that have been added to HR and OB issues that the organizations are facing and even becoming challenging in today's very competitive environment. In case of IT industry, the practice is not new but the wider application of the policies can be visible with increasing rate of attrition as well as job dissatisfaction that may come as a result of stress environment. Various literatures have already dealt with the issue and identified some of the important areas of stress management which may benefit the employees as well as the employers both. Broadly there are three areas of stress management policies found in those literatures on stress management<sup>1</sup> and this can be categorized as follows:

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<sup>1</sup> HSE Contract Research Report No. 61/1993 by Tom Cox, pp 36

- **Primary Technique:** Under this technique the focus is on upgradation of jobs associated with the employees. This is related to changes in the organizational policies related job and organizational aspects.
- **Secondary Technique:** The main objective is to provide training to workers so as to cope with various stress related matters and focus is also given on both physical and mental health of the employees
- **Tertiary Technique:** The technique is mainly depends on employee assistance in the form of counseling that the organizations are providing due various personal and professional issues faces by the employees.

Thus the broad areas of stress management techniques as adopted by most of the IT organizations can be discussed below:

### **Value addition and training for upgradation**

Since the working environment is competitive in nature, continuous upgradation of skills and techniques are very much essential. If an employee failed to perform because lack of skills then it will surely create a pear pressure in the mind of that employee. So, periodic value addition should be incorporated so that the same should not become an obstacle for the employees.

### **Social relevance of work**

Every human being is a part of the society and whatever the industry is producing that is coming from the society. So, the profit that we are making, some amount of societal contribution is also there. Thus, various organizations have started the CSR activities to return it back towards the society in a health way. This will surely improve the society and will create some short of belongingness among the various stakeholders. This particular approach should be integrated with the workers of the organizations and make them realize that they are also part of the society. The job that they are doing is able to improve the living conditions of the people staying in the society or may be for the future generations to come. This attachment with the societal development may help the employees to bring the positiveness in the job that they are doing.

### **Safe and healthy working conditions**

Safety in the work place should be an important issue while dealing with employee's stress. If the working conditions are not safe or are not healthy then chances of attrition will be highly simultaneously it will create a burden in the mind of the employees which may create job dissatisfaction. Providing proper working condition may able to reduce the level of stress that the employees are facing.

### **Opportunities for growth with the help of clear growth path**

Every employee working in an organization for better earnings and better growth which they try to achieve during the course of the time and if they failed to do, then surely it will create a pressure in their mind. So, it is important to mention the growth prospects of the employees from the beginning so that employees can get a clear picture about organizational growths that they may be achieve within a specific time frame subject to fulfillment of organizational commitments.

### **No discrimination in terms of payment of compensations among the employees working in a specific group**

Discriminations may be an issue which creates level of stress in the mind of the employees. Gender wise discrimination may be found in various organizations and this need to be abolished so as to create a working environment where all the employees can work as a team rather than as individual human beings. In IT sector, this is more important as most of the job is being implemented with the help of group activities. So, any sorts of discrimination may demoralize employees to a great extent.

### **Job Redesigning**

The job that an employee is doing may not be proves desired result or may not be able to capitalize the given expertise of that employee. This is surely affecting the overall productivity of that individual and simultaneously also affecting the productivity of the organization as a whole. In this case a window of opportunity must be there so as to redesign the existing job which may fit the criteria of the organization along with the matching expertise of the employee. This particular mechanism may help to reduce the level of stress as the said employee is able to perform in more effective manner.

### **Organizational Change**

Organizational change is a policy which aims to achieve the desired goal if certain factors hampering the growth of the organizations. Implementing organizational change is not that much easy as it is being noticed that employees often resist to change. Thus, it entirely depends on the specific requirement of the organization where they feels that by introducing any change it will actually benefit the employees. So, for doing so the various stakeholders need to be taken into considerations regarding these changes.

### **Stress Management Training (stress control workshop, job burnout seminars etc.)**

Only identification of stress will not be sufficient unless and until the same can't be handled properly. Various organizations not only identify the stress that the employees are facing, along with it they are also develop certain strategies which if implemented properly then the employees will be able to handle the stress in an effective manner. Stress management training is not new and various organizations bring lot of innovations in this aspect so as to get the best out from the employees. Among the most prominent stress management training that is being adopted by various IT firms in India are stress control workshop and job burnout seminars. In both the cases the objective is to get a clear idea about the job and the nature of problems that the employees might face during the course of the jobs. The emotional stress that may come across that also can be discussed. The relationship with the group members also need to be discussed if it causes any kind of mental blockages. Thus, the tool becomes one of the important ingredients to tackle the stress as faced by the employees.

### **Intervention to Modify the Job Role**

Sometimes the application of intervention tools may enrich the performance of the employees which may give a clear picture about the job role. Frequent meetings with the various stakeholders and greater responsibility related to a job will lead to reduction in job conflict and job ambiguity. Thus, by giving a clear picture about the job that the employee has to do or by increasing the job responsibility the organizations may able to reduce the stress level of

the employees. But in this case the important criterion is to provide a clear understanding about the job and the role of the employees.

### **Leisure Holiday with Colleagues/ Family**

Spending leisure time is always inevitable and when the job is deals with high amount of stress. Some amount of relaxation is always inevitable and if the employees able to spend a quality time along with the friends or family members in a good place without thinking about the job then surely it will motivate them to work more and in an effective way to so as to get a desired outcome. So, sometimes organizations plan for such vacations for its employees who are doing stressful works.

### **Networking**

As most of the jobs that have been allotted to an employee are needed to be completed in a group there arise the importance of networking. Networking is an association of close groups where each member is in a position to share the knowledge, concerns related to jobs as well as personal problems. This helps them to get a support from a close group who are equally concerned about the activity and probable outcome. This kind of support from the close group surely increases the moral of the employees who are under very stressful work.

### **Supportive Organizational Climate**

Supportive organizational climate is another important area which can reduce the level of stress without incurring much cost. For this a change in attitude is desired and the working environment should be informal and friendly. Today, most of the organizations are following this trend and trying to bridge the gap between the top level and the lower level management. Interactions through blog or a simple internal mail can create drastic change in the mind set of the employees and if a message comes directly from the top boss of the organizations then surely it will motivate the employees to a great extent. So, by creating a supportive working environment is a priority and this need to be implemented so as to reduce the level of stress.

### **Job Enrichment**

Job enrichment is a technique which helps the employees to perform the job in a better manner. It is often found the most of the employees are not able to find the job interesting due to monotonous nature of the job. So, the organizations should take care of this and must add innovations that the employees may be able to implement in their existing jobs. They must be given the freedom to do the job in a more innovative manner and along with that the job enrichment should be merged with some sort of achievement or career advancement of the employees. Improvement in core job activities is another area of job enrichment which the organizations can implement so as to get a better result. This procedure thus, surely able to reduce the level of stress that the employees are facing to a great extent.

### **Organizational Role Clarity**

Organizational role clarity is a technique which gives a direction about the job that the employees are suppose to do. This is an issue which needs a proper look into the issue. If any ambiguity arises as a result of job role then this will increase the conflict to a great extent and ultimately it will bound to affect the productivity of the employees as well as the organizations.



### **Celebration of an Event**

This particular activity is also part of stress management process adopted by most of the companies. Although, it has no direct connection with the core jobs that the employees are doing but still it gives some sort of accomplishments and employees think positively towards the organizations. The organizations may celebrate the overall achievement or success of the tasks assigned to a specific group by inviting them in a party or the organizations may celebrate the individual events like marriage anniversary, birthdays etc. These are the initiatives may add a little cost but the positive outcome is much favourable than the money spent by the organizations. These out of the job activities also give the employees much needed break and relaxations.

### **Participation in Social Activities**

Along with the integrating employees in societal development of the organizations through CSR activities, the company may involve the employees in various social activities where the employees will work actively for the betterment of the society and for the people living in the society. Participating in blood donation camps, AIDS awareness programmes, tree plantations, environmental related issues are some of them where the members participates actively. Sometimes, the employees themselves form a group or NGOs to perform various duties related to social causes. Some of the events are also sponsored by the respective companies where the employees are working. This joint collaboration for the betterment of the society is surely helping the employees to reduce the level of stress that they are facing in workplace.

### **Flexible working hours**

In IT sector since the jobs are 24 x 7 in nature a flexible working hours may be inevitable so that the employees can spend a quality time with the family members. Due to long working hours it is often being noticed that most of the employees are not able to give a quality time towards family members and this often raises the level of stress. A flexible working in this way can help the employees to reduce the stress as they are able to spend a considerable time with the family members and can participate in household activities.

### **Celebrations of festivals**

Like celebration of individual events, celebrations of festivals may influence the working behaviour of the individuals in an organization. In India, people celebrate any festivals like anything and the same is being also celebrate by the organizations then surely it helps to motivate the employees to perform better.

### **Yoga & Meditations**

It is a traditional activity which often helps the employees to concentrate on their work rather than become stressed. Meditations involve quiet environment and able to reduce the stress of the individuals to a great extent. Since the effectiveness is huge most of the IT companies have developed their own workshops for yoga and meditations and active participation becomes essential.

Thus as discussed, it can be seen that stress management becomes one of the important parameter to judge the quality of the organization and the organizations who are able to implement the same is in a better position to attract good talent and retain good talent.

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