Stress Busters in Organizational Set Up: A Study

Aishwarya Puri
BA III English (Hon)
Hindu College Delhi

Abstract:
For last many decades management gurus, organizations, companies and psychologists are looking for ways to reduce stress. The present study examines ill effects of stress among managers and workers and on the other hand it also looks into the different strategies of reducing stress. There are some conventional methods and some out of the box approaches which can be helpful in reducing stress. Mindfulness is an emerging approach to trim down stress. Mindfulness has been theoretically and empirically associated with psychological well-being and it is an effective stress buster as far as work place stress is concerned.

Keyword: Stress, out of the box approaches, mindfulness

Stress has become part and parcel of 21st century work places. As far as work stress is concerned it is recognized worldwide as a major challenge to workers’ health and over all atmosphere of any organization. Most of the time, the classic response from employers to stress at work has been to blame the victim of stress, rather than its etiology. However, it is moral and legal duty of the employer to ensure the good health of employees. It is also in their long term economic interests to avoid stress, as stress is likely to lead to poor performance, (Toews JA, Lockyer JM, Dobson DJG, Brownell AK. 1993). According to the American Institute of Stress, stress-related distraction or sleepiness account for an estimated 60 to 80 percent of accidents on the job. Workers’ compensation claims for stress have increased substantially every year, threatening to bankrupt the system in several American states. (American Institute of Stress)It is well documented that the mental health of managers and workers not only boosts the company output and helps to improve the efficiency of their health system but also creates the atmosphere for each and every individual to enjoy life and survive frustrations of work places. In other words, companies and people benefit equally from healthy conditions in the world of work.

Stress is a subjective phenomenon and an anxiety based syndrome which manifests differently in different persons hence a lack of stereotyped definition. (Babatope, Ihuoma Sandra,2013) However, it may be defined as physical, mental or emotional strain or tension or a condition feeling experienced when a person perceives that demand exceeds the personal and social resources the individual is able to mobilize. (Bunge, C.A ,1990) Acute responses to stress may be in the areas of feelings (for example, anxiety, depression, irritability, fatigue), behaviour (for example, being withdrawn, aggressive, tearful, unmotivated), thinking (for example, difficulties of concentration and problem solving) or physical symptoms (for example, palpitations, nausea, headaches). If stress persists, there are changes in endocrine, cardiovascular, autonomic and immunological functioning, leading to mental and physical ill health such as anxiety, depression, and heart disease. (Cooper CL, Marshall J., 2004) A 2004 study found that people who work under stressful conditions, which can include work/life conflicts or lack of social support, autonomy and control, are at least twice as likely to experience the following physical and mental effects as other workers: (Lluminari, Inc., 2004) f Heart and cardiovascular problems, anxiety, depression and demoralization, substance abuse, certain cancers infectious diseases f, conflicts, minor injuries and back pain.

There are many top stressors for people in the workplace. (American Psychological Association, 2012) in order of importance, they are: money (75 percent), work (70 percent), the economy (67 percent), relationships (58 percent), family responsibilities (57 percent), family health problems (53 percent), personal health concerns (53 percent), job stability (49 percent), housing costs (49 percent) and personal safety (32 percent).

For last many decades management gurus, organizations, companies and psychologists are looking for ways to reduce stress. The American Psychological Association suggests a range of ways that a company’s culture
Many companies have turned to “out-of-the-box” approaches to deal with stress. There are many such innovative strategies. In-house art programs are proved very effective. Burlington, Massachusetts-based Lightbridge, an e-commerce payment management company, established in-house art programs to help employees channel stress. (HeartMath, 2002) On the other hand some organizations are in favour of Green workplaces. A recent study found that workers who had proximity to windows and indoor plants rated their job satisfaction significantly higher than employees with no direct proximity to “green” elements. Green elements have also been shown to reduce frustration and anxiety on the job, as well as turnover. (Dravigne, Andrea, et. al., 2008). (American Society for Horticultural Science, 2008.) Even employees who have indirect contact with nature suffer from less stress and illness and have increased well-being as well as clearer thinking. As a creative solution for windowless offices, some companies are installing large screens throughout office buildings that show natural settings, such as oceans and forests. Employees can have input on what is shown on the screens. (Rojas-Burke, Joe,2009) Researchers have found that pets can have a calming effect on humans and can lower blood pressure. So some psychologists suggest organizations to allow their workers to bring their pets. (Allen, K., et. al., 2009), (Centers for Disease Control, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2009).

In many cases work/life balancing strategies also work. Establishing work schedules that are compatible with demands and responsibilities outside the job and offering supportive services can help reduce stress. Allowing workers to start or end the workday earlier or later can reduce work/life stress, especially for working parents. Flexibility in time can also reduce the stress of commuting in rush hour traffic. (Swanson, Naomi G., Ph. D,2000) Job sharing allows at least two people trained to perform each job, enabling each employee to have time off without losing productivity. (American Psychological Association,2004) Working from home results in higher morale and job satisfaction and lower employee stress and turnover, according to an analysis of two-decades of studies involving nearly 13 thousand employees, conducted by researchers at Pennsylvania State University. The prime reason is that working at home provides employees more control over how they do their work. Working at home also helps workers better manage work/family demands. (Gajendra, Ravi S. and David A. Harrison, 2007) In some cases extending the lunch hour may help discourage snacking and fast food. One survey found that nearly three quarters of employees say that they eat unhealthy snacks—chips, candy, etc.—at work once a week; 27 percent said they did so three or more times a week. (Nationwide Better Health) Adequate time may also encourage time for calming or other stress-reduction activities such as walking. Many companies have begun to contract with geriatric care specialists to help with issues such as finding doctors to address age-related diagnosis, and arranging transportation to medical appointments.

Even cat-nap works well when it comes to stress at work place. According to researchers at the Harvard School of Public Health (HSPH) and the University of Athens Medical School (UAMS) in Greece (February 2007, The Archives of Internal Medicine), healthy people who take a 30-minute midday nap 3 times per week are 37 per cent less likely to die of heart disease than those who don’t nap. The underlying principle is that napping may reduce stress.

Mindfulness training has been emerging as stress management technique. Mindfulness training, a method that was first developed by Jon Kabat-Zinn, Ph.D., founder of the Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Health Care, and Society at the University of Massachusetts Medical School, is a stress management technique that involves training the mind to focus attention on the moment. “Mindfulness is not trying to achieve anything. It is just looking”. Mindfulness has been theoretically and empirically associated with psychological well-being.
The elements of mindfulness, namely awareness and nonjudgmental acceptance of one's moment-to-moment experience, are believed as potentially effective antidotes against familiar forms of psychological distress – anxiety, worry, fear, rumination, anger et cetera– many of which involve the maladaptive tendencies to avoid, suppress, or over-engage with one's distressing thoughts and emotions (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). It aims to reduce stress, increase productivity and enhance awareness through relaxation techniques, physical exercises and cognitive behavioral approaches. These approaches train people to find the ability to find rest, tranquility, silence, and qualities of peace and relaxation into their everyday moments,” explains Michael Baime, M.D., director of the Penn Program for Stress Management in Philadelphia and a leading authority on the training. “Mindfulness helps people to manage their own impulses and reactivity, they become less critical, and it helps them meet their goals. The training diffuses reactivity in a way that others can sense, and so can become contagious in the workplace.” Emerging evidence reveals the effectiveness of the technique. Dr. Baime and his colleagues conducted a three-month mindfulness-based work site program at the Philadelphia-based Scheie Eye Institute. After employees learned and practiced mindfulness techniques for a period of six weeks, their reported emotional exhaustion decreased from nearly 25 percent to almost 15 percent. At the end of the full three-month program, depression and fatigue were both reduced by nearly half. Other early evidence shows that mindfulness can improve how people regulate their attention and ability to concentrate. (Blaime, Michael, M.D., 2005), (Jha, Amishi P., et. al., 2007)

References

Nationwide Better Health. “As Obesity Rates Continue to Rise, Is the Workplace a Source of or Solution to Unhealthy Lifestyle Habits?” (News Release)


Toews JA, Lockyer JM, Dobson DJG, Brownell AK. (1993) Stress among residents, medical students, and graduate science (MSc/PhD) students. Acad Med.;68(10 suppl):S46 – S48