

ANTECEDENTS, SOURCES AND CONSEQUENCES OF STRESS

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Introduction

Stress refers to pressure that is exerted on a person, which in turn results in tension or “strain”. Within certain limits, people are able to deal with these pressures and adapt to the current situation, and to recover when the situation is over. However, when the pressure is too large, people may not be able to recover or adapt. An individual’s adaptability is determined by personal characteristics, e.g. their stress tolerance, and by the environment, e.g. the availability of social support.

History of Research on Stress

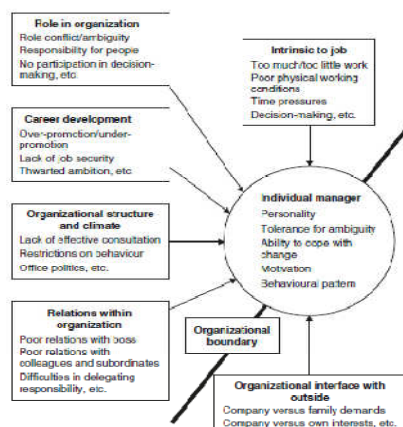
Ever since research in job stress initially began to emerge during the 1950s and 1960s it has become a field of that is omnipresent in every facet of work life and non work life. The volume of research in stress area is like to increase in the years to come. The field has gone through several stages by the efforts and thoughts of various researchers.

Today research on work stress has reached a maturity level from the nascent stage during 1950s and 1960s. But even at this age there is still a persistent sense of concern about established methods and practices, and the theoretical framework.

Sources of Stress

Stress is created several factors called as stressors. Stressors are environmental conditions that put a physical or mental demand on a person.

Figure: Sources of Stress



Source: Cooper, C.L. and Marshall, J. (1978)

As explained in the diagram stress is created by factors personal factors of the individual, group stressors, organisational stressors and extra organisational stressors.

Individual Stressors

Some individuals perform well under stressful circumstances, though others are trounced by them. Individual factors like perception, job experience, social support, belief in locus of control and hostility are individual stressors. Personality of the individual seems to be the moderating variable in this regard. A person with pessimistic attitude is prone to develop stress symptoms than an optimist. Age of the individual and stress management strategy used by them could also either worsen or lessen the stress

Group Stressors

Groups have incredible influence on the behaviour of individuals and at the same time groups can at times become probable sources of stress. Group stressors arises due to factors like lack of group cohesiveness, lack of social support, intra individual, interpersonal and intra group conflict, work place aggression and sexual harassment.

Extra Organisational Stress

These are sources of stress which are outside the purview of the organisation. These are potential sources due to outside forces and events. For examples events and forces include family, economic conditions, racial discriminations, etc. Neither the organisation nor the individual employees have control over these extra organisational stressors.

Physiological Response to Stress

The following table summarises the physiological changes experienced in response stress.

Organ or tissue involved	Reaction
Lungs	Airways dilate and breathing becomes more rapid and deeper
Heart	Increased rate - the heart beats faster and harder; we can experience palpitations and chest pains
Legs/arms	An experience of muscle tension or tingling in the arms and legs as the electrical balance of the cells in the muscles undergoes change
Liver and fat tissue	Mobilization of glucose and fats for energy to fuel muscles
Brain	Increased mental activity to be alert for quick decision making
Skin and sweat glands	Increased sweating; hands and feet (extremities) often feel cold as blood supplies are diverted to the brain and muscles; hairs stand erect and we experience 'goose-pimples'
Salivary glands	Decreased flow of saliva; the mouth feels dry
Gut muscles	Gut activity is slowed; blood supply is reduced and we might experience indigestion or the feeling of a 'knotted' stomach because digestive processes stop or slow down
Spleen	Contracts and empties red blood cells into the circulation
Kidneys	Reduced urine formation
Ears	Hearing becomes more acute; people under extreme stress often report feeling very sensitive to noise
Eyes	Pupils dilate as an aid to keen vision; vision can become blurred if oxygenated blood is impeded in getting to the brain as blood vessels in the neck constrict
Blood	The action of cortisol produces an increased ability for blood clotting; the immune system is activated to prevent infection

These physiological changes as a result of stress can be summarised release of adrenal hormones and free floating fatty acids, changes in cholesterol and triglyceride levels and changes in thyroxin in urine and blood.

Conclusion

Job stress leads to physical illness, psychological disturbances, psychosomatic and physical changes. Stress is unavoidable in modern day work life, but the price individuals and company pay for it is very high. Individuals face ill health and personal problems, while organisations face the problem of decreased productivity. So the need of the hour is to help individuals manage stress.

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