
MANAGING CAREER STRESS AMONG MANAGERS IN ORGANIZATIONS

MAXWELL NWINYE

Department of Management
Faculty of Management Sciences
University of Port Harcourt

Abstract: *Every employee is faced with the challenges of growth in the organization. This achievement will not be possible without experiencing job stress. This paper examined the techniques used by managers and organizations to overcome career stress. The paper reveals how unmanaged stress can hold employee back from being successful but if managed properly it will take a manager to a new level of growth in the organization. Therefore, the ability to identify and cope with career stress is a key unavoidable factor for improving employee performance and organizational success.*

Introduction

Business is noted to be a stressful occupation which operates in a dynamic environment where managers are concerned with change organizations, improvement and survival. Stress is part of living and can contribute to personal growth development and mental health. However, excessive and prolonged stress generally becomes quite negative which can be related to health problems such as cancer, asthma, ulcers and heart disease.

According to the American academy of family physicians, two-thirds of all office workers visit family doctors because of stress-related symptoms. Many employees in developing countries and developed countries are not enjoying job security due to economic crisis which may result in layoff and of course, budget cuts. This unpleasant situation increased fear, uncertainty and higher levels of stress among workers in the organizations. It will be of interest to learn new and better ways of handling the pressure.

A manager's emotions are contagious and stress has an impact on the quality of his interactions with others. It is obvious that if a person is able to manage his own stress, the more he will achieve his career, extends the benefit to those around him and reduce the extent in which other peoples stress will affect him negatively.

When a jobless man gets employment, his needs increases and whenever he is elevated to the position of business manager, the higher needs attract burden in his professional capacity which leads to stress and burnout. Research evidence shows that stress is the number one killer that takes life of employees and many persons in our society today, when neglected. Carnegie (1974) asserted that sometimes ago, the streets of New York got infested with Doctors and Nurses feverishly working day and night vaccinating crowds against smallpox. The reason was that eight people in New York City had smallpox and two had died. Yet, one may stress is

an emotional sickness and as one that has caused ten thousand times more than smallpox has not invited government attention. No doctor had warned that a certain percentage of the population of the city will have a nervous breakdown induced by stress and emotional conflict.

This indicates that level of stress has suffered neglect in the hands of corporate entities, managers and government. In supporting this, earrel (2000) suggested that businessmen who do not know how to fight worry die young. The paper shows that the problem of stress will lead to frequent labor unrest, absenteeism, and decrease in productivity, morale problems and inefficiencies in the job.

Literature Review

The Concept of Job Stress

The national institute of occupational safety and health (NIOSH) defines job stress as the harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when the requirements of the job do not match the capabilities, resources or needs of the workers. Stress could occur when the situation has high demands and the worker has little or no control over it.

Stress is described as the non-specifically induced changes within a biological system (Harre, 1999). It is a non-specific response of the body to any demand. Stress occurs when an environment presents a demand threatening to exceed the person's capabilities and resources for meeting it.

Schuler (1980) noted that stress means a dynamic condition in which an individual is confronted with an opportunity constraint or demand related to what he or she desired and for which the outcome is perceived to be both uncertain and important.

Stress and Eustress

Stress appears to be positive or negative. Positive stress is regarded as Eustress which takes the form of getting a promotion, marriage activities and similar good things. The extra burden or responsibility associated with this can be stressful. Negative stress is called distress-which includes bad news, and excessive pressure.

Sources of Stress

A manager's stress emanates from different sources. Some of these sources are external and internal to the organization. The external factors such as economic factors which include inflation, recession, cultural values, political insecurity and advancement in technology create stress for managers (Johnnie, 2002). Causes of stress are stressors and they include:

Job Overload: It is related to a person's job that requires time to attend carefully to them. When overload interferes with these conditions, stress sets in. This is the additional task given to an employee in order to enhance productivity.

Under Utilization of Abilities

It occurs when there is no job challenge, one's intellectual abilities, skills and formal education become waste, and there is the feeling of being redundant in the organization. These are regular complains of dissatisfied workers and managers. In such situation, they experience frustration as part of stress.

Job Insecurity: This has made many employees to perform their jobs in fear when they know that their jobs are no longer safe, which attracts stress. -The workers will not show much commitment in their jobs believing that one day they will leave the company.

Task Demands: Moorhead and Griffin (1992) believe that some occupations are by nature more stressful than others. The job of a surgeon, air traffic controller and professional football coach are more stressful than those of general practitioners, football team equipment manager, etc. Beyond specific task-related pressures, other task demands may pose physical threats to a person's health. Such conditions exist in occupations like coal mining and toxic waste handling.

Inappropriate Leadership Style: In certain organizations, the leadership style of a superior manager can be stressful to a subordinate. A leader who is always hostile and dominating may create very severe psychological pressure on a given individual than the person who can reasonably handle it (Selznick, 1959). The managers who adopt autocratic leadership and Michigan University production centre leadership styles may be harsh on the subordinates.

Interpersonal Demands: These are pressures created by other employees. If an employee has poor interpersonal relationships and lacks social support from his colleague, he is bound to suffer stress.

Career versus Family Demand

Many employees in both private and public sectors experience conflicts in their lives relating to overlapping demands between their jobs and family life. The individual may want to devote sufficient time for his work and personal life at home. This will lead to the problem of stress.

Ageing and Retirement

It was argued that life in Nigeria can be real source of stress for workers whose ages are old and waiting for retirement. The old workers were under the delusion of immortality and worked diligently thinking less about retirement. When they hear about the retirement of aged people, they feel threatened because of the benefit enjoyed while in the service (Ekpo, 1983). Some retired workers feel cheated that their service is no longer needed and develop serious fear on retirement which they see as marking time and waiting for death. The individual physiological consequence is heart attack.

How to Manage Career Stress

There are so many steps to reduce individual stress levels and the stress found on the job and in the workplace. To cope with stress, Johnnie (2002) argued that the manager must find his optimal stress level and then use his adaptation energy at a rate and in the direction to adjust his innate qualification and preferences. Measures to overcome stress in a managerial job are:

Recognize Warning Signs of Excessive Stress at Work: When an employee feels overwhelmed at work, he loses confidence and may become irritable or withdrawn. This can make him less productive and the work becomes less rewarding. But if workers ignore the warning signs work stress, it can lead to physical and emotional health problems.

Physical Exercise: A manager and other employees must learn to engage in non-competitive exercises such as walking, jogging, swimming and riding a bicycle. These help to stimulate body tissues and enable the blood system to flow and function properly. Body exercise helps to fight against certain diseases and common infections like cold, fever, duodenal ulcers and so forth.

Time management: This involves creating balanced schedules by preparing daily task and responsibilities. Employees should find a balance between work, family life and social activities. Tasks that are not truly necessary are to be dropped. An employee should go to work early

instead of adding stress to him by running late to office.

Relaxation and Break: This may be a short interval during work hours or complete rest after close of work. If a worker observes rest, he is likely to avoid stress. Other methods of relaxation are listening to music, getting involved in leisure activities and moving away from work environment.

Socialization: This refers to when a person gets support from friends, family and work colleagues by expressing his predicaments to them. This will be possible because of his good interaction with people. A man who works in isolation normally have problems that are unsolved since he has no person to share it with.

Job Redesign: This gives employees more responsibility, greater participation in decision making, more autonomy and increased feedback which can reduce stress. These factors provide opportunity for the employee to have more control over *work* activities and reduce dependence on others.

Organizational Communication: Management can also use effective communication to make the workers have sense of belonging in the organization. Free flow of information in the organization will enhance the employee performance to achieve organizational objectives. Role conflict, work overload and feedback can be reduced by increasing formal communication with employees.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The existence of job stress needs not to be given a low attention by employees and corporate organizations. Research evidence shows that the ways to manage career stress is not about making changes or rethinking career ambition but rather involves focusing on one thing that is always within an individual control. Stress can have a positive or negative influence on employee performance. Those with low level of stress perform better in their jobs than employee with high level of stress.

The complexity of modern organizations has attracted a lot of concerns and employees have to work under conditions of uncertainty and pressures. The consistent pressures at work have virtually eliminated leisure in the lives of employees and also created the problem of stress at work. Consequently, some of the stress experienced by employees at workplace is not always caused by the organizations where these workers work. Sometimes, the stress suffered by the employees is self-induced. Despite *the* number of measures taken to eliminate stress at workplace, the attempt has not been successful. The best managers can do is to reduce stress at work. It is therefore, recommended that managers should take care of themselves through having leisure and work free days, physical exercise, and creates a balanced schedule for daily tasks.

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