

# Organizational stress: positive or negative? essay sample

[Business](#), [Leadership](#)



The increased uncertainty about the future, the global competition, lower living standards, the spreading disorganization and absence of leadership are just some of the causes that concur to generate organizational stress. Lazarus (as cited in Selart & Johansen, 2011) defined stress as the physiological and psychological reaction of any individual against external factors called stressors. Several studies were conducted to evaluate how these factors negatively affect the physical and mental health of both workers and managers. For instance research conducted by the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions in 2003, highlighted that the stress is the second cause of health problems at work (Mitut, 2010).

In this post, I have provided a definition of the organizational stress, its causes and the way it affects the organization. Then I have addressed my considerations about positive and negative stress coming from my personal experience. Therefore, I have offered some ideas on how to assess stress and manage it. Concluding, I have provided some considerations on how the organizational stress is negative for the wealth of the business. Causes of Organizational Stress

There are many causes of stress within an organization due to mismanagement or poor leadership. These causes could include the organizational structure, leadership style and quality, the unclear identification of tasks and roles, the demanding of high-quality standards, the increasing "24/7" availability, structural and business processes change, and the quality of communication within and outside the organization

(Manning & Preston, 2003). Further, Mitut (2010) defined four main stressors: (a) professional activities carried out in unstable conditions, (b) professional dissatisfaction, (c) work related hassle, and (d) imbalance between personal and professional time. Managers and leadership play a critical role in relieving the organizational stress and provide a suitable work environment for the employees. This environment is as well important as the business result of the company. In fact, high level of occupational stress influences economically and financially at organizational level and eventually at social level (Mitut, 2010). Impact on Organization

The impact on organizational stress affects the employees of the company primarily. The stress is therefore translated in behavioural and organizational disorders as the stress has a direct impact on the physical and psychological capability of the personnel. These results can be absenteeism, burnout, lack of trust, performance problems, and compromise of communication and interaction of people (Manning & Preston, 2003). Mitut (2010) defined in his study five main effects on a personal level and eventually on a systemic level. These effects are the following: (a) physical effects (e. g., cardiovascular disease, obesity, strokes); (b) mental effects (e. g., anxiety, apathy, depression frustration); (c) behavioural effects (e. g., food disorders, predisposition to accidents, aggressiveness, poor communication); (d) cognitive effects (e. g., decreased capability, poor concentration and attention); and (e) organizational effect (e. g., absenteeism, low productivity, dissatisfaction, resignations).

Therefore, concerning the organization, the impact of stress affects the relationship, quality/performance of activities, and productivity. Only due to staff replacement because of stress, the American economy annually suffers about \$ 200-300 billion loss (Mitut, 2010). About personal experience of the negative effect of organizational stress, the last project I am working on is full of specific examples on the subject. The project is performed by a joint venture between a Kazakh company and an Italian company. The fact that role and responsibilities are defined on paper, but not properly translated into the organization is the primary source of organizational stress. People are confused, overlap in the activities with evident conflicts, and they blame each other for work not performed. Missing of an effective leadership is the main cause of disruption: the project manager is not the level the project of this magnitude requires.

This fact translates into quantity and qualitative overload of work to the project people with clear compromise on quality of work done. This overload generates frustration, anxiety and aggressiveness among the team. People start resigning, with a clear impact on the project performance as it is not easy to find available and suitable personnel in the local market. This issue increases the workload of the present staff, as no replacement is always available immediately. Besides the tangible effect of the stress, there is another important aspect of stressed employees which deals with ethical conduct. One of the main tasks of a leader is to align the values of the employees with the values of the organization. In fact, as Bass (1999)

declared, transformational leadership is required to align the individual's values and beliefs, and the requirements of the work position.

When the alignment between personal and organizational values is missing, "attitudes will be formed which suppress motivation, hinder performance, and result in greater levels of dissatisfaction, turnover, and stress" (Posner, 2010, p. 536). In particular, Selart and Johansen (2011) suggested that the stress influence the capability of people to elaborate ethical decisions and reduce their ability to act ethically. Therefore, organizational stress affects the organization both internally and externally. Positive Stress

However, as there are many negative effects of stress on the organization, removing all the stress from the organization is not good either. Removing the stress will also removes the right pressure to perform work in a timely and quality manner. Again, leadership plays a vital role in keeping the right tension on the organization. As Heifetz and Laurie (1997) concluded in their study, "a leader must strike a delicate balance between having people feel the need to change and having them feel overwhelmed by change.... It also requires the ability to hold steady and maintain the tension" (pp. 127-128). In order to do so, the leader is required to perform three important tasks (Heifetz & Laurie, 1997): (a) create a holding environment, providing the conditions for diverse groups to communicate and debate about issues, perspectives and values; (b) be responsible for the direction, protection, orientation, managing conflict, and providing norms; (c) have presence and self-confidence.

Related to stress, a leader should have the capability to support its effect better than his / her subordinates as he / she needs to transmit them the right pressure together with confidence. As a personal example of positive pressure, I can mention the project I personally delivered in the year 2010. The project was related to the construction of a gas plant in a remote area south of Russia. The time schedule of the project was tight with challenging milestones and deliverables. The working time was 24 hours a day in two shifts, working in the hazardous conditions of live gas plants, for more than one year. As organization was concerned, role and responsibilities were clearly defined; task and duties discussed and agreed with the team supervisors each morning. Feedback on the work performed was given immediately, and any issue rectified within a couple of days maximum.

The pressure from the client was sensible, as the team had to deliver the project on time, with no compromise about safety or quality. Everybody was under pressure, however the team (400 people) was motivated, and the work environment was very positive. For each achievement, there was a clear recognition and reward, at all level. We finally delivered the project ahead the schedule. After several years, everybody who participated to the project (team and client) still remember the challenge of the project positively and with visible satisfaction. Stress Assessment and Management

It is important for a manager or a leader to recognize the level of stress that his / her organization is suffering. If organizational stress is evident, it is necessary to assess it properly. One tool can be conducting exit interviews to people voluntarily leaving the organization (Manning & Preston, 2003). Once

the data are collected, is important to define an improvement plan and a follow up on items that are in the control of the company. As a manager, the actions I usually take in consideration in my organization to manage and control the stress are the following: Cross-training among department, to improve person's knowledge and facilitate exchange of experiences. Career development plan, to provide stability and job vision to the personnel.

Performance management and rewarding to be conducted yearly and with direct feedback of the supervisor to the employee. Increase multidirectional communication, giving and receiving feedback from employees. Personal-organization values alignment: is important to have periodical meetings to discuss about personal / organizational values and objectives. Clearly defining job role and responsibility: avoiding misperception of responsibility and accountability motivates people to perform. Implementing a motivational strategy, therefore train managers and leaders on this organizational aspect. Management by objectives (MBO): recognize tangible rewards to meritocratic personnel. Conclusion

Stress is a negative condition of human being and affects individuals in various forms. Therefore, it is important to recognize the causes of stress and overcome to a resolution. In general, prolonged period of organizational stress will demotivate employees, leading them to be less productive, misbehave and eventually to leave the company. However, having no stress is not good either. It is required a competent and effective leadership in place to address the right tension to the organization to keep everybody focuses to the common target.

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