

Stress management in the workplace



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The study of human relations looks at the interaction between people in the workplace. From study of Masters in Business and personal experience, I understand the one major problem for human relations and therefore corporations is how to manage stressful events/issues in the workplace. “ Highly stressed workers are less productive, change jobs much more frequently, and experience more negative health consequences than their less stressed colleagues” (North Western National Life, 1991, 1992). This is exactly the reason why good management is needed to combat the problem of stress. This critical reflection will examine stress management from my personal point of view and reflect on the topics learnt regarding human relations in the workplace. This critical reflection utilizes the knowledge and experience I have gained from my father’s workplace, HDFC Bank Ltd India. This company like most banks can be a very stressful and fast paced workplace and like most companies there is conflict, co-operative efforts and group relationships. From my father’s management in his company I understand that an employee is not just made up of his/her skills. An employee is a person, a human being, and an effective way of managing human relations is to utilize not just that person’s skills but the diversity they bring to the company when individual employees make up a team.

Companies must limit the amount of conflict within the workplace in order to increase productivity and maximize the efficiency of their workers. Conflict arises due to a difference in values, interest, cultures and can also arise due to miscommunication. It is important when dealing with conflict, that managers understand the underlying factors of why certain conflict arises. With understanding co-workers, employees become compassionate and

empathise with each other as they start to understand and grow to know one another. On the other hand, too much agreement between employees is said to be unhealthy for a company. This does not necessarily mean conflict but rather relates to debate over certain issues. Debate is healthy for companies especially if it generates higher productivity. However, I believe, it is necessary for managers to make sure employees behave in a polite and constructive manner.

In my opinion, it is also important for managers to have effective negotiation skills. With the arise of conflict, comes in need for managers to resolve conflict and disputes in a fair and equal manner. The two types of negotiation, distributive and integrative negotiation can be achieved with the effective management. Distributive negotiation refers to one party winning and the other party losing whereas integrative negotiation is a win-win situation. Unfortunately the latter cannot always be achieved and with conflict there is sometimes a losing party. Therefore conflict resolution, as a manager it is important to express the need to compromise when conflicts arise. As a manger, I am striving to create my skill in negotiating, more importantly I believe managers like myself, should increase their skill in collaboration and accommodating negotiation skills. In aiming to reduce stress in the workplace, negotiation skills such as finding a common ground, a common interest can divert attention away from the conflict and therefore end the stress.

Stress in the workplace does not only come from conflicts between employees. In a bank it is very fast paced and the amount of work that the employees have can also cause stressful tensions. This type of stress is

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known as the treadmill syndrome. Another type of stress can be caused by interruptions in day-to-day processes. This means that employees that are interrupted many times have higher stress levels. However, other types of stress can come from managers and the employer's themselves. Uncertainty in company policies, employee contracts or future employment can also result in tension.

From personal experience I believe the manager must always aim to achieve a good relationship with co-workers and also aim to decrease the level of stress through effective management skills. I also believe that treating employees as individuals, respecting the diversity in the workplace can also lead to happy and less tensed employees. In my father's company one effective way of achieving this is to be inclusive with all employees. This can be difficult when dealing with large teams however being able to make employees feel safe, secure and included can reduce the amount of stress in the job. An example of this is where employees share their knowledge and skills so that the team is not only made up of individuals working alone completing separate tasks, but instead works as a group to achieve a common goal.

The effective control of self-esteem is also an important element in stress management. Self-esteem when properly managed, can allow employees to feel engaged and happy in the workplace. An effective level of self-esteem will create an effective worker. From personal experience creating a balanced self-esteem within employees is all about personal development. Setting goals and giving employees the knowledge and skills to achieve those goals can boost self-esteem, create confidence in the employee's

abilities and decrease the level of stress. Another way of creating confidence is by developing a reward system. A reward system allows for praise to be given when employees deserve it however the management of the system should be carefully scrutinised so that employees do not become dissatisfied when they cannot achieve goals. From personal experience I have seen this system in use and by giving employees praise and rewards for doing a good job the workplace can be comparative and employees feel good about success thus creating high self-esteem and happy effective workers.

Happy effective workers may be easy to establish, however the continuation of this emotion and the deliverance of a low stress workplace can only be achieved through effective management. My view of effective management begins with the ability for managers to be able to set an example of how they want their employees to work. This is closely related to the topic of self-management, which enables a manager to lead by example. The concept of leader and follower is very important to establish for managers. Being able to direct and instruct employees in an appropriate manner can also effectively manage stress. I have seen this when personally dealing with lecturers and teachers. An effective leader, manager or teacher should be able to make people feel calm, valued and secure through their attitude towards work and also the manner in which they conduct themselves. In personal experience teachers have made me feel calm, valued and secure by their positive attitude, friendly personality and ability to “live what they preach” (they lead by example).

The manager’s ability to lead by example also relates to gathering information on employees likes and dislikes and making sure communication

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between employees is at an effective level. “ The main aims of communication are knowledge management; decision making; coordinating work activities; fulfilling relatedness needs; inform; express feelings and influence.” (Evans, (2010) Communication: Interpersonal Effectiveness, [PowerPoint Slides] retrieved from www.jcu.edu). Although these aims are not directly related to stress management, it can be devised that if these aims are achieved the employees work load and general day-to-day tasks will become less stressful. In this day and age, intellectual technology has allowed fir communication to become more efficiently received. However, communication which has been received electronically has more of a chance at being misread. Email, memos, voicemails etc. can create greater conflicts than there would be with face to face communication. Through personal experience and observing my father I have learnt that extensive training in electronic communication and how to write without mistakenly offending people is very important. Face-to-face communication also allows for employees to disclose certain information, allowing people to become comfortable with each other and work more closely as a team. The stress reduction factor in the ability for employees to communicate effectively is seen when communication lowers the risk of conflicts and also decreases the amount of mistakes employees make due to miscommunication. In my father’s company I have heard of many mistakes made due to miscommunication, such as Bank Policies on human relations and employment conditions causing panic and unrest with employees and decreasing efficiency. The miscommunication between bank departments and the creation of rumours results in high levels of stress which could be avoided if better management had been in place. The kind of manager that I

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want to be relates closely with the 'Johari window' and the four panes of relationships. I believe that by developing a close, professional relationship with employees can generate trust and great communication skills. I also believe that a manager should have the ability to criticise employees in a way which will make them more efficient at their job. Constructive criticism, as many call this, is the ability to point out a person's behaviour in a way which makes that person examine their behaviour but is done in a positive manner. Learning to restructure the way in which I give criticism so that my communication is positive and employees are able to learn from the criticism I give them. I learnt from my father that the way he manages his employees, that positive language generates more positive responses to productivity. This ability to disclose information, communicate and take criticism can only happen if there is a certain level of trust already gained between co-workers. An example, Employees' perceptions of low role overload-quantitative, role overload qualitative and lack of career development as sources of stress most likely result in low job stress; in turn, this would benefit both the organizations and the employees themselves. Low job stress should result in better job satisfaction and organizational commitment, since researchers have found significant negative associations between job stress and both job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Jamal & Badawi, 1995).

Although communication is vital, being able to communicate with a diverse range of employees can be difficult. That is why it is necessary for managers to learn how to communicate in different styles. For example, in the workplace there may be employees which are able to process instructions which are verbally communicated. However, others may be more visually

inclined and therefore managers will need the self-disclosure and close relationship with co-workers to develop and understand what communication styles are needed.

However, managers are not able to control every little event that happens in the workplace and conflict can still arise even with good management. A manager's ability to observe, notice and counter act any possible conflict is a great skill to have. However, no manager is able to control people's emotions in this can develop into conflict. The manager's job in this case is to educate employees on the proper ways of controlling and handling their emotions in times of high stress. In my point of view, I believe that company retreats where employees get to know one another in an environment other than the workplace can lead to high levels of trust between co-workers and also creates opportunities to develop their ability to handle emotional stressful events. From my personal experience in studying I have learnt how to deal with stressful events and control my emotions so that I make rational decisions through observing how my father deals with stress (Exercise and Hobbies) and also through seminars which have taught me how to understand how people think and react to different saturations.

As mentioned above, positive language, communication and good management are all good ways to deal with stress in the workplace. One other way to create a stress free environment is to motivate employees in the belief that if workers are motivated and believe in their job conflicts will be diminished, emotions and irrational behaviours will decrease and staff will be happy within themselves and productive. Motivation, I find is a very hard skill to learn and can sometimes take years to develop. From the personal

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experience I have witnessed great management and motivational skills from one of my teachers. Her motivational skills came from her passion for her subject and the belief in what she was doing. Her passion and excitement motivated her whole class and her creativity and ingenuity for teaching and learning pedagogies catered to a diverse yet successful classroom.

Along with motivational skills comes the ability to be able to observe and distinguish learning capabilities. Not every individual has the ability to learn in the same way, and as mentioned before, some may be visual learners others may be auditory and lastly, managers may come across tactile learners. In believe the ability to encourage employees to continue their lifelong learning is an important skill and through learning comes the ability to gain knowledge and ultimately understanding and consideration for others. As a manager, I believe it is this consideration which is also important to stress management. From personal experience I know that knowledge can bring wisdom and the ability to act rationally when conflicts arise.

According to my point of view work life balance can be achieved through proper prioritising between “ work”, career and ambition on the one hand and “ life”, pleasure, leisure and family on the other hand. Through this the manager should be able to promote workplace health and understand the work or family conflict. Stress can be related to this, if an employee is does not have a good work life balance he will undergoing stress in all the ways. I believe that there should be a work life balance in the working environment where the employees should be happy and they can give their own effort to achieve the common goal. An example, “ Singaporean employee perceptions of a supportive HR environment will be negatively related to their

perceptions of role overload and responsibility.” (International Journal of Stress Management July 2002).

In summary, it is very important for managers to learn this significance of stress management. As a manager I believe it is important to keep in mind the organisations, although made up of individuals are essentially individuals that work together. There may be different departments with different managers and therefore different ways of dealing with tasks however, these departments work as a whole in order to successfully achieve a common goal. This is a significance of why stress management is important. If employees are stressed and goals are not achieved, productivity and the company suffer. As expressed above in the critical reflection stress can arise from many situations caused from over work, interruptions or general conflicts between employees. In dealing with stress in the workplace it is important to continue learning new skills in how to deal with conflicts. Some of the factors underlying conflicts which were examined above included miscommunication, lack of knowledge or understanding over diverse workplace etc. The importance of these factors allows for managers to develop a process or plan helping to deal with these factors. I. E self-disclosure will hopefully create a better working environment due to greater knowledge and understanding of each other and thus the ability to communicate more efficiently and effectively with each other. With conflict comes the need for negotiation in order to resolve conflicts and establish a united workplace. My personal experiences and study has allowed me to develop into the kind of manager I believe is most efficient. This involves the ability to communicate effectively with a diverse range of learning abilities

and also able to negotiate to the best of my ability so that compromises can be reached when conflicts arise. But most importantly, I believe in setting a good example for my co-workers which includes continuing my learning through professional development, sharing my knowledge and skills with fellow co-workers, listening and learning from my co-workers and lastly gaining the ability to be empathic and understanding of diverse cultures and people which I may come across both personally and professionally.