

# The history of the meaning of stress philosophy essay



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In psychological terms, stress is a feeling of pressure, strain, anxiety, being overwhelmed. It is characterized by overall irritability, feeling of insecurity, nervousness, withdrawal from social activities, loss of appetite, depression, frequent panic attacks, exhaustion, low / high blood pressure, skin problems, inability to sleep, migraine, gastrointestinal problems (constipation or diarrhea) and menstrual problems in case of women. It can lead to more serious problems e. g. heart problems, etc.

Stress in small amounts may be desirable, beneficial and even healthy for us in some cases.. Positive stress helps improve our performance and keeps us focused on our targets and also “ on our toes”. It also plays a major role in motivating us, helping us in adapting to the environment and any changes therein and also manages our reaction to the environment.

However, excess of anything is bad. This is true in case of stress also. Large amounts of stress can cause many problems in the body that will be harmful to us. Stress could be something external, that is, related to the environment or it could be something internal, that is, affected by the internal perceptions of an individual that cause him to experience feelings of anxiety / negative emotions in relation to a given situation. Examples of negative emotions are pressure, discomfort, etc., which in excess prove to be harmful for us.

For individuals experiencing Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), external factors that are not considered to be stressful or threatening to the individual are deemed as such. Examples of some such triggers are – Reporting stress on hearing a particular song or a particular tune, seeing something that may

remind the individual of prior events that he found threatening to himself. People experience feelings of stress, or perceive things to be threatening to themselves, when they believe that the resources that they have are insufficient for coping with difficulties. It can also be said that people think they do not have the resources that the circumstances demand them to possess. These difficulties may be some stimuli, situations or people. When people believe that the demands being placed upon them are beyond their coping ability, they perceive stress (negative).

## **CAUSES OF STRESS**

Any stimulus that is perceived to be a threat, may it be a particular situation, circumstance, etc. is called a stressor if it promotes or causes an individual to experience stress. Some of the most common stressors in an individual's life are -

**Personal Circumstances** - The personal circumstances of the individual are perhaps the most important stressor in an individual's life. These include any financial difficulties he may be experiencing, any conflicts he may have with his family or friends, etc. These give a lot of stress to the individual.

**Health Status** - An individual's health status is also a cause of stress to him. If the individual is going through some health problems e. g. he has a disease like malaria, he will experience a lot of tension.

In case the individual is poor, he will worry about the cost of treatment, hospital bills, etc. In case of a student, he will worry about the amount of studies that he will miss, the homework, assignments, etc that he will have to submit when he gets better, etc. In case of an employee, he will worry

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about the backlog of his work, whether his job in the organization is safe or he will be replaced, etc. Thus, health status is also a major stressor in the individual's life.

**Ethnicity, Gender, Age or Disability** – Ethnicity refers to a person belonging to a particular place, culture, etc. Sometimes the individual is subjected to bias on the basis of non – ethnicity (in case of Indians working in Norway, the natives of Norway getting preference over Indians even though they may not be as competitive as the Indians), gender (not accepting individual for a particular post in the organization because of gender; this is usually found in the cases of women). Such bias also lead to a lot of frustration arising within the individual and giving him stress.

Also, age of the individual is also a stressor for him. When he grows old, he starts worrying about his retirement, whether the company will firm him because of his inability to work productively any longer, how he will support himself, etc. This gives him a lot of stress. Similarly, disability is also a cause of stress for the individual.

**Personality** – The personality of the individual also affects the amount of stress that he takes, how much he is affected by the different stressors, etc. e. g. Someone, who has an easygoing, “ happy – go – lucky” nature will not take a lot of stress or not take any undue stress. On the other hand, a pessimistic person will always be under a lot of stress as he will always think the worst in every situation and take a lot of stress from the same. Thus, personality of the individual can also be said to be one of the factors of stress.

Background and Culture – The background and culture of a person are a factor in shaping the personality of a person. Thus, background and culture can also be a factor of stress for the individual.

Other than the above factors, there are various demands in and outside work which also contribute to giving stress to the individual.

## **WORK – RELATED STRESS**

Work – related stress is the tension or stress that an individual experiences when he feels or he actually does not have adequate resources to cope with the various types and combinations of demands of his work.

Work – related stress usually arises due to lack of planning. In the absence of an organized and well designed plan to accomplish a goal, the individual feels stress while working towards accomplishment of the goal. However, planning or rather lack of it, alone, is not responsible for work – related stress. There are various other factors which can be responsible for this stress. Some of them are given below :-

Management Standards – Management standards give definition to the culture and characteristics of the organization. They lay out the benchmarks for performance of the employees. The employee feels stress from the tension of not being able to achieve the target or not being “ up to the standard” in the organization. He fears this will lead to him losing his job and thus, takes tension. Thus, management standards also cause stress to the organization. However, if this stress is taken positively, it can lead to great personal growth of the employee by serving as a motivator for the employee to perform better.

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Overworked Underling – This scenario usually arises when there is a high demand for the services of the individual but he has very little or no control over how his services are volunteered or used in the organization. This tends to cause a great deal of psychological strain on the individual. The employee is usually overworked, is busy from the time he comes to work to the time he goes home, mostly comes early to work and goes home late. The employee does not get a say in the projects that he will be doing and often finds himself doing someone else's work also in addition to his own.

Frustrated Go – Getter – Every employee, whether he is a hard worker or a smart worker, works with some specific objective in mind. This objective can be a raise in salary, appreciation for a job well done, promotion, etc. However, when this objective is not satisfied, even though the employee has worked fruitfully for the achievement of the same, the employee becomes frustrated. In this, someone else (e. g. the bosses) may take credit for employee's work instead of giving him what is due to him. Whatever the reason may be, as the employee does not get any fruit for his efforts, he gets more and more frustrated. As his frustration increases, so does his stress and anxiety level. Thus, employee takes a lot of stress as a frustrated go – getter.

Castaway – In this situation the employee feels like its “ just him against the world”. He feels totally alone and feels that he cannot trust or rely on anyone except himself. His boss does not give him any guidance or help when he faces a problem. He feels that he does not have any friends who he can trust at the workplace. He becomes cynical and cannot find a way to channel all his negative feelings / emotions (frustration at the boss, fear of losing his job, <https://assignbuster.com/the-history-of-the-meaning-of-stress-philosophy-essay/>

etc.) There is no outlet for all these emotions. He is at a loss of who to turn to and feels totally alienated by everyone else at the workplace. This also gives the employee a lot of stress.

Doormat – This happens a lot in jobs where the employee has to deal directly with the customer. He is expected to talk politely to the customer irrespective of what or how the customer is talking to him. The same is true for the employee's relationship with his seniors / manager(s). The manager may not treat employee with any respect but the employee must always treat the manager respectfully. He is always expected to maintain a façade of professionalism and courtesy. Thus employee feels like he is being treated like a doormat on which anyone and everyone can step without there being any consequence of the same. He feels that he is being taken for granted and no importance is being given to his self – respect. This also leads to “ bottling up” of emotions on the employee's part, thus giving rise to tension and stress.

Tech – Prisoner – This is one of the adverse effects that technology has on our life. What with laptops, mobiles, Blackberry, etc. the boss can be in touch with the employee 24 X 7 X 365 i. e. all the time. Even at Sunday, which is an “ off” day, the employee is usually working, albeit from home. In case he is sick, the boss tells him he need not come to office..... he can work from home instead. Our home, instead of being a sanctuary to return to from work, has now become more like a 2nd workplace. The employee is imprisoned by the very technology that makes his work easier. Thus, the employee does not have any place or time to unwind or relax. He is always

working. This gives rise to frustration on the employee's part. This frustration, in turn, leads to stress.

**Bully Target** – In organizations, the boss is usually the ultimate bully. He holds the power to fire the employee, deduct his salary, etc. The boss knows this. The employee is usually the bully target for the boss. The boss can take out all his anger or frustration on the employee, give him enormous amounts of work to be finished within a very short period, insult the employee or “dress him down” in front of others as a show of power over the employee, etc. The employee, being “under the boss's thumb” cannot do anything but go on working and hope to please the boss. Even if this happens to others and not the employee himself, he is always afraid that it will be his turn next. Thus, these feelings of fear, anxiety, etc. give stress to the employee.

**Burnout** – Burnout begins with prolonged and excessive levels of job stress. Strain is produced as a result of this stress. The process is completed when employee copes with the job in a defensive manner and becomes cynical or rigid. It usually happens when an employee has been working “his tail off” continuously for a long period of time. As the term suggests, “burnout” refers to a state of total exhaustion, both physical and emotional, when the employee feels that he is just about to break down or collapse from overwork. It is usually characterized by a dramatic decrease in the employee's productivity and a diminishing of interest on the part of the employee in the work that he has to do. It is caused by working for long hours, taking very little time to relax and a continuous competition with peers, the need to prove oneself to the superiors, etc. All this builds pressure on the employee and causes a lot of stress to him.

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Wronged Victim – The employee feels that he is being wronged at the workplace. He may feel that the boss is playing favorites and being partial towards some employees e. g. the employee may be overburdened with work, while some other team members might have no work at all and may be relaxing. Even at the employee's behest, the manager refuses to distribute his work among them. Thus, employee may feel the manager is being partial towards the other employees. Also, if the manager takes credit for work done by employee, he may feel wronged. This leads to employee feeling very frustrated with the manager as well as the organization and thus, feeling very stressed.

The main work – related stressor is burnout.

## **CAUSES OF BURNOUT**

Long hours – When an employee keeps working long hours continuously for a long period of time, he starts feeling exhausted, both mentally and physically. This also leads to him not being able to concentrate on his work, losing his interest in the same and feeling large amounts of stress. This leads to the employee experiencing burnout.

Lack of down time – As the saying goes, “ All work and no play made Jack a dull boy.” Similarly, if an employee continues to work for long hours continuously for a long period of time without taking any time to relax or unwind, the exhaustion of the employee becomes two – fold. Instead of helping him do the work faster by devoting more time to it (as he believes), the employee is actually slowing himself down by not resting at all. Once he rests, the productivity of employee can once again become high. On the

other hand, when an employee keeps working without resting his productivity keeps getting lower until it is nil. This is when the employee is likely to experience a complete physical and mental breakdown.

Continuous competition – Competition, as long it is taken positively, is good for the employee. It helps in improving performance of the individual and also helps in his personal growth. However, “ Excess of anything is bad”. This holds true in case of competition also. If an employee is always worrying about competition, it is liable to build pressure on him. This pressure, combined with all other pressures, can speed up the process of burnout of the employee.

Thus, we can see that everything, may it be competitiveness, work or rest works positively for the employee only when done in moderation. Excess can lead to burnout which only adds to the employee’s problems rather than reducing them.

## **SYMPTOMS OF BURNOUT**

Low Job Performance – The employee’s productivity falls and his level of performance decreases. Also, his job satisfaction also goes down. Employee is not happy doing his job and does not give the required level of productivity.

Physical exhaustion / Fatigue – Due to working for long hours for a prolonged duration, employee feels tired out and in great need of relaxation. He is unable to concentrate and focus on his job, bringing down his performance. He feels totally exhausted physically.

Rigidity – Employee becomes rigid i. e. inflexible towards change of any kind. Instead of being active and trying to adapt himself to any new changes in the job environment, the employee adopts a rigid attitude and does not want change of any kind.

Apathy – The employee becomes indifferent towards the activities of the organization. He loses his sense of purpose and becomes listless. Also, the employee does not work towards fulfillment of his objectives and does not really care about their fulfillment.

Cynicism -The employee becomes cynical and shows distrust towards everyone. He feels that no one can be trusted and that everyone is motivated by their own selfish reasons only.

Emotional exhaustion – The employee is so drained that he acts like a zombie with no sense of what is going on or what is happening. He is totally exhausted emotionally as well as physically. He has no energy and is in dire need of relaxation to get back some energy.

## **COPING WITH STRESS**

Individuals may perceive various threats to themselves. These perceived threats may prove to be stressful to them in various ways. Individuals have different coping mechanisms or defense mechanisms for handling this stress. However, all their variations are based on the same general idea: There are productive / positive and counter – productive / negative ways of handling stress. As stress is perceived, the mechanisms given below may not necessarily deal with the actual situation that causes stress to an individual.

However, they may be considered coping mechanisms if they give the <https://assignbuster.com/the-history-of-the-meaning-of-stress-philosophy-essay/>

individual a way to handle the stress in a better way such that the negative feelings / feelings of anxiety that the individual is experiencing due to the perceived threat may be reduced substantially, rather than actually fixing the concrete obstacle causing the stress. This “ actual fixing” is not possible in real life. Given below are some widely accepted mechanisms for coping with stress -

### **1) Highly Active / Problem-Focused / Adaptive Mechanisms**

These skills are used when the individual wants to “ face the problem head on”, or at the very least, deal with the negative emotions experienced by him due to stress in a positive / constructive manner. This style is generally known as being adaptive in nature.

a) Affiliation - This method involves dealing with stress by involving oneself in social activities, turning to a social network for support, etc. However, the individual just uses these social interactions as a way to unwind or get away from his problems for some time. He does not share his problems with others in order to “ decrease the burden on himself” or transfer the responsibility to someone else.

b) Humor - As it is said, “ Laughter is the best medicine”. An individual often tries to get some relief in a stressful situation by injecting some humor or “ comic relief” into the same. Besides decreasing the stress on the individual, this method also allows him to “ step away” from the situation. This gives him another way of looking at the problem which can help him in finding a solution to the same.

c) Sublimation - This method allows the individual to find an indirect way of resolving the conflict such that there is neither any loss of pleasure on the part of the individual nor any adverse consequences. Most importantly, this mechanism is characterized by the fact that it gives the individual a socially acceptable outlet for channeling his troubling emotions and impulses.

d) Positive Reappraisal - This method involves redirection of the individual's thoughts or cognitive energy to good events that are either happening or have yet to occur. It leads to introspection or self - reflection, personal growth of the individual and awareness of the benefits of one's efforts or of how much the individual can achieve through his efforts..

Other adaptive coping mechanisms include altruism, anticipation and self - observation.

## **2) Disavowal Mechanisms**

These mechanisms are used by the individual because they give him a diminished or even non - existent (in some cases) awareness of his fears, perceived threats, feelings of anxiety, etc. This is because this mechanism causes the individual to become impervious to any perceived threats.

Displacement - This is the technique of directing one's attention away from a threatening situation, event, etc. to a somewhat less threatening one.

Repression - In this method, the individual tries to totally disconnect himself from the threatening situation by removing all feelings, thoughts, etc. related to the perceived threat from his awareness. This method is usually not advisable because when followed long enough, it is little more than denial of

the threats that he faces. He is “ running away from the threats or hiding from them” instead of facing or resolving them.

Reaction Formation – This is similar to repression. The only difference is that in this method, in addition to removing all threatening thoughts, feelings, etc. from one’s consciousness, the individual substitutes or replaces them with the exact opposite feelings, thoughts, etc. e. g. in case of threatening thoughts, individual will substitute pleasant ones.

Other disavowal mechanisms include rationalization, undoing, dissociation, etc.

## **Active Mechanisms**

In these methods, an individual deals with stress either by withdrawing from the threatening situation or by taking action against the same.

Acting Out – In this method, the individual, instead of reflecting on the problem and trying to find a way to solve it, starts taking maladaptive action i. e. instead of trying to adapt to the situation, the individual starts fighting against it. Such behavior is counter – productive for the individual and is usually characterized as problematic or counter – normative behavior.

Passive Aggression – In this method, the individual deals with negative thoughts or feelings arising from the stress (anxiety, fear, etc.) by behaving in a resentful or hostile manner towards others. He rejects help from others and also complains about the circumstances and / or the present state of affairs.

Depending on the situation, all the coping mechanisms given above may be characterized as being adaptive or counter – normative.

## **TO RELIEVE STRESS AMONG EMPLOYEES, A MANAGER CAN –**

**Include Employees In Decision Making** – This gives the employees a feeling of control over the work that they do. It helps in reducing the frustration that they experience with the managers and the organization at the amount of work they have to do. By making them a part of the decision making process, the manager is gaining their voluntary acceptance to do the work allotted to them.

**Increasing Transparency** – The manager can make the decision making process more transparent, explaining the reason for a specific decision. This does not mean that manager has to give an explanation to the employees for all his decisions but he may give reasons for those decisions which the employee perceives as having a negative effect on him. This will nip any notions of “ partiality by manager” in the bud only and also make the employee feel more valued.

**Discuss Employees’ Problems** – The manager should have an open – door policy and encourage employees to discuss their problems. This will help in clearing any misunderstandings or misconceptions that the employee may harbor and also assure the employee that he can come to the manager for help and guidance. This will reduce the stress on the employee.

**Giving Employees Time off** – This means literally giving the employee some time to relax. Just the fact that the employee is at home is not enough. If

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employee is working from home, he is still working only. Giving time off means not giving employee any work and just allowing him to unwind or relax himself. This will reduce the physical and emotional exhaustion of the employee and allow him to rejuvenate. Also, he will feel less like a “tech prisoner”. This will also reduce the stress on the employee.

Periodic Performance Appraisal – Managers should conduct periodic performance appraisals (weekly, monthly, etc.) of the employees so as to analyze their performance, check whether they are performing according to the set standards, find out the causes of deviation, if any exists. The manager can also instruct the employees on how to achieve their goals and where they are going wrong presently. This will reduce any feelings of frustration experienced by employees and also assure them that the manager wants to help them in achieving their goals.

## **BENEFITS OF RELIEVING STRESS**

### **TO INDIVIDUALS –**

Higher Job Satisfaction – If the individual is not experiencing any stress or too much stress, he will be happy doing his job and thus, will have a high degree of job satisfaction.

Easier To Achieve Goals – If the individual is not experiencing an excess of stress and he has a high level of job satisfaction, he will also have higher productivity. With this higher productivity, individual will be able to achieve his goals in a shorter time.



Harmony - If individual does not experience too much stress and has high job satisfaction, he will automatically find a balance between his professional and personal life. Thus, he will find a harmony between both and be able to enjoy both to the fullest extent.

Problem free - The individual, in the absence of negative stress in his life, will be free of many of the problems relating to stress e. g. listlessness, emotional and physical exhaustion, etc. Thus, his life will be further enriched.

## **TO TEAMS –**

Harmony Between Team Members - Due to lack of stress on individuals and reduced tension among the employees, there will be more harmony between the members of the team and team spirit will be significantly greater.

Better Performance - Due to greater harmony between the members of the team, the team members will perform better and be more productive.

Subsequently, the team performance will also be much better.

Achievement of Targets - As the performance will be higher, the team will also be able to achieve all its targets in a timely manner.

Higher Motivation - Due to the combination of the above given factors (harmony between team members, better performance and achievement of targets), the team will have a high degree of motivation.

## **TO ORGANIZATIONS –**

Higher Productivity – As the individuals will perform better and the teams' performance will improve, the productivity of the organization will also increase.

Lower Turnover – Turnover here refers to the attrition rate or the rate at which employees leave the organization. If employees experience less or no stress, they will have job satisfaction and be happy doing their jobs. If they are happy working in the organization, they will not leave the organization. Thus, there will be lower turnover.

Lower Absenteeism – If the employees have a high degree of job satisfaction, they will not be absent frequently from the job and thus, there will be lower absenteeism in the organization.

Better Reputation – As the company will have a lower turnover, lower absenteeism and a higher productivity, its reputation in the market will improve greatly and the value of its goodwill will also increase, Thus, company will get more business and its income will increase.