

The stress in the workplace psychology essay



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Stress is a common daily experience for many people, increasingly in the workplace. Employees complain that there are many elements that produce stress in the workplace; for example, relationships with other employees, occupational demands and lack of control work (Cooper, Dewe and O'Driscoll 2001). A survey of over a million employees in the UK found that over fifty percent of them experienced health problems due to stress. More and more employees appear to be suffering from ill health, often attributed to stress. Some psychologists claim that job stress affects more than sixty percent of all workplaces in the UK (Cartwright 2000). Stress is a significant and increasing problem in many countries (Chmiel 2008). Many researchers believe that there are three main types of stress (Copper and Payne 1988): stress as a reaction; stress as a stimulus; and stress as an intermediary procedure between both reaction and stimulus. Thus, stress is a psychological or physiological response when people face a difficulty. Currently, some theories suggest that stress is a negative sentimental state which is due to the reaction between people and their surroundings (Arnold et al. 2010). However, stress may also have a positive effect on employees. This essay will focus on the definition of stress and two causes of stress – work-related causes and individual personality causes in the workplace. Then evaluate the organizational techniques and individual techniques of reducing stress.

The first step in solving any problem is to be beginning by understanding the issue. The definition of stress is argued by many psychologists. Since 1929, different researchers have developed various definitions of stress. Some researchers believe that the definition should be impartial, while others

suggest that it could depend on individual opinions (Furnham 2005).

According to the early studies, Selye defines stress as “ the non-specific response of the body to any demand made upon it” (1956^{1/4} Epp. 27-29).

Selye’s definition concerns the physiological reaction instead of incorporating both psychological and physiological responses. A few years later, Cox (1978) illustrates that stress can be explained into three meanings: “ reaction-based”, “ stimulus-based” and “ interactive”. Moreover, this theory is developed by other psychologists. Semmer (2003) claims that stress can be divided into stimulus, response and the intercede course between response and stimulus. Hence, Semmer’s definition is the most popular definition in sphere of learning. People use his definition to deeply understand stress.

At present, stress is regarded as a public problem for most of employees. People try to find the roots of stress, especially in workplace. Some psychologists say that stressors such as workload, work schedule and conflict at work are the main sources of stress in the workplace (Landy & Conte 2004). Furnham (2005) divides the main stressors into two types of cause: work-related causes and individual personality causes. He separates these stressors from the internal cause (personality) and external cause (environment).

Currently, several studies prove that these two main causes which can produce stress in workplace. One of causes is work-related cause. Regarding work-related causes of stress, it includes job requirements, job role, work overload, work underload, organizational change, and other stressors. Firstly, Job requirements are the most significant factor which cause stress in the

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workplace. There are some demands which can make a job more and more stressful – for instance, risk and danger. Police officers, firefighters, and other people in occupations where they often have to face physical threats always need to reduce the stress (Arnold et al. 2010). Secondly, Role-stressors include role conflict and role ambiguity (Woods & West 2010). It affects the work settings and social support. Role ambiguity can also be a source of stress if a job description is too vague, and therefore employees are unsure of what duties they have in the office. Thirdly, Work overload and underload also influence employee physical and mental health. Work overload means that there is too much work or work that is too difficult for an employee to complete. On the other hand, work underload means work is too simple to being a challenge for employees (Schultz & Schultz 2002). Both work overload and work underload can lead to stress. The more time required completing a task, the lower employee's level of happiness, and as a result, it impacts employees' health and state of mind. The next factor is organizational change. Usually, it is difficult for employees to find their positions when the situation or environment changes. In that instance, not only the organization changes but also the demands of the organization changes, which in turn can make employees feel stressed. Finally, there are additional stressors in workplace, such as negative leadership and career development. Negative leadership gives employees pressure when they are provided negative feedback. Moreover, most of employees worry about their career development. In an employee's career development, worrying over promotion and performance appraisals can be a significant factor of stress. Consequently, Work-related causes are external causes, which are objective and hard to change. The other main cause is individual personality causes. In

this case, stress is influenced by individual factors, such as personality types, subjective opinions, and intelligence (Furnham 2006). There are many unique elements which can produce stress. Furthermore, people's tendency to pay attention to the negative sides of an event is also a source of stress for employees. An individual's personality is an internal cause which can change by employees. Thus, these two causes are the common reasons of producing stress. Most employees are bothered by work-related causes, and are suffering from the negative effects of stress for a long time.

As the cause of stress already discussed indicate, most researchers assert that stress is a growing problem in many countries – one that has the potential to increase in the future (Chimel 2008). In general, stress tends to have negative consequences. Nevertheless, there are also some positive effects of stress in workplace.

While, Selye (1956) believes that there are two kinds of stress – “distress” and “eustress”. “Distress” is negative stress which can affect people's health. “Eustress” is positive stress which can motivate people to reach a goal. Distress expresses the negative consequences of stress. These negative consequences can be separated into three main types: behavioral, psychological, and physiological (Woods & West 2010). Initially, for behavior outcomes, people could make more mistakes during the learning and understanding processes. For example, fast food delivery workers can get into accidents more easily when there are too many deliveries to make (Landy & Conte 2004). This is because they cannot pay more attention to the situation on the road when they are worried about how they can make deliveries on time. That is very dangerous for workers. Then, the

psychological consequences of stress are also serious. Burnout, a common psychology consequence of stress, is a prominent negative effect of stress – especially in “caring” careers – nursing and teaching (Landy & Conte 2004). For instance, a job which has massive workload and high work demands, usually leads to burnout. Normally, burnout will affect individual achievement. Employees who have low individual achievement will have difficulties facing challenge or difficulties well. It is clear that the high workload and job demands will increase the risk of burnout. In the meantime, some physiological changes result from stress as well. Some early studies reported that stress not only causes heart disease and headaches but also increases blood pressure and heart rate (Arnold et al. 2010). It is hazardous for employees that stress can threaten their life. The negative consequences of stress are easy to uncover, although, many articles have shown that stress can also have a positive influence in workplace. Selye (1956) suggests that a suitable amount of stress can help employee to develop their full potential. Because of “eustress”, they are good at receiving and acting on positive feedback during work time and they continue to find new challenges in their career development. Consequently, employees can get their goal soon. Stress can encourage employees to be successful in workplace. Nevertheless, most of the time, people spend lots of time studying the negative side of stress instead of the positive. The negative consequences of stress are the main problems that mostly disturb employees in workplace. Because of the negative consequence of stress, nowadays, there are many methods that can reduce or manage stress in the workplace. Some psychologists say that people can use organizational techniques and

individual techniques to reduce stress in the workplace. Organizational techniques include changing the organizational climate and providing employee assistance procedure. The organization should make sure that employees are able to adapt to change (Cooper & Locke 2000). It is important that employees engage in the decisions leading to change in the workplace. Participation could assist employees in adapting more easily to changes. Employees have a right to express their ideas and opinions. It can help employees to reduce or prevent the stress. Providing employees with assistance procedures means that organizations define employee roles and provide programs about stress management. In order to reduce stress which due to role ambiguity, organizations should give employees a clear job description before they start to work. It is an effective way to reduce employees' stress. Moreover, appropriate job demands can prevent and reduce work overload and underload. Another effective way to help employees reduce stress is by providing stress management programs. For example, a survey of 130 workers in Netherlands who engage in a stress management training program reported that it is an effective solution for reducing psychology stress. More importantly, the effects of this program lasted for six months (Schultz & Schultz 2002). Accordingly, training programs could be successful in helping employees reduce stress levels in the workplace. On the other hand, Individual techniques for reducing and limiting stress are also important for employees. Since the 1930s, relaxation training has been used as an effective solution for reducing stress. The purpose of this kind of training is decrease the blood pressure. That way, employees begin to feel relaxed more quickly. In addition to the methods already described, biofeedback is another popular technique for reducing

stress. Through the feedback of heart rate or blood pressure, people are taught to manage their internal state. Biofeedback can also be used to control brain waves. Keeping calm is an essential element of reducing stress. As a consequence, both organizational techniques and individual techniques are effective ways for helping employees to reduce stress. However, in fact, the organizational techniques are easier than individual techniques to enforce in a company.

In conclusion, stress, an increasingly public problem, bothers most employees in modern society. Some psychologists claim that stress is a reaction and stimulus. It is a kind of psychological or physiological response shown when people face challenges or a threatening situation. There are internal causes – individual personality and external causes – work-related causes. Work-related cause is the main cause for producing stress in workplace. Selye (1956) demonstrates that “ eustress” is one kind of positive stress. “ Eustress” can motivate employees to improve themselves and get their goal. Other researchers, however, say that stress only has negative effects on employees, such as disease and burnout. In accordance with the negative effects of stress, the measures of reducing stress are divided into two categories: organizational techniques and individual techniques. These techniques deal with the stress due to work-related causes and individual personality causes. In the workplace, not only the employees but also the organization’s leaders should be concerned about reducing stress.