

Relationship between stress and communication process



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An organisation of the current time is naturally exposed to a stress environment. The recent economic downturn has just made it more comfortable for accommodating such a condition in the organisation. This is illustrated through the following case involving a situation in an 'Accounting & Auditing' firm. The organisation is well reputed for its big size and to have achieved great heights in short period. The organisation depends on technology for all sorts of communication across all levels of hierarchy. There is a belief of saving time and efforts by doing so. The words that may suit the overall ambience surrounding the employees here are- being dynamic, demanding, high expectations, achieving targets, deadlines etc. This, like most other big organisations in this sector, has erratic working hours. Of course it is also known for the comparatively high monetary compensation it offers for the same.

Since recently, the organisation has been undergoing change in work policies according to the changing needs of the environment. Parallel to which, we can observe a rise in the number of employees quitting the organisation and many being absent or showing a poor performance. The increase in employee turnover has started to worry the top management. They realised the importance of giving attention to these issues which puts their social reputation and status at stake.

Under this situation, one can guess that the employees are exposed to diversified behavioural issues. But also to be considered is the rise of giving importance to managing them effectively. As the first line of this part hints, the backbone of the following report will analyse the case with respect to the stress levels of its employees and also relate it to one other issue viz.

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Communication process. This will be done by defining and deploying the appropriate theory with relation to the organisational behaviour. Following which, the possible recommendations and conclusions will be discussed to manage the current situation effectively.

Relationship between Stress and Communication process:

To begin with, one has to understand and identify whether the organisation, the employees in particular, are going through stressed situation. Stress can be defined as “ a response, consequence of any action, situation or event that places special demands on a person; and all such actions/situations/events that places special demands are called Stressors” (Gibson, Ivancevich, Donnelly and Konopaske, 2006, p. 199).

OUTCOMES:

Behavioural:

- Satisfaction
- Performance
- Absenteeism
- Turnover
- Health care claims

Cognitive:

- Poor decision making
- Lack of concentration
- Forgetfulness

- Frustration

Physiological:

- Increased blood pressure
- High cholesterol
- Coronary heart disease (CHD)
- Harmful addictions

Stressors, Stress and Outcomes model:

STRESSORS:

Individual Level:

- Role conflict
- Role overload
- Ambiguity in job description
- Pace of change
- Job uncertainty

Group Level:

- Intra group conflict
- Organisational Level:
- Culture
- Communication process
- Change in policies
- Lack of career opportunities

Non-work:

- Elder & Child care
- Environmental changes- economical, social, political, technological

Stress:

- Individual differences- heredity, age, sex, diet, lifestyle, coping, type A personality traits

[Adapted] From: Gibson et al. (2006). Organizations: Behaviour, Structure, Processes. (12th ed.). New York. McGraw-Hill/Irwin

Relating few of the above to the current scenario:

- Change in policies- fluctuating targets than the usual because of changing needs
- Role conflicts- multiple level hierarchies; An individual handling varied projects at the same time may have to report to new/multiple managers leading to role conflicts
- Role overload- closer deadlines, erratic working hours
- Environmental changes- whether it is economic changes or technological advancements, the employees view it as a source of replacements. And feel insecure about layoffs & uncertain about their jobs
- Communication- when it is ineffective, it leads to role ambiguity, intra group conflicts

The above list of stressors may increase/decrease according to the employees and the organisation. These need not be stressors to all. An individual in a demanding position may be affected by stress, while the other may not be though both belong to the same organisation. It depends on the <https://assignbuster.com/relationship-between-stress-and-communication-process/>

individual's characteristics and perspectives. (Gibson et al, 2006). Wilson (2004) identifies these two types of individuals as " Type-A": sustained drive towards poorly defined goals, preoccupation with deadlines, competitiveness, desire for advancement and achievement and " Type-B": relaxed, unhurried and satisfied. Type-A individuals encounter with high risk of coronary heart disease (CHD), and other physiological outcomes compared to Type-B individuals. The actual issues of concern in the mentioned case are employees quitting the organisation, poor performance and absenteeism. And these can be traced to the outcomes in the above ' stress defining' model. All these confirm a stressed atmosphere prevailing in the organisation.

" Communication process becomes very important in organizations that deal with uncertainty, that are complex and that have a technology that does not permit easy routinization. The more an organisation is people and idea oriented, the more important communication process becomes" (Hall, 1999, p. 167). All the job related information is communicated to the subordinates by the managers. There is delegation of work running through all levels. Communication process is carried out by adopting various technological channels like Email, Fax, and Telecommunication etc.

The question to be answered at this point is- whether appropriate channel/medium is adopted? For example: The targets/goals/job description for the lower level employees is determined by the managers. And the same is being communicated to them through emails. Now, if the message is similar to what is done in the past then this is an appropriate channel. This way, the organisation will save time and efforts as they believe so. However,

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if the message relates to new responsibilities/project, the employee at the execution level may need more clarifications and may prefer personal/telecommunication channel. When the sender of the message (managers) fail to use the appropriate channel, the message often tend to get distorted leading to ambiguity among the employees about their role & responsibilities. This causes stress. Also, Wilson (2004) notes Hilpern's (2003) finding that excessive dependency on technology at work contributes to rising stress levels, referred as 'digital depression'. This implies that, an effective communication process in place will support a stress free environment. Consequentially improve the situation and performance of the employees and organisation.

Recommendations:

As we have discussed so far, it can be inferred that the outcomes of a stressed situation or an ineffective communication adversely affect the performance and life of the individual, thereby the organisation.

Facts:

According to national mental health association, the cost of depression is \$43billion a year in medical bills, lost productivity, and absenteeism;

Depression is the seventh most common cause of adult deaths

(Gibson et al, 2006 noted Sharon Johnson's, " Depression: Dragging millions down" The New York Times magazine, October 29, 2000 pp39, 47)

It is estimated (Wilson, 2004) around 13.5 million working days a year being lost to companies in the UK because of stress, anxiety or depression of employees.

Therefore, it becomes very important to address these issues so as to improve the situation and save various costs to the organisation.

Stress Management:

Briner and Reynolds (1993, cited by Dewe and O'Driscoll (2002)) identified that “ people may be absent because they find the job stressful. On the other hand, it may add to the stress encountered. Therefore, identifying the direction of causality is a critical step in developing effective stress management interventions”.

Organisational ways of alleviating stress:

- Advance planning should be done providing for sudden demands & risks
- Jobs redesign- economic downturn and work load are interrelated. Therefore provision should be made to address to the needs of erratic working hours and strike a balance; Flexible working hours should be provided
- Performance evaluation/feedback should be given to the employees to improve
- Check on physiological changes in the employees like harmful addictions. Example: excessive smoking, alcohol, unhealthy eating habits, sleep cycle, lifestyle. These often act as stress indicators

- Better communication process- a union/representative should be established to identify the needs, suggestions and grievances. Or a box for the same can be installed to maintain anonymity
- Inculcate the importance of fitness and health by sponsoring/promoting the idea of gym, aerobics
- Allocate a day/sometime in a month/week for recreation & leisure; Arrange outings for the employees' families together; work-life balance should be given importance
- Conduct wellness programs to improve overall physical & mental health, Employee Assistance Programs (EAP) to assist work & non work related issues; many organisations believe these to be efficient and effective
- Appoint a person as a personal tutor for each employee to know his individual problems relating to anything and ensure he is comfortable
- Regular comparisons between the planned performance and the actual performance should be made. If there is any deviation, the causes should be analysed and rectified immediately

Individual measures:

Informal group meetings should be initiated to share solutions to common problems they face – work & non work related

Create time to attend to individual needs so as to feel good and positive

Engage in any kind of physical activities; Or yoga, meditation to improve the health and avoid the risk of heart diseases caused due to stress

Have a close check on the daily diet, lifestyle, avoid unhealthy food

Ensure sufficient sleep the body demands; Effective time-management

All of the above stress management measures should be a continuous process in order to achieve significant results. It should be remembered that immediate results in these may not be permanent or long lasting.

Effective Communication process:

Organisations need effective two-way communication systems. Good communications help to reduce high stress and to lower job dissatisfaction (Taylor and Cooper (1988) supports Newman and Beehr (1979); McGee et al., 1987). The entire organisation gets the work done by communicating. Communication is one of the most important organisational processes that bind the different parts.

The 3 major issues are- Omission, Distortion and Overload of messages

If the sender is intimidated by receiver, the message and its interpretation are affected. The main considerations that crop up- social status, sexual attraction, status differences etc. This leads to distortions of messages (Hall, 1999)

Medium of communication is an integral part in the communication process. Especially for an organisational structure like in the case. As explained earlier, any inappropriate channel/medium will lead to ambiguity of message and distortions

Filtering of information and selective listening are the two major issues of concern while sending and receiving a message, respectively

Measures:

Computers, an integral part of communication process, should be checked for its working condition regularly. Because sudden break down will handicap the entire process thereby leading to stress

Regularise team meetings- provide increased problem resolution leading to greater job satisfaction and stress reduction. Also an opportunity for increased communication between managers and team members of other competency groups, possibly leading to better team cooperation (Zeffane and McLoughlin, 2006)

Create an atmosphere, wherein two way communications are possible. All the managers and employees involved should be approachable and kind. Non verbal communication is equally important to create a positive impact on the receiver of the message

Interpersonal communication that involves face to face and group meetings are most of the times replaced with emails. Therefore this should be adopted when appropriate

Upward communication and feedback in the communication process are often neglected in the case. Importance should be given to these in order to ensure the correctness of the message (message received is understood in the same sense as it was intended when sent)

Conclusion:

Communication-stress-performance-life of the individual and the organisation are so interdependent. Statistical analyses show that job satisfaction and positive communication with managers are strong predictors of feelings of stress and perceived cooperation (Zeffane and McLoughlin, 2006). Studying of organisational behaviour has gained so much of importance not only with a motive to address performance issues, but also saving costs. Being efficient and effective seems to be the guidelines of every organisation. “ Study of organisational behaviour attempts to assist managers understand people better so that productivity improves, customer satisfaction and better competitive position” (Gibson et al. 2006, p. 6).

Therefore it is almost mandatory for every organisation to understand and manage these behavioural issues, to remain organised. It is not just for the well being of the employees but the organisation as a whole.