

Stress management and well-being at work



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For employees everywhere, the troubled economy may feel like an emotional roller coaster. “ Layoffs” and “ budget cuts” have become bywords in the workplace, and the result is increased fear, uncertainty, and higher levels of stress. Since job and workplace stress grow in times of economic crisis, it’s important to learn new and better ways of coping with the pressure. The ability to manage stress in the workplace can make the difference between success and failure on the job. Our emotions are contagious, and stress has an impact on the quality of our interactions with others. The better we are at managing our own stress, the more we will positively affect those around us and the less other people’s stress will negatively affect us. Stress management is the need of the hour. However hard we try to go beyond a stress situation, life seems to find new ways of stressing us out and plaguing us with anxiety attacks. Moreover, be it our anxiety, mind-body exhaustion or our erring attitudes, we tend to overlook causes of stress and the conditions triggered by those. In such unsettling moments we often forget that stressors, if not escapable, are fairly manageable and treatable.

In this research, I would like to identify the core factors that trigger high stress levels especially in the service sector which has been gaining more importance today and also the impact of emotional labour. This proposal also brings out the various research questions which would be answered over the course of conducting my research through surveys and informal communication with the employees across various organizations. In the end, the limitations are also listed which I may come across while conducting my research.

RESEARCH QUESTION

The importance of stress management has been increasing in today's dynamic business era as the pressure of growth of an economy has begun to shift from the manufacturing sector to the service sector. Thus, I am very interested in finding out:

What are the main causes of high levels of stress among employees at the service sectors?

What are the risk factors associated within any organization in the service sector?

What are the other organizational issues that elevate the levels of stress?

Are employees in the service sector forced into emotional labour?

What are the current strategies used by organizations in order to manage high levels of stress among employees keeping the poor economic climate in mind?

How vital is it to have a good work-life balance?

I believe that towards the completion of my research, I would be able to have a much deeper understanding into the concepts of stress management and emotional labour.

SCOPE

An analysis of the work stress of the company provides the true picture of the condition at the company which will give an idea about the areas which require immediate management attention for the better operation. Since the <https://assignbuster.com/stress-management-and-well-being-at-work/>

entire project is based on the understanding & managing stress of employees across organizations in the service sector, the scope of the project is limited to the employees working in the organization at different levels of the hierarchy structure. These findings and suggestions are made primarily to frame a suitable personnel strategy for the better operations of the organization with all round benefits.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) estimates the costs to society of work related stress to be around £4 billion each year, while 13.5 million working days were lost to stress in 2007/08. By taking action to reduce the problem, we can help create a more productive, healthy workforce and save money.

Many organisations have reported improvements in productivity, retention of staff and a reduction in sickness absence after tackling work-related stress.

Several large global insurance companies regularly conduct nationwide surveys to assess the amount of job stress experienced by people at all levels in all types of organisations. Extensive surveys conducted on 45,000

employees by Northwestern Life Insurance Company captured some sobering information about job stress. Seventy per cent of employees said that their jobs are 'extremely stressful'. Further, the respondents reported that they were three times as likely as employees reporting low work stress to experience problems in their lives or work due directly to the stress that they experience on the job. Their employers reported that those stressed out employees:

Make more physical and mental health insurance claims.

Are less productive.

Exhibit more outbursts on the job

Exhibit more turnover, absenteeism and substance abuse.

Thirty-five per cent of the respondents said that they were ‘burned out’ by work overload and they often experienced stress or tension-induced anger (intermittent explosive disorder) on the job. They reported on other factors that amplified their chronic work overload and experienced job stress. These ‘amplifiers of stress’ and their frequency pattern are noted below:

Unfair and demanding bosses or managers (29 per cent).

Unsupportive, angry and abrasive co-workers (31 per cent).

Inadequate authority for current job responsibilities (61 per cent).

Technology-based interruptions (e-mail) that undermine personal productivity (78 per cent).

Respondents reported that company efforts to reduce costs also contribute to the toxic brew of job stress. Many firms now announce large layoffs but they don’t say who will get pink slips or when it will happen. This throws employees into a paralysing state of anxiety that the downsizing axe is about to fall on them. Often this intolerable situation is a consequence of merger activity or changes in the firm’s ownership. Downsizing and mergers are here to stay and these forces are often cited as chronic stressors by employees. Employees contribute directly to the productivity of a company and in order to be productive they should not be stressed. Chances are that a stressed

worker will contribute negatively to a company's productivity and a group of stressed employees can result in erosion of profit margins. Hence, stress management at workplace assumes a significant role.

According to Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, one may also add over and above the importance of individual appraisal and perception, the importance for the individual of failing to cope with demands and the consequences of failure to cope (Sells, 1970). More recent thinking suggests that organizational systems should incorporate the ability to enhance personal resources such as self-efficacy, which may be important for taking advantage of, for example, increased autonomy brought about by a work redesign intervention and coping with change generally. A company's management should have advance plans and strategies to help its employees manage stress. One of the biggest causes of workplace stress is the job itself. The management should make sure to reconcile the job profile with the employee's profile. Job rotation, matching with the worker's physical and emotional capacity and resources will go a long way in reducing stress.

When under severe stress, an individual fails to take clear-cut decisions, re-evaluate and reassess the priorities and lifestyles, and ultimately, tend to fall into unproductive distractions. This can be described as a classic case of 'burnout'. The 'burnouts' often engage in reckless or risk-taking behaviours. Starting from glamour and sport celebrities to common men, 'burnouts' are found everywhere.

The Cox (1993) review also integrated physical and psychological stressors and developed a hazard-based taxonomy centred on aspects of job content

and job context; it also introduced the concept of a control cycle approach to risk management. These ideas formed the basis for subsequent HSE guidance, *Stress At Work/A Guide for Employers* (HS (G) 116; HSE, 1995) which gave a series of basic messages emphasizing that excessive pressure from extreme demands may lead to an employee's inability to cope, and introduced the concept of jobs that are 'do-able', achieved through a combination of job design and effective training leading to better 'person-job fit' (Caplan, 1987). Subsequently this approach has been further developed and incorporated into frameworks for intervention (Cox, Griffiths, Barlowe, Randall, & Rial-Gonzalez, 2000; Cox, Randall, & Griffiths, 2002).

The categorization developed from Cox's research, in conjunction with the findings of other HSE-funded studies, formed the basis for the approach adopted in the development of draft standards for the good management of work-related stress, which have been named 'Management Standards'. The Management Standards approach help organisations to manage the pressures that can result in work-related stress. The Management Standards approach:

Helps simplify risk assessment for work-related stress by identifying the main risk factors.

Helping employers focus on the underlying causes and their prevention.

Providing a step-by-step approach to carrying out a risk assessment.

Encourages employers, employees and their representatives to work in partnership to address potential sources of work-related stress throughout the organisation.

Provides a yardstick by which organisations can gauge their performance in managing the key causes of stress.

Also, following the publication of the 1999 Discussion Document (HSE 1990b), HSE held a series of workshops at which the issue of a practicable taxonomy was discussed. The HSE then reviewed all existing taxonomies and how to examine how individual stressors combined. As a result of this research, outputs from the workshops and subsequent discussions a grouping of seven stressor areas was agreed. These formed the basis of HSE guidance Tackling Work-related Stress (HS (G) 218; HSE, 2001) and are as follows:

Demands (including such issues as workload, work patterns and the working environment).

Control (how much say the person has in the way they do their work).

Support (which includes the encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided by the organization, line management and colleagues).

Relationships at work (which includes promoting positive working practices to avoid conflict and dealing with unacceptable behaviour).

Role (whether people understand their role within the organization and whether the organization ensures that the person does not have conflicting roles).

Change (how organizational change (large or small) is managed and communicated in the organization).

Culture (the way in which organizations demonstrate management commitment and have procedures which are fair and open).

In the subsequent work on the standards the separate topic of culture was dropped because it underpins the approach to each of the others. Thus aspects of culture are incorporated into each of the remaining six. In order to clearly understand the how big the problem of stress was, HSE conducted many surveys and the following were the findings:

About 1 in 7 people say that they find their work either very or extremely stressful (Psychosocial working conditions in Britain in 20071).

In 2005/06 just under half a million people in Great Britain reported experiencing work-related stress at a level they believed was making them ill.

Depression and anxiety are the most common stress-related complaints seen by GPs, affecting 20% of the working population of the UK.

When stress leads to absence, the average length of sick leave is 30. 1 days (Labour Force Survey 2005/062). This average is much higher than the average length of sick leave for work-related illness in general (21. 2 days).

A total of nearly 11 million working days were lost to stress, depression and anxiety in 2005/06.

HSE researches in 2003 into offshore work found approximately 70% of common work-related stressors are also potential root causes of accidents when they were caused by human error.

A rough sketch on Emotional Labour

There have been vast researches done on areas like job satisfaction and motivation which are concerned with exploring the feelings people have about work. The principle focus of these researches has been narrowed down to the increasingly common situations wherein service employees are required as a part of their job contract, to display specific sets of emotions with an aim of inducing a particular set of feelings within the customers. Hochschild (1983) coined the term 'emotional labour' to refer to ' the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display.' Thus, the concept of emotional labour also seems to have an impact on the stress levels of the employees in the service sector.

METHODOLOGY

One of the most vital elements of carrying out research is the method the researcher adopts to pursue the answers to his research questions. Every element of the research must be planned out carefully before putting it into action. A central part of research activity is to develop an effective research strategy or design, Methodology involves the most suitable method of investigations. The nature of research instruments are the sampling plan and the type of data. A research design is a frame work or blue print for

conducting the marketing research project. It specifies the details of the procedures necessary for obtaining the information needed to structure and/or solve marketing research problems.

Normally research design is the plan and structure of investigation so conceived as to obtain answers to research questions . The plan is overall scheme or program of the research. The research design which will be adopted is descriptive research design. The key to good descriptive research design is knowing exactly what you want to measure and selecting a survey method in which every respondents is willing to co-operate and capable of giving you the complete and accurate information efficiently. Questionnaire method will be used for the survey. Causal research is also adopted in order to relate emotional labour with stress.

Sources of Data Collection:

Primary Data:

The primary data is that data which is collected afresh for the first time and is thus to be original in nature. There are several methods for collecting primary data. They are observation method, interviews, questionnaire etc.

In this research, the primary data will be collected in two ways; information about the company's employees will be collected through regular talks with the employees. Data for the project was collected through objective based close-ended questionnaire.

Secondary Data:

Secondary data means the data which is already available. This means that they refer to the data which has already been collected and analyzed by <https://assignbuster.com/stress-management-and-well-being-at-work/>

someone earlier which can save both time and money of the researcher.

Secondary data may be available in the form of company records, trade publications, libraries etc. The secondary data will be collected from Annual reports, various magazines and other reference books.

LIMITATIONS OF PROPOSED RESEARCH:

The proposed research requires travel and access to many service organizations in order to have a clear idea of the levels of stress among the service sector employees and also to have a proper sample size for the survey. Limitations are thus imposed on the research by budget constraints and accessibility.

Another important constraint would be time as it is not be possible to cover all the employees and thus meetings have to be fixed according to their convenience. Also sometimes, the managers might be busy or out of station and hence it may not be possible to get a good sample.

It is also possible at times wherein the employees may hesitate to give accurate information as such questionnaires is personal in nature and they may feel their privacy is being invaded. Also the employees are scared to speak their mind in case they have trouble from the management.

Since I do not have any personal contacts in any of the organizations here in UK, it may be difficult for me to gain some informal information and also access to some organizations. But this limitation would not hamper my research to a great extent as I can then compensate it with secondary data from the company websites, annual reports etc. if available.

The inexperience of the researcher in conducting such researches may also be taken into account as I do not have any in-depth experience in conducting research.