

The impact of human resource management on the levels of stress in the working po...

[Health & Medicine](#), [Stress](#)



Stress nowadays has become a part of everyday life for a percentage of the working population. Arnold et al. (1997) as cited in Maund [2001 p. 298] define stress as: ' any force that pushes a psychological or physical factor beyond its range of stability, producing a strain within the individual'.

According to Hans Selye (1956 and 1974) as cited in Foot and Hook [2005 p. 340] there are two types of stress, ' eustress' and ' distress'. ' Eustress' is known to have a positive effect as Hans Selye states that ' Sometimes people are stimulated by having to deal with a number of issues; this can be exiting and motivating'. Graham [1998 p. 129] also states that stress ' has both positive and negative aspects as some employees thrive on pressure'.

The common form of stress we refer to is known as ' distress'. These individuals who react negatively to a threatening situation will ' experience a release of hormones which drains blood from the skin and the digestive system' Graham [1989 p. 78], which in turn will result in what we know as stress.

Bratton & Gold [2000 p. 142] talks about Job design as being one possible cause of stress. If HRM does not give an employee variation within his/her role, then they won't ' activate employee's upper level needs' which will cause stress. Arnold et al [1997] as cited in Maund [2001 p. 209] supports this within his five categories that is ' casually responsible for work stress', as he talks about the role of the individual within the organisation.

Another category Arnold et al sees commonly responsible for causing stress is work relationships. Foot [2005 p. 340] also refers to poor relationship

within the workplace, ' especially with one's manager or supervisor', as this can contribute to an individual developing stress.

Bratton & Gold [2001 p. 142] also talks about conflict between employees, ' When different social experience, personality, needs and points of view interact with co-workers, disagreement may cause stress.'

If Human Resource Managers cannot identify and correct conflicts within working relationships, employees can become stressed as a result of Human Resource Managers failing in keeping conflicts at bay.

The way that an organisation is structured and its climate can have profound effects on an employees stress levels. An individual who has ' unclear job description and organisation charts/manuals leads to ambiguity about who should do what' Graham & Bennet [1998 p. 129], gives us an indication on poor organisation structure that can lead to ' individuals experiencing role ambiguity who will be uncertain how their performance will be evaluated and will experience stress' Bratton & Gold [2000 p. 141]. Managers can expect employee performance to be different from task to task which can lead to role conflict as there hasn't been any role ambiguity in the explanation of the employee's role within the organisation. All these factors can lead to or cause stress within the working population.

Graham & Bennet [1998 p. 130] refers to what most people see as the major cause of stress as overwork, ' which can be quantitative (having too much work to do) or qualitative (finding work too difficult).'

Maund [2001] and Bratton & Gold [2000] see this as a form of employee frustration. Bratton & Gold [2000 p. 142] defines employee frustration as ' a result of motivation being blocked to prevent an individual from achieving a desired goal'. This can be as a result of over qualitative work, where the employee is unable to complete a certain objective ' because something hinders, disturbs or thwarts their progress' Maund [2001 p. 294].

An employee who experiences stress due to over quantitative work is directly affected by poor management style and structure as it's the management who over-sees the employees' workload. Overwork can result in an employee working longer hours and will be ' frequently connected with poor diet, lack of exercise and inadequate relaxation' Graham and Bennett [1998 p. 130].

' Harassment (sexual and racial) at work is another source of stress' Bratton & Gold [2000 p. 142]. Graham & Bennett [1998 p. 133] states how ' sexual harassment in practise is extremely difficult to prove.' They also state that ' it can be difficult to distinguish between sexual harassment and normal male/female flirting behaviour.' Bratton & Gold defends this statement by saying that it's ' difficult for an HR manager to convince employees and other managers to take this kind of sexual harassment seriously.' Bratton & Gold go on to talk about another form of sexual harassment that is called quid pro quo harassment, ' which is essentially a kind of sex-for-promotion blackmail [p. 142].'

Graham & Bennett state that this sort of sexual harassment ' is especially serious when someone's conditions of employment or benefits (promotions, pay rises, etc).' It's important for a Human Resource department within an organisation to have clear-cut directives on harassment within the workplace, as this would create a foundation if a situation would occur.

The effects of people experiencing stress will ultimately affect the performance of the organisation as Maund [2001 p. 299] states that ' Individuals exhibiting high stress within the workplace will affect the organisation and the achievement of organisational goals'. Maund then tells us how high stress can be exhibited through psychological, physical, behavioural and organisational aspects.

Different types of stress can trigger different types of exhibitance. Overwork can affect the physicality of an individual through weight loss, poor diet and tiredness.

Other physical aspects that can occur due to stress are headaches, chronic indigestion, ulcers, heart attacks, high blood pressures and skin complaints.

Graham & Bennett [1998 p. 130] states that ' In severe exhaustion, cramp and back ache can occur in extreme cases.' They also state that ' Anxiety is perhaps the clearest indicator that someone is unable to cope'.

Maund [2001 p.] agrees that anxiety is a physiological effect of an employee experiencing stress.' Low self-esteem, chronic depression and aggression are also listed by Maund as physiological effects.

When an employee shows signs of stress it is always hard for that person to be cleared of its symptoms. It is seen on many occasions' especially on television soaps and films that when people are stressed; many turn to abusing mild drugs such as nicotine and alcohol as a form of calming them down. This is seen as behavioural effects of stress and is listed in Maund [2001 p. 299], as well as ' eating disorders, emotional outburst and sleeplessness.

Bratton & Gold [2001 p. 146] also talks about alcoholism being an issue in organisations as they state that ' Excessive consumption of alcohol is both a health problem and a job performance problem in every occupational category.'

Bratton & Gold also talk about behavioural problems as a result of alcohol abuse in that it ' ranges from tardiness in the early stages to prolonged absenteeism in the later stages.' It also states that an US study revealed that on average 22 days a year, a problem drinker is absent from work and that problem drinkers are ' twice as likely as non-alcohol drinkers to have accident.'

Maunds' final organisational effects of stress are that of the organisation itself. Maund [2001 p. 299] lists ' absenteeism, high turnover, accidents, dysfunctional conflict and low productivity.' Following from the US study on alcohol abuse earlier, Bratton & Gold see Maund's list on the organisational effect as a direct and indirect cost to the company. They also state that bad

decisions and loss of managers' time is affecting the organisation as a result of alcohol abuse by its staff.

To a Human Resource department, an employee experiencing stress is always a sign that they aren't doing their job properly. Although individuals have different stress levels it is the Human Resource Departments duty to analyse and change an employees working duties to his/hers standards, in order to get the best out of that employee. Bratton & Gold [2003 p. 4] state that due to global competition, the internationalization of technology and the productivity of labour, ' It requires managers to change the way in which they manage the employment relationship in order to allow for the most effective utilization of human resources (HR).'

Although none of the authors talk about Human Resource Management as having direct effects on the working population in terms of stress, all of the issues the authors talk about the causes of stress are caused by poor Human Resource Management.

To conclude, I've chosen a quote from Bratton & Gold [2003 p. 5] that tells me that Human Resource Management strategies should adapt with the times to deal with the levels of stress in the working population. People have higher needs nowadays and expect more from their work. It states that ' Fashions come and go, and the same might be said about approaches to people management.'

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