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A new paradigm shift in managing occupational stress in organizations

Occupational stress is a major concern in many organisations. Human resource practitioners, counselors, professionals and managers in various organisations are concerned about the cost of occupational stress in organisations. Occupational stress is associated with problems like turnover, poor performance, accidents alcohol and drug abuse to mention a few. Managers in various organisations are in dilemma on what interventions they should put in place to manage costs of occupational stress. To develop appropriate interventions one need to understand the causes, symptoms and the effects of occupational stress. Occupational stress contributes significantly to the corporate health costs of the organisation and if not managed properly might erode the profitability of the organisation. The methodology adopted in this research is largely based on review of literatures both online and print. The findings from the study conclude that occupational stress affects employees and is a major source of employee's turnover in many organisations. The practical implication of this research is that it will inspire managers to develop appropriate interventions to manage and prevent stress in their organisations since employee's contribution is crucial for the success of any organisation.

Introduction

Occupational stress has been a great concern to management, employees, and other stakeholders and its presence among the employees in organisations cannot be ignored. Occupational stress researchers agree that stress is a serious problem in many organisations globally (Cooper & Cartwright, 1994; Varca, 1999; Ornelas & Kleiner 2003). The cost of occupational stress is very high in many organisations. For instance, the International Labour organisation (ILO) reports that inefficiencies arising from occupational stress may cost up to 10 percent of a country's GNP (Midgley, 1996). In a personal level occupational stress might lead to increased morbidity and mortality (Mark Le et al., 2003).

Occupational stress is defined as the perception of a discrepancy between environmental demands (stressors) and individual capacities to fulfill these demands (Topper, 2007; Verment & Steensma, 2005; Ornelas & Kleiner 2003; Varca, 1999). Botha & Pienaar, (2006) for example, argued that the causes of occupational stress includes loss of job and job security, sitting for long periods of time or heavy lifting and lack of safety and complexity of repetitiveness and lack of autonomy in the job. These stressors are related to work. In addition occupational stress is caused by lack of resources and equipment; work schedules (such as working late shifts or overtime) and organisational climate are considered as contributors to employees stress. Occupational stresses often shows high dissatisfaction among the employees, job mobility, burnout, poor work performance and less effective interpersonal relations at work (Manshor et al., 2003). Johnson (2001) similarly argued that interventions like identifying or determining the signs of stress, identifying the possible causes for the signs and develop possible proposed solutions for each signs, in order to build individuals to have coping skills and to develop strategy to develop individualised stress management plans that includes eliminating the sources of stress and increasing individual coping skills are some of

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the intervention which will be used by the management to prevent stress.

Therefore, this research will try to find out the causes of occupational stress, signs of stress and interventions which will be used by management and employees to manage stress effectively in their organisations.

Topper (2007) defines stress as a person's psychological and physiological response to the perception of demand and challenge. According to Nelson and Quick (1994), stress is one of the most creatively ambiguous words, with many interpretations as there are people who use the word, as even the experts do not agree on its definition. Reese and Redfern (2000) assert that there is no universally accepted definition of the term stress. To illustrate how diverse the term stress is, we turn to the Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary (1994), which describes the term stress as, "a physical, chemical or emotional factor that causes bodily or mental tension and may be a factor in disease causation. Ornelas and Kleiner (2003) argued that stress is the byproduct of modern life that results from our efforts of trying to balance the demands of the workplace and demands of family life.

The above definitions confirm what a number of researchers have observed when it comes to the definition of stress, that it is ambiguous and can be quite confusing. Beehr (1998) noted in his work that, job stress is particularly an area of research with the potential to be plagued by confusion because of the general, non technical and popular usage of the word stress. To add to the ambiguity that already exists concerning the term stress, it seems most researchers classify stress to be either "good" stress or "bad" stress. Good stress being the kind of stress that is positive and motivates employees to perform (Bland, 1999) and "bad" stress being the kind of stress that brings negative consequences. Seyle (1987) classified stress as eustress and distress, eustress being "good" stress and "bad" stress as distress. To try and avoid this confusion over the term stress, most researchers have opted to their interpretation to the term stress in relation to their work or study. For instance **Hausman (2001**) defined stress as the uncertainty and even fear in connection with the implementation of new technology and systems between organizations. Varca (1999) defined stress by relating it to the environment. She gave the definition of a stressful environment as a gap between the environmental demands and personal resources to meet those demands.

There are many causes of stress in an organisation, but many researchers argue that the main cause of occupational stress is work overload (Topper, 2007; Buchanan & Kaczynski, 2004). The increase in the workload in the organisation without taking into account the availability of staff to do it, it leads to occupational stress. Therefore, the workload increase in any organisation should correspond with the availability of manpower. Management failure to do this, it will lead to frustration of the staff involved, because the employees in question are unable to accomplish many tasks and responsibilities assigned to them. In addition Buchanan and Kaczynski (2004) listed some typical causes of stress in an organizational setting as inadequate physical working environment, inappropriate job design, poor management style, poor relationships, uncertain future and divided royalties.

Tehrani (2002) argued that stress is caused by unsympathetic organisational culture, poor communication between managers and employees, lack of involvement in decision making, bullying and harassment, continual or sudden change, insufficient resources, conflicting priorities and lack of challenge. Communication channels of the organisation should be left open to all employees and employee should be allowed to participate in decision making process of the organisation. Failure to do this by management it will make employees to be stressed. **Bland (1999)** reports that stressors that seemed to be popular with employees in the workplace includes too much work, inadequate time to do the work, stressful environment, relationship problems with partner, boss or colleague and money worries. Conflicts between

home and work, and the impact on personal relationships are also contributing factors to stress (Fairbrother & Warn, 2003).

The National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) built or designed a model that shows job stress and health relationships. In this model, the listed causes of stress as a physical environment, role conflict, role ambiguity, interpersonal conflict, job future ambiguity, job control, employment opportunities, quantitative workload, and variance in workload, responsibility for people, underutilization of abilities, cognitive demands and shift work.

Kirkcaldy et al., (2002) argued that the causes of stress includes inadequate guidance and back up from superiors, lack of consultation and communication, lack of encouragement from superiors, feeling isolated, discrimination and favoritism and inadequate or poor quality training/management development. In addition other factors which are contributing to stress are keeping up with new technologies, ideas, technology or innovations in organisations, attending meetings, lack of social support by people at work and simply being visible or available. All these stressors are related to factor management. Other causes of stress include role ambiguity, conflicting performance expectation, political climate of the organisations and poor relationship with co-workers (Manshor et al., 2003). Stress is also caused by environment demand factors and these includes job content such as work load, employment conditions, such as flexible employment contracts, working conditions such as physically demanding work and social relations at work such as mobbing expenses (Otto & Schmidt, 2007).Factors like individual and family factors, socio-economic and financial status, mental and physical health factors contributes greatly to occupational stress (Manshor et al., 2003).

Harvey and Brown (2006) for instance, argues that the major stressors in the workplace includes the change in technology, downsizing of the employees which makes employees to lose their source of income, sudden re-organisation and unexpected changes in the work schedules, competition –for promotional opportunities available, lack of participation in the decision making process especially employees are not allowed to make decisions about their work, lack of employee empowerment, conflicts with other people in the work place, no enough time to do expected duties and violence in the workplace. On the issue of the acts of violence in the work place committed by both employees and customers contributes a lot to the employees stress. For instance, American institute of stress indicates that homicide is the second leading cause of fatal occupational injury, and for working women is the leading cause of death.

Stress has been associated with impaired functioning in the workplace. The negative effects of occupational stress includes reduced efficiency, decreased capacity to perform, dampened initiative and reduced interest in working, increased rigidity of thought, lack of concern for the organization and colleagues and a loss of responsibility (Greenberg & Baron, 1995; Matterson & Ivancevich, 1982).

Stevenson and Harper (2006) in their study on Workplace stress and student learning experience reported that the effects of stress to the academic staff include teaching below par, absence from work, conflict with students and seeking employment elsewhere. All these have a direct detrimental effect on the student learning experience. In addition the negative effects were undeniably significant, there were some positive effects of stress that were reported like enforcement of deadlines and improved performance.

Occupational stress contributes to low motivation and morale, decrease in performance, high turnover, sick leave, accidents, low job satisfaction, low quality products and services, poor internal communication and conflicts (Schabraq & Cooper 2000; Murphy, 1995; McHugh, 1993).

Stress is widely accepted to have two opposite effects on individuals-positive and negative. Acceptable level of stress helps to improve the individual's performance whilst excessive amounts of stress can lead to decreased performance (Stevenson & Harper, 2006). Occupational stress has increased risks of work related diseases and accidents in both developed and developing countries that have experienced rapid industrialization (Manshor et al., 2003). Stress is recognized as a major health hazard of the contemporary century undertake diverse conditions such as psychosomatic diseases, behavioral changes and it is a major contributor to disturbances in one emotional, social and family life (Sapountzi-Krepia, 2000).

Occupational stress if not managed properly it might lead to increase in absentee rates, internal conflicts and low employee morale (Botha & Pienaar, 2006).Occupational stress is ubiquitous and increasingly costly (Katherine et al., 2008). Close to 70% of workers reported that stress caused health problems that lead to decreased productivity (Randolf, 1997). An estimated 90% of medical patients have stress symptoms. For instance in USA industries $69 billion annually are spent on stress related costs (Manning et al., 1996). Occupational stress is a big threat to the quality of manpower in organisations (DYCK, 2001). The good performers in organisations may tend to quit when they start experiencing symptoms of occupational stress. This turnover affects the organisation adversely in increasing the recruitment and selection costs of the organisation (Ongori, 2007). In addition occupational stress affects the physical and psychological of an individual and it leads to heart diseases, hypertension, peptic ulcers, sickness, alcoholism, depression, suicidal tendencies, anxiety, as well as other mental disorders (Christo & Pienaar, 2006).Therefore, there is need for management to develop appropriate interventions to manage stress in their organisations.

Cohen and Single, (2001) lists symptoms of stress under five categories, being emotional-anxiety, nervousness, worries, depression, anger, irritability, guilt, moodiness, and loss of enjoyment of life, loneliness, loss of humour, lack of confidence, isolation, and job dissatisfaction.

Secondly, physical – feeling restless, feeling uptight, jumpy, high blood pressure, back and neck muscle tension, lack of energy, dry mouth headaches, insomnia, dizziness, loss or increase in appetite and ringing in the ears.

Thirdly, behavioural – impatience, impulsiveness, hyperactivity, short temper, aggressiveness, alcohol abuse, use of drugs, avoiding difficult situations, loss of sex drive, and overworking.

Fourthly, mental– frequent lapses of memory, constant negative thinking, being very critical of oneself, inability to make decisions, difficulty getting things done, distorted ideas, very rigid attitudes and difficulty concentrating.

Lastly, health – high blood pressure, higher than usual susceptibility to colds and flu, migraines, irritable bowel symptoms, ulcers, stomach disorders, heart attacks, angina, strokes, asthma and skin rashes. In addition the table below highlights others signs of stress among the employees. Management to a certain degree should be able to read these signs and develop proper interventions to manage and prevent stress in their organisations effectively.

Interventions for managing occupational stress

They are many interventions used in managing stress in many organisations but the interventions which are commonly used include the primary, secondary and tertiary. The primary interventions emphasizes on identifying the possible causes of stress and their subsequent risks to employees. This will be done by taking pre-emptive action to reduce the stress hazard or limiting the employee's exposure to it. Therefore, stress audit should take

place using appropriate methods including face to face interviews with the staff or by the use of a dedicated questionnaire or if appropriate the occupational stress indicator. Once data is collected decisions can be taken on the interventions that will be most effective to manage stress. Basically primary interventions includes redesigning jobs to modify work place stressors (Bond & Bunce, 2000), increasing workers decision-making authority (Jackson, 1983) or providing co- worker support groups (Defrank & Cooper, 1987; Kolbell, 1995).

The secondary interventions are designed in a way to provide training to the employees. This intervention includes the seminar programmes to help participants recognize and deal with stress and identify organisational stressors. These seminars will have a dual purpose to identify the current stress factors and will help "inoculate" seminar members from future stress. The secondary interventions are aimed at reducing the severity of stress, symptoms before they lead to serious health problems in an individual and the organisation at large (Murphy & Sauter, 2003).

Tertiary interventions, these are interventions which take care of individuals who are already suffering from the effects of stress. These interventions include counseling and employee assistance programmes, consulting a stress manager or mental health professionals to assist employees to cope with stress (Arthur, 2000).

Abbreviated progressive relaxation training (APRT) intervention also will be used to manage stress in organisations. This intervention has been found successful in reducing stress (e.g. heart rate, salivary cortisol (Carlson & Hoyle, 1999; Pawlow & Jones, 2002).

Management should use the three tier intervention to manage stress at the work place. The first step is to asses the workplace factors that contribute to stress and second implement management measures to reduce work place stress and lastly one has to monitor the progress with an objective of developing an appropriate intervention to manage stress (Cal/OSHA, 1998; Johnson 2001).

Stress management training interventions. This training may include instruction in the time management, goal setting, delegating counseling of subordinates, self awareness, relaxation techniques, conflict resolution and identification of stress situations and symptoms. The types of occupational stress interventions are illustrated in the figure 1 below.

Paradigm shifts in managing occupational stress

Organisations must continue to exist in any environment despite the presence of occupational stress experienced by employees. There is need for paradigm shift, in managing organisations of the 21st century in order to prevent stress. Therefore, it's the prime responsibility of the management to adapt organisational change in their organisations in order to empower employees in organisations and manage stress effectively. Empowerment of employees should involve:

Engaging employees unions in most aspects related to labour-management relations. Effective labour-management relations should be in place to help in achieving consensus and solve problems expeditiously. This to a certain degree will prevent stress which might arise from conflicts (GAO, 2001).

Employees should be given the necessary training to enhance their skills and abilities. Employees should be trained so that they will be easily support the changes that are made by management effectively from time to time without any complains from the employees (Higgins, 1986).

Organisations should encourage team work in organisation to assist individual employees

in handling complex tasks. Tasks which are complex need the assistance of other employees to share information so that they can complete the task successfully. If complex tasks are not handled by the teamwork in organisation, it will be a major source of occupational stress. This will enable employees to work effectively towards achieving the organisational objectives. Complex tasks should be done by the use of teamwork approach (Harvey and Brown, 2006).
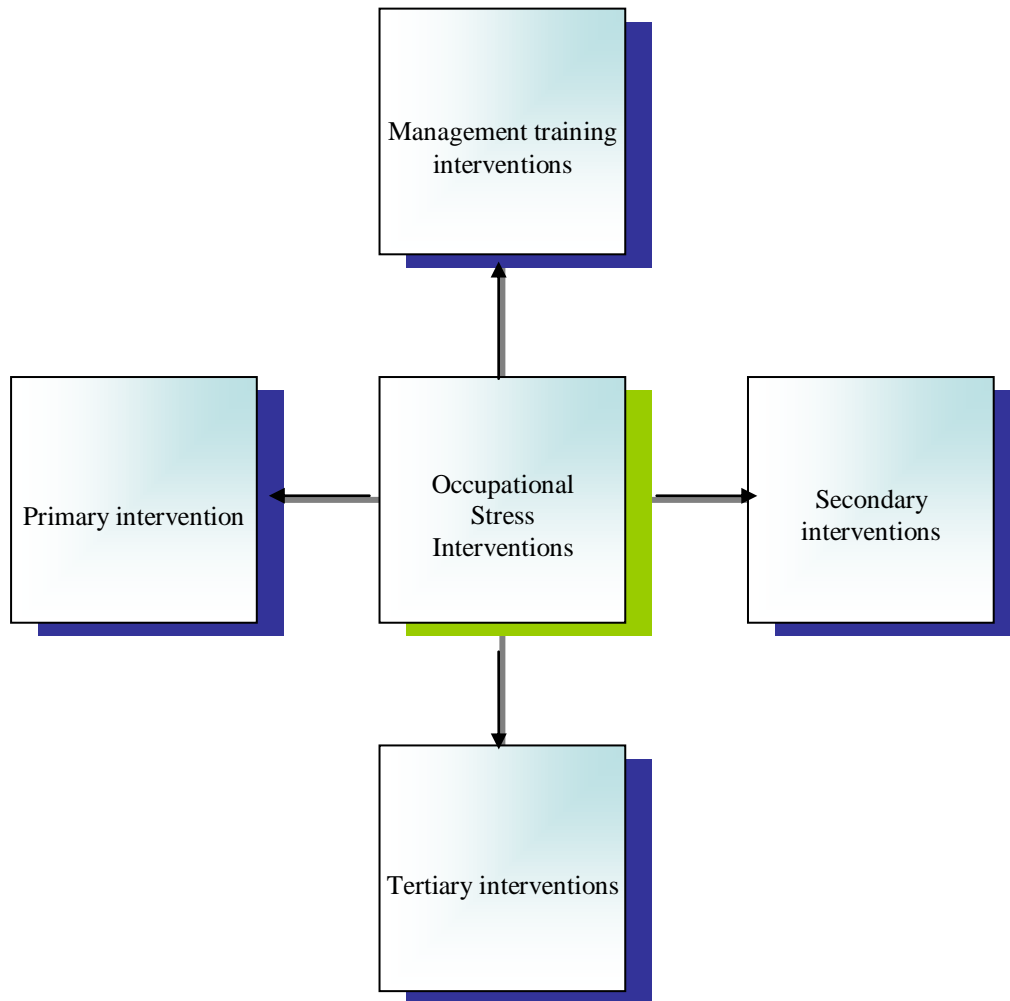

Figure1: Types of occupational stress interventions (Ongori, 2008)

Employees should be involved in planning and sharing of performance information of the organisation. Therefore, employees should be involved in varying degrees in the planning process of the organisation and management should encourage "open book management". The sharing of information will involve posting performance data in charts, graphs and tables throughout the buildings of the organisation, so that the employees should know the progress of their organisation towards achieving the goals. In addition management should improve communication in organisations channels in the organisations.This will encourage the flow of

information in organisations and employees will be in a position to know how their organisation is performing and thus prevent stress (GAO, 2001).

Delegating authority to employees should be encouraged since it acts as a training ground for other employees and it will prevent stress in short run as well as in the long run. Employees should be allowed to make decisions related to their work processes, workloads, training needs and work schedules.

Top management leadership commitment should be demonstrated in the organisation in managing stress. Top management should have in place mission, vision and strategic plan of the organisation which gives direction of the entire organisation. This will act as motivator to the employees because they will be working towards achieving the vision of the organisation. Similarly the top management should practice flexibility management. Similarly the management should accommodate any changes which might arise, especially when employees feel that these changes are necessary for achieving the vision of the organisation (GAO, 2001).

Jobs should be designed in a way to provide meaning, stimulations and opportunities for workers to exploit and develop their skills and talents. This will make employees to be motivated and feel that their skills and talents are fully exploited. The job should have the core characteristics of a job like task identity, task significance, task variety, autonomy and feedback. In addition work schedules should be established and they should be compatible with demands and responsibilities outside the job. This will make employees know their schedules of work earlier and plan for it. Flexible work hours will allow employees to coordinate their work and social schedules, which reduces the time pressures from both (Raitano and Kleiner, 2004).

The workload should be in line with workers capabilities and resources of the organisation.This will make employees to do their work without being stressed by unnecessary increasing their workloads. Increase of workloads is a major source of stress in many organisations (Topper, 2007).

Conclusions

This paper demonstrates that stressors do exist in organisations and its presence has made managers in various organisations to come up with various interventions to manage it. Therefore, there is need for a new paradigm shift in managing occupational stress in order to minimize employee's turnover. Occupational stress is mainly caused by the increase of workload, uncertainty about the future, poor communications in organisations, insufficient resources and conflicts. The effects of occupational stress are really felt in many organisations. Occupational stresses adversely affect the organisation, especially in reducing efficiency in organisation operations, increase of employee turnover, and increase the expenditure of health costs of employees, low motivation and accidents. Occupational stress costs are quite very high and its presence in organisations can not be ignored. Failure to manage occupational stress in organisations might erode their profitability through litigation, morbidity and mortality. However, managers in various organisations stand to gain if they will be in a position to identify the signs of occupational stress among the employees at their infancy stage. The services of professionals like counselors will be used in various organisations to identify the symptoms of employees experiencing stress. The signs of stress include employees experiencing emotional anxiety, loss of enjoyment in life, dizziness, increase of job dissatisfaction to mention a few. Occupational stress in organisations will not remain unchallenged, that is why managers have come up with different interventions to manage stress effectively in order to enhance orgnisational performance and reduce employee turnover. The interventions which are commonly used in many organisations include the

primary, secondary and tertiary. Primary interventions are the best in managing occupational stress at the infancy stage. If these primary interventions are taken seriously, to a certain degree it will minimize stress in organisations.

However, the current practice of managing stress by using the interventions alone needs to change drastically and adapt the new paradigm of managing occupational stress by adapting organisational change continuously to curb the arise of stressors. This will make management to monitor the stressors at infancy stage. In addition managers must manage stress in holistic way and minimize its effects which are felt across organisations.Thus the organisation should also regularly conduct audit of its policies, procedures and systems to ensure that it provides a working environment that protects the wellbeing of the workforce and should be able to identify the troubled employees and provide them with an appropriate level of support.

Finally there is need for a systematic research on practical and efficient interventions to manage occupational stress in organisation to be undertaken to give a practical perspective on how to manage occupational stress.

The limitation of this research is that it does not give a comprehensive view on occupational stress and it lacks quantitative analysis. Therefore, there is need to conduct further research which is empirical studies in order to understand the true nature, complex sources and effects of occupational stress to the employees. This will act as guide to managers in developing appropriate coping mechanisms to manage stress in organisations.

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Армен А. Ґрігорян
Нова парадигма в управлінні професійним стресом в організаціях

В даній роботі показано, що стреси які існують на підприємствах (організаціях, установах) завдають чимало шкоди діяльності фірми. В роботі показано, що інтенсивність стресів на фірмі напряму пов'язана з плинністю кадрів і тому потрібно вживати конкретні заходи по мінімізації стресів на роботі, з метою контролю над плинністю кадрів. Професійний (виробничий) стрес в основному виникає через надмірну завантаженість працівників, невпевненість на майбутньому, слабку комунікацію в організації, нехватку ресурсів та через конфлікти. Професійний стрес впливає на ефективність діяльності, знижуючи операційне управління, збільшуючи плинність кадрів, привносить додаткові затрати на охорону здоров'я та медичне страхування. Витрати пов'язані з професійним стресом досить значні і не можуть ігноруватися на підприємствах. Неможливість управляти стресом на виробництві може призвести до зниження продуктивності праці через зростання захворюваності, смертності.

Управлінці на різних рівнях ієрархії будуть лише у виграші при вчасному розпізнаванні стресів і правильних методах його корекції. Основними ознаками стресу на виробництві є поява різного роду емоційних турбот в працівників, втрата наснаги до життя, незадоволення своєю роботою. Заходи, що використовуються при контролюванні і зменшенні рівня стресу можна класифікувати як первинні, вторинні, та третинні. До першого класу відносять заходи щодо попередження стресу і також його контролю на ранніх етапах розвитку стресу. До другого класу відносять безпосередньо втручання керівників, в період коли вже безпосередньо виникає стресова ситуація і спробувати її розрядити. Третій клас заходів полягає в комплексному підході до регулювання стресових ситуацій, починаючи з самого їх виникнення на ранніх стадіях і якщо не можливо запобігти відразу, то потрібно мати набір інструментів та чинників по розрядженню стресової ситуації з метою забезпечення нормальної роботи підприємства. Тобто аудиторські перевірки на наявність стресової ситуації в колективі повинні стати звичним явищем і основою для ефективної роботи організації.

На завершення потрібно сказати, що систематичні дослідження на різних організаціях де виникають стресові ситуації є необхідністю з метою розроблення методологічного апарату боротьби зі стресовими ситуаціями. Недоліками даної роботи є обмеженість числових розрахунків і недостатнє визначення поняття професійного стресу.

Тому потрібно проводити подальші дослідження щодо визначення джерел стресу на робітників, і розробці (плануванні) відповідних заходів по його зменшенні, які будуть використовуватися менеджерами в різних реальних ситуаціях для подолання стресу в різних колективах людей.