ITE 3652 Organizational Behavior

Lesson 11 – Occupational Stress Management

1.0   What is stress?

Stress is a feeling of emotional or physical tension. It can come from any event or thought that makes you feel frustrated, angry, or nervous. As human beings we get stress due to many things happen to us in our day to day life. Stress is the body's reaction to a challenge or demand. When humans face a challenge or threat, they have a partly physical response. The body activates resources that help people either stay and confront the challenge or get to safety as fast as possible.There are two types of stress.

1. **Acute stress.** This is short-term stress that goes away quickly. Acute stress helps to manage dangerous situations. It also occurs when someone does something new or exciting. All people have acute stress at one time or another.

2. **Chronic stress.** This is stress that lasts for a longer period of time. You may have chronic stress if you have money problems, an unhappy marriage, or trouble at work. Any type of stress that goes on for weeks or months is chronic stress.

People can realise that reaction of the stress with the changes occurs in the body. The body produces larger quantities of the chemicals. These trigger the following physical reactions:

- increased blood pressure
- heightened muscle preparedness
- sweating
- alertness

2.0   What is Occupational Stress?

Occupational stress is stress related to an employee's work. Occupational stress is one of the major health hazards of the modern workplace. Occupational stress and stressful working conditions have been linked to low productivity, absenteeism, and increased rates of accidents on and off the job.

3.0   Diseases occurred due to stress

Chronic stress disrupts nearly every system in the body. It can suppress the persons immune system, upset the digestive and reproductive systems, increase the risk of heart attack and stroke, and speed up the aging process.

It can even rewire the brain, leaving the person more vulnerable to anxiety, depression, and other mental health problems.Health problems caused or exacerbated by stress include:

- Depression and anxiety
- Pain of any kind
- Sleep problems
- Autoimmune diseases
- Digestive problems
- Skin conditions, such as eczema
- Heart disease
- Weight problems
- Reproductive issues
- Thinking and memory problems

4.0   When is workplace stress too much?

As we have dissed earlier, stress isn't always bad. A little bit of stress can help the employees to stay focused, energetic, and able to meet new challenges in the workplace. They also helps the employees to meet the deadlines on time as well. But in today's hectic world, the workplace too often seems like an emotional roller coaster. Many workplaces practices long hours, tight deadlines, and ever-increasing demands can leave you feeling worried, drained, and overwhelmed. And when stress exceeds the ability to cope, it stops being helpful and starts causing damage to human mind and body as well as to your job satisfaction. There can be many reasons for the employees for being stress at work. Some of the reasons may be personal to them but many of them are connected to the job and the work place environement. Common causes of workplace stress include:

- Heavy work load
- Less support from peer workers
- Lack of experience
- Less motivation

- Fear of being laid off

- More overtime due to staff cutbacks

- Pressure to perform to meet rising expectations but with no increase in job satisfaction

- Pressure to work at optimum levels

- Lack of control over how you do your work

5.0   Stress at work warning signs

Due to these reasons, employees may get them self-stress at work. When the employees feel overwhelmed at work, you lose confidence and may become angry, irritable, or withdrawn. Other signs and symptoms of excessive stress at work include:

- Feeling anxious, irritable, or depressed

- Apathy, loss of interest in work

- Problems sleeping

- Fatigue

- Trouble concentrating

- Muscle tension or headaches

- Stomach problems

- Social withdrawal

- Using alcohol or drugs to cope

6.0   Managing Workplace Stress

There is a huge role to play by the manages or employers to reduce the stress levels of the employees at work. Many employees expects the managers to look after the welfare of them and as well as their working difficulties. Many managers do have good practices in stress management and employees stay connected with the work and the employees due this reason. Lets discuss some good practices that can practice in managing stress at work.

- Relaxation strategies. Relaxation helps counter the physiological effects of the fight-or-flight response. For example, progressive muscle relaxation helps reduce muscle tension associated with anxiety. To practice this skill, sit comfortably with your eyes closed. Working from your legs upward, systematically tense and relax each major muscle groups. Hold the tension for 10 seconds; release tension for 20 seconds. Each

time you release muscle tension, think "relax" to yourself. This skill and many other relaxation strategies can help reduce symptoms of anxiety.

- Problem-solving. Problem-solving is an active coping strategy that involves teaching people to take specific steps when approaching a roadblock or challenge. These steps include defining the problem, brainstorming potential solutions, ranking the solutions, developing an action plan, and testing the chosen solution.

- Mindfulness. Mindfulness is the ability to pay attention to the present moment with curiosity, openness, and acceptance. Stress can be exacerbated when we spend time ruminating about the past, worrying about the future, or engaging in self-criticism. Mindfulness helps to train the brain to break these harmful habits.

- Reappraising negative thoughts. Chronic stress and worry can lead people to develop a mental filter in which they automatically interpret situations through a negative lens.

- Schedule the day-Developing correct schedules for the day and the week is another good practice to manage workplace stress. This can be done at the beginning of the week by discussing with the group members and the managers.

- Allocate time to eat and sleep – this is something that many workaholic people misses in their life. Many workers even forget to have their meals properly during the daytime. Due to the heavy workload and tasks they do not practice a good and healthy meal plan. At the same time some employees to not get a proper rest for the day. Every human needs some resting time after heavy work at night. Some workers are even work at night (over the mid night) and do not get a proper sleep. This is another reason for then to get heavy stress levels.

- Conflicts with co-workers - Cool Down Quickly – Sometimes employees create troubles by them self being fighting with the co-workers. This is very badly affected to their stress levels. When the employees make conflicts with the co-workers, it is very unpleasant to work in the office environment. Therefore, the best thing is to cool down yourself quickly as much as possible.

- Prioritize Your Priorities-With competing deadlines and fast-changing priorities, it's critical to define what's truly important and why. It's important to understand your role in the organization, the company's strategic priorities, and your personal goals and strengths.

- Band relaxation: Meditation, massage, and yoga can help to reduce stress at work. Breathing and relaxation techniques can slow down the heart rate and promote

relaxation. Deep breathing is also a central part of mindfulness meditation. Some organizations do arrange yoga programmed after office hours.

- Talking: Sharing feelings and concerns with family, friends, and work colleagues may help a person "let off steam" and reduce feelings of isolation.

- Physical Exercise: Physical exercise can reduce memory impairment in subjects with stress. Office workers get very less physical exercises since they are stuck at a work place for long hours. Some organizations organize sports camps, gym activities, re creational games at office to reduce the stress levels of employees.

- Reducing the intake of alcohol, drugs, and caffeine: These substances will not help prevent stress, and they can make it worse.

- Nutrition: A healthful, balanced diet containing plenty of fruit and vegetables can help maintain the immune system at times of stress. A poor diet can lead to ill health and additional stress.

- Extracurricular activities – Many organizations do organize special lunches, trips, musical evenings and dance parties to reduce the stress levels. These activities help the employees to create harmony among the co-workers and reduces the stress levels. At the same time, it helps to build the team spirits.

7.0   Benefits by not being Stress

Among many plus points discussed about lesser stress above, an organization is specifically benefited for stress management

- Enables motivate employees - Stress affects the morale of employees and hence their performance in the workplace. It not only affects the individual but the business also. Stress demotivates employees which causes the increase in absenteeism and employee turnover. By using good stress management skills, you can boost your employee morale which motivates and keeps them focused on their jobs and performance.

- Improves productivity - When the employee morale is high and remains intact with the workplace relationship. It improves the employee productivity. By using good stress management skills, there will be very less chance of customer complaints or poor decision making even in the most stressful situations.

- Enables to lead people in difficult situations - When employees feel stress they look to the guidance and direction of managers. Some of the employees may seek help from

the bosses by discussing their issues one to one. By using good stress management skills and identifying the stressful issues correctly, it will be able to lead in tough timees

- Reduces workplace conflicts - Conflict at the workplace is very common and occurs due to differences in opinions, personalities and increased level of stress. It breaks the relationships and weakens the overall culture. However, effective stress management skills prevent such distractions, builds teamwork and makes everyone life easier.

- Decreases unethical issues- Unethical issues often rear its ugly head during the time of high stress. There have been times when people have used this practice for shortcut purposes. During that time people start blame game and point fingers to others. However, good stress management skills provide ethics and stress seminars to reduce the chances of unethical practices.

- Increases the chances of meeting deadlines - When stress increases employees become distracted depending upon the source of a stressor. As a result of which they don't perform up to the expected level and miss deadlines. However, good stress management skills help them to identify the stressors before they become an issue and ensure that business should run smoothly.

- Improves communication process - When stress levels are high, there is a negative effect on communication. Employees won't discuss about jobs between individuals. Instead, they look for managers to discuss the company issues or problems. However, an effective stress management skill helps to identify a problem and resolve it, which strengthens the communication process.

- Helps to run the projects smoothly - Stress and management go together. While managing a project you never know when the vendor will delay or not supplies the input. These issues make it hard to reach a required deadline. Sometimes the employee of the project is given responsibility and requested to deal with stress and meeting the deadline.

- Enables you to develop team - When employees feel stress they couldn't concentrate on their work. Also, there is no unity in the team. They feel irritated when some of the team members comments on them. A situation arises where employee discusses his issues with you and seek help to resolve it. By handling stress as a tool and using effective stress management resources, you can build and unite the team.

- Enables you to provide space to employees - When employees are engaged in work and continuously busy, they don't get time to take rest and relax which in turn create stress.

Use effective stress management skills and provide space to your employees so they can take a rest or a break. Allowing employees to take a breather at work helps them to regain their energy and reduce the effects of stress.

- Helps in the performance appraisal of employees - Every employee has a different threshold of stress. Stress factor can be directly related to job performance. It also helps to judge how well employees work within the team. It is measurable also. Effective stress management skills help you to evaluate and do the performance appraisal of them.

8.0   Conclusions

This lesson is very important to every employee and employer since everyone experiences stress at different levels at work. The stress occur due to many reasons and it may vary from person to another person. Occupational stress has to manage well and effectively since it affects the work quality, good will of the company, customer satisfaction, harmony among employees and company performances. Many effective methods are available in order to manage the stress levels at work.