

# THE EFFECTS OF STRESS ON BUSINESS EMPLOYEES AND PROGRAMS OFFERED BY EMPLOYERS TO MANAGE EMPLOYEE STRESS

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## **1 Introduction**

Today, many organizations and employees are experiencing the effects of stress on work performance. The effects of stress can be either positive or negative. What is perceived as positive stress by one person may be perceived as negative stress by another, since everyone perceives situations differently. According to Barden (2001), negative stress is becoming a major illness in the work environment, and it can debilitate employees and be costly to employers. Managers need to identify those suffering from negative stress and implement programs as a defense against stress. These programs may reduce the impact stress has on employees' work performance.

## **2 Statement of the problem**

The purpose of this study was to determine the negative effects of stress on employees and the methods employers use to manage employees' stress.

## **3 Significance of the Study**

There are three primary groups that may benefit from this study. The first group, consisting of employees in today's business organizations, may learn to identify ways that stress negatively affects their work performance. Identifying the negative effects may enable them to take necessary action to cope with stress. By sharing this knowledge, employees can act as a vehicle to help management implement appropriate stress reduction programs. The second group that may benefit from this study is employers who may gain insight as to how stress is actually negatively affecting employees work performance. Finally, educators can use these findings as a valuable guide to incorporate into their curriculum. By emphasizing to students the importance of developing programs to deal with stress, the students may be able to transfer this knowledge to the workplace, thereby improving the quality of the work environment.

## **4 Scope of the study**

This study was limited to the perceptions of full-time business employees as to the negative effects that stress has on work performance and the steps that employers are taking to manage stress. For the purpose of this study, what constitutes full-time employment is defined by the employer. This study was restricted to businesses operating in the Central Texas area. The Central Texas area encompasses all communities within Hays, Kendall, Travis, and Williamson

counties. For the purpose of this study, stress is defined as disruptive or disquieting influences that negatively affect an individual in the workplace. Data for this study were collected during the fall of 2002.

## 5 Review of Related Literature

Barden (2001), a freelance writer specializing in health care and a former managing editor of Commerce and Health, stated the importance of wellness programs and gave specific examples of corporations that are successfully implementing such programs. The Morrison Company currently saves 8.33 *foreverydollar spent on wellness by offering programs such as weight loss, exercise, and back care.* Axon Petroleum, Barden cited the savings for six other companies. According to the Wellness Bureau of America, the success of these companies offers concrete proof that wellness programs pay off by lowering health care costs, reducing absenteeism, and increasing productivity. Foster (2002), a professional speaker on stress-management, surveyed midlevel managers and found stress to be a major determinant in worker productivity. According to the study, the primary areas affected by stress are employee morale, absenteeism, and decision making abilities. By recognizing that a problem exists and by addressing the issue, managers can reduce stressful activities and increase worker performance in the business organization. Harrold and Wayland (2002) reported that increasing stress affects morale, productivity, organizational efficiency, absenteeism, and profitability for both individuals and the organization. The problem for businesses today is knowing how to determine stressful areas in their organizations and how to use constructive confrontation methods to reduce stress and improve efficiency. According to the authors, organizations that make a positive effort to deal with stress not only help build trust among their employees, but also increase the productivity of their employees and the organization as a whole. Maurer (2002) stated that stress-induced illnesses are prevalent in the workplace today, and stress is the problem of the sufferer and the employer. Stress causes absenteeism and can lead to other problems such as drug addiction, alcoholism, depression, and poor job performance. According to Maurer, the annual Barlow Corporation Forum on Human Resource Issues and Trends reported that large numbers of companies noticed severe levels of stress exhibited by employees. The forum's panelists agreed that more needed to be done in the workplace to help employees manage stress. Some of the suggestions were to expand wellness programs, offer stress-management seminars, and teach staff how to balance work and family life. Maurer also noted that Olympic TeamTech, a computer management company, has dealt with employee stress by providing training programs, monitoring employee concerns, and meeting once a month to be proactive instead of reactive. Olympic TeamTech's turnover is less than the industry average. Schorr (2001), a stress-management consultant, stated that stress causes problems in the workplace which negatively affect employee health and organizational productivity. Stress can lead to problems such as job dissatisfaction, alcoholism, absenteeism, physical ailments, and poor job performance. If managers know how to prevent and cope with stress, productivity can be increased. Many companies instituted stress-management programs that led to a decline in absenteeism, a decrease in sickness and accident costs, and/or an increase in job performance. Schorr reported that a stress inventory, available from a stress-management program, can assist executives and managers in assessing employee stress. The inventory can identify the sources of stress, which may include physical elements as well as other factors. Once these sources have been assessed, the program can provide the necessary skills for coping with the problems, and participants can learn that there are alternative ways of reacting to stress.

## **6 Methods of the Study**

### **6.1 Source of Data**

Data for this study were collected using a questionnaire developed by a group of students at Southwest Texas State University. The questionnaire was divided into three parts. Part one consisted of a list of 15 work performance areas that may be negatively affected by a person's level of stress. Respondents were asked to indicate whether stress increased, decreased, or had not changed their work performance in each area. They were also asked to indicate from the list of 15 work performance areas the area that was the most negatively affected by stress and the area that was the least negatively affected by stress. In the second part of the questionnaire, a list of 17 programs was provided and the respondents were asked to indicate which programs their companies had implemented to manage stress. Part three was designed to collect demographic data for a respondent profile, including full-time employee classification and age group.

### **6.2 Sample Selection**

The respondents involved in this survey were employees working in companies located in Central Texas. A non probability, convenience sampling technique was used to collect primary data. Each member of the research team was responsible for distributing three questionnaires to members of the sample. To ensure confidentiality, respondents were given self-addressed, stamped envelopes in which to return their completed questionnaires to Southwest Texas State University. Controls were used to eliminate duplication of the responses.

### **6.3 Statistical Methods**

Simple statistical techniques were used to tabulate the results of this study. The primary data were analyzed using a percent of response. To compute the percent of response, the number of responses to each choice was divided by the total number of respondents who answered the question. In question one, the percents of responses for the negative effects of stress on the 15 work performance areas were reported. The results of the next two questions were tabulated by totaling the number of respondents who chose an area they believed was least or most affected by stress. The fourth question reported the percent of respondents whose employers offered the listed programs to manage stress. Questions five and six asked the respondents to indicate if they were considered full-time employees and to indicate their age group.

## **7 Limitations Of The Study**

This study may be limited through the use of a questionnaire as a data collection instrument. Because questionnaires must generally be brief, areas that may have been affected by stress may not have been included in the questionnaire. Also, all programs that may be available to employees for managing stress may not have been included in the study. The study may also be limited by the use of a nonprobability, convenience sampling method. The sample of business employees for the study was chosen for convenience and may not be representative of the total population of business employees. Care should be taken when generalizing these findings to the entire population. Finally, the use of simple statistical techniques may introduce an element of subjectivity into the interpretation and analysis of the data. All attempts have been made to minimize the effects of these limitations on the study.