

Stress



Stress is a psychological condition and body discomfort. Stress is a common phenomenon. Every individual experiences stress at some or other time. Employees experience stress in the process of meeting the target and working for long hours. When the person experiences a constrain inhibiting the accomplishment of desire and demand for accomplishment, it leads to potential stress. Anxiety is converted into stress and ultimately it leads to job burnout.

“Stress is an adaptive response to an external situation that results in physical, psychological and or behavioral deviations.”

Stress can adversely affect an individual. Individual stress has direct consequences for organizations. The performance level declines and withdrawal behaviors such as absenteeism and turnover may occur if there is too much stress. People may exhibit poor attitudes when they are under too much stress. This affects their mental health and well-being as well as their physiological well-being.

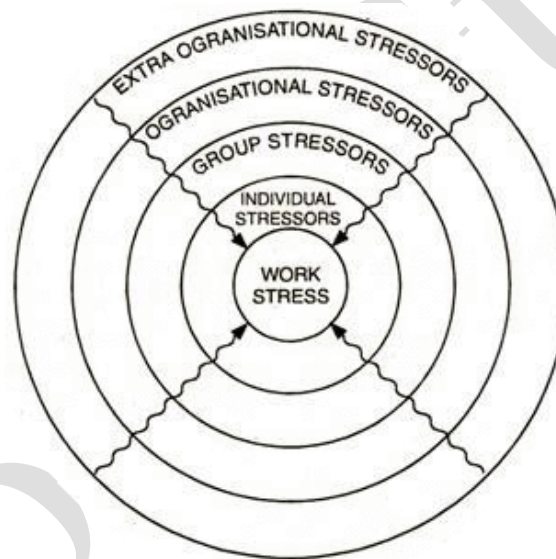
Stress and anxiety are not similar concepts. Anxiety occurs as a result of emotions caused by the interactions of environmental stimuli. Thus, it is confined to the psychological disturbance. On the other hand, stress is originated by the psychological tensions and slowly leads to physical or biological breakdown. While stress is accompanied by anxiety, the latter need not always lead to stress.

Similarly, stress and burnout are different concepts. Prolonged stress leads to burnout. It is a state of mind. It results from a continuous feeling of emotional stress. An individual feels physical, mental and emotional exhaustion. Job burnout is characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and diminished accomplishment. Burnout is also closely associated with the so-called helping professions such as nursing, education, and social work.

Characteristics of Stress

1. It is the result of environmental factors.
2. It may be positive or negative.
3. It may be temporary or long-run.
4. It represents a very significant cost to organizations.
5. It may result in multiple deviations.
6. Stress affects individuals differently.

Sources of Stress



1. Extra Organizational Stressors

Job stress is not limited to things that happen inside the organization, during the working hours. Extra organizational factors also contribute to job stress. These stressors include the following factors:

- a) Political Factors:** Political factors are likely to cause stress in countries which suffer from political uncertainties as in Iran, for example. The obvious reason is that the countries have stable political system where change is typically implemented in an orderly manner.
- b) Economic Factors:** Changes in business cycles create economic uncertainties, when the economy contracts, people get worried about their own security. A very important example is the great depression of 1930s.

- c) **Technological Factors:** Technological uncertainty is the third type of environmental factor that can cause stress. In today's era of technological development new innovations make an employee's skills and experience obsolete in a very short span of time. Computers, automation are other forms of technological innovations, which are threat to many people and cause them stress.

2. Organizational Stressors

In organizations, there is no shortage of factors which can cause stress. Almost every aspect of work can be a stressor for someone. Although there are many factors in the work environment that have some influence on the extent of stress that people experience at the job, the following factors have been shown to be particularly strong in inducing stress:

- a) **Working Conditions:** Working conditions and stress are inversely related. Employees working with poor working conditions like crowded work areas, heat, noise, polluted air, etc. are subject to greater stress.
- b) **Organizational Tasks:** Organizational tasks are designed to meet the objectives and goals. Poorly designed tasks lead to greater stress.
- c) **Administrative Policies and Strategies:** Employees' stress is related to certain administrative strategies followed by the organization like competing pressure, unfair pay structure, ambiguous policies, rigidity in rules, and job rotation.
- d) **Organizational Structure and Design:** Certain aspects of design like specialization, centralization, line and staff relationships, span of control, and organizational communication can severely create stress in organizations.

3. Group Stressors

Another source of stress in organizations is poor interpersonal relationships or conflicts. These conflicts can be among the members of the group or between the superiors and subordinates. Groups have a lot of influence on the employees' behavior, performance and job satisfaction. On the other hand, the group can also be a potential source of stress. Group stressors can be categorized into the following factors:

- a) **Group Cohesiveness:** Group cohesiveness is very important to the employees, particularly at the lower levels of the organization. Lack of cohesiveness can be very stress producing, especially for those persons who cannot thrive in isolation.
- b) **Lack of Social Support:** Satisfaction, though, a state of mind is primarily influenced by the positive external factors. These factors include friendliness, respect from other members and self respect, support, opportunity to interact, achievement, protection against

threats and a feeling of security. In this type of social support is lacking for an individual, it can be very stressful.

- c) **Conflicts:** People who are working in the organizations are prone to interpersonal and intergroup conflicts. Conflict has both functional and dysfunctional aspects. Whenever conflict has dysfunctional consequences, it will lead to stress in all the concerned parties.
- d) **Organizational Climate:** Much of the group or interpersonal relationships depend upon the organizational climate. An overall organizational climate may have a relaxed style of working or it may be tense and crisis oriented. All the employees of such organization will be continuously tense, if the climate in general is unfriendly, hostile or totally task oriented.

4. Individual Stressors

The typical individual works for about 8 to 10 hours a day. The problems and experiences which he has to face in the remaining 14 to 16 non-working hours can spill over to his work place. Our final category of stressors thus includes personal or individual stressors. Following are the main factors which can cause stress to individuals:

- a) **Personality and Individual Differences:** Individual basic dispositions are the main reason for potential stress. Introversion, extroversion, masculinity, rigidity, locus of control, personal life, demographic differences such as age, health, education and occupation are some of the reasons causing stress in individuals.
- b) **Family Problems:** Family issues influence the personal life. Sound marital relationships, marital discipline, early and healthy children may lead to happy personal life. Poor settlement of family member, aging parents, dual working couple, death of spouse or other close family member are some of the reasons for greater stress in the individuals.
- c) **Economic Problems:** An increasing family expenditure, increased expenditure on children, education and health create heavy demand for income. This creates greater stress in the individual.
- d) **Life Styles:** Life Styles of individuals can cause stress like inactive life styles, life trauma (Individuals experiencing certain unique situations may be compelled to alter their attitude, emotions and behavior), and faster career changes bring more responsibilities to the individuals. Persons occupying higher positions in the younger age are likely to get heart attacks due to greater stress. This is because of inability to adapt to the new carrier responsibilities.