

MANAGEMENT OF STRESS: COPING STYLES, PREFERENCES, AND STRATEGIES

Dr. Rani P.B.

Guest Lecturer
University First Grade College
Department of Commerce
Mangalore University
Mangalagangothri-574199, Karnataka, India

Abstract: Stress is an individual psychological state, that resides in one's (his/ her) perception or appraisal of the balance or "transaction" between the internal or external demands placed on one and one's ability and resources to cope with these demands. Individual well-being and quality of life are influenced by not only the amount of stress experienced but also by how one (he/she) copes with these demands. Everyone needs to avoid over-stress or under-stress and develop appropriate and relevant coping strategies to manage it effectively and efficiently. As a matter of fact, coping styles and strategies differ across individuals based on their personality, situational characteristics, and individual differences. Accordingly, this paper highlights these aspects revolving around coping styles, preferences and strategies of employees in the corporate sector.

Keywords: Stress, Coping Styles, Preferences, Strategies

Introduction

Stress is a state of mind, which reflects certain biochemical reactions in the body and is projected by such a sense of anxiety, tension, and depression and is caused by such demands by the environmental force or internal forces that cannot be and by the resources available to the person. The experience of stress can alter the way individuals feel, think, and behave and also produce change in their behaviour and physiological function which may both be detrimental to employees as well as organizational well-being. Stress management refers to the full spectrum of control strategies used to deal with the problems of stress in the workplace, which can be effective in the quality of the working life of workers and their immediate psychological health. The effectiveness of stress management intervention support to reduce or reappraising the pressures and enhances an employee's coping ability and resources to face the complex and demanding situation.

Methodology

The present research paper made an attempt to gather information by reviewing published books, articles in various journals, and collecting relevant data from published dissertations.

Conceptual framework

The term 'stress' derives from the middle French word *destrresse* ("distress") which in turn derives from the Latin word *strictus* ("compressed") which means 'to injure' 'molest' 'constrain' 'hardship' or affliction'. The concept of stress finds its root in the field of life science. Hans Selye, one of the early pioneers of modern stress theory first employed the term stress in the biological context in the 1930s. Selye referred to stress as an upset in the body's balance due to physical, mental, and emotional stimuli. Meanwhile, Newman, J.E., *et.al* (1979) defined job stress as "a situation where job-related forces interact with the workers to change his/ her psychological and/or physiological condition such that the person is forced to deviate from normal functioning" (pp-1-43).

Stress, stressor and strain relationship

Stress is the emotional and physical caused by an individual response to pressure from the outside world. Hans Selye (1930) referred to stress as an upset in the body's balance due to physical, mental, or emotional *stimuli or situations* that can result in the experience of stress is termed stressors, and strain is a longer-term reaction to chronic stress. Literally, the stressor is a predictor of stress and strain is a consequence of stress. A consequence of stress is an interaction between individual responses to the environment; distress experienced by individuals has a negative consequence for them. The symptoms can surface as physiological, psychological, cognitive, and behavioral outcomes.

According to Jex, *et.al.* (1992) stress is an overarching umbrella concept that comprises stressors or the process where a stressor is a physical or psychological stimulus present in the environment (e.g., work overload, poor lighting, unclear job expectations, or role ambiguity). A strain is also distress in the negative reaction to the stressors (i.e. job burnout, substance abuse, violence, depression (job burnout, substance abuse, violence, etc.). Not all stressors produce strain, an individual has a positive response to stress and this is known as Eustress. Eustress or good stress occurs when the individual constructively manages their response to a stressor. However, perception of stress and its management depend upon a variety of factors such as antecedents (individual, team, organizational, and situational characteristics), nature of stressors (causes), nature of strains (consequences), coping styles, and strategies to effectively handle stress under various demanding situation.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Reviews on Stress and Gender-specific Studies

Jick, T.D., et al. (1985) The study implied that men are more prone to severe physical illness; women tend to report higher rates of psychological distress. Women exhibited the symptomatology of low emotional well-being to a greater extent than men.

Sorensen, G., et al. (1985), The study pointed out that occupational mobility has a slightly stronger effect on men's risk than on women's and job experiences have considerable consequences for individual attitudes and behaviours, and these effects are generally stronger for men than women.

Karasek, R. (1987), The results of the study showed that family problems are associated with increased health risks stronger for men. And family responsibilities and constraints affect health behaviour stronger for women.

Lennon M.C. (1987), This survey-based study found that full-time work and low levels of complexity are associated with higher levels of demoralization among women. Substantive complexity is also associated with drinking, but only among men; as complexity declines, levels of drinking increase.

Frankenhaeuser, et al. (1989) The study revealed that Type-A behavior was more prevalent in women than in men when working hours are controlled for. The male managers who reported the highest workload experienced a high level of personal control which may serve to buffer the damaging effects of a heavy workload.

Olson D.A., et al. (1994) Women reported higher levels of emotional social support from friends and co-workers than men, moreover, men reported higher levels of instrumental support (e.g., providing money) and informational support (e.g., Providing directions) from coworkers and more appraisal support (e.g., providing performance feedback) from their spouse.

Reviews on Stress and Gender-Neutral Studies

House, J.S., et.al. (1979) The study analysis found that psychosocial job stress was significantly associated with psychological and psychosomatic disorders among blue-collar workers, the study suggesting that such stress may pose an additional hazard to blue-collar workers by making them more susceptible to the effects of noxious environmental agents on dermatological and, especially, respiratory functioning.

Pettegrew, L.S., et.al. (1981) The study observed that the communicator style accounted for the greatest differences between employees who were experiencing stress due to being unprepared to perform their work roles. Physicians appeared to be more assertive and less supportive in their communication; administrators/managers were assertive but also supportive while line employees were both submissive and supportive in their communicator style. Statistically significant found that the discriminant functions were less powerful than the communicator style discriminant functions.

Olsson, K. et al. (1990) The study found that nurses experienced more mental and physical occupational stress than paper workers. The nurses working in an irregular three-shift system reported more shift work stress compared to the male and female paper workers on regular shifts. The nurses reported more often active cognitive coping strategies than the paper workers. The nurses who used active problem-solving coping methods had fewer psychological symptoms than the other nurses. If the nurses had not used so many active cognitive methods and social support, they might have been even more exhausted. The fixed shift system gave the paper workers abundant leisure time in which to take care of themselves and to use coping methods to promote their health.

Kawkami, N., et.al. (1992) The study results found that job unsuitability and poor human relations at the workplace seem to be risk factors for long-lasting depressive symptoms in Japanese blue-collar workers.

Rahim, M. A. (1997) The study stated that the managers with a high internal locus of control who receives high social support will perform significantly better than the ones with the opposite conditions. managers who are externalizers (i.e., low on internal locus of control) particularly require stress management training. A major implication of the findings is that managers who possess a high internal locus of control personalities should be particularly selected for positions that involve high stress.

Sand, G. (2000) The study results suggested that coping mechanisms that are more direct (e.g., confronting stress or talking about stress) are more likely to lead to lower levels of burnout than retreat tactics such as ignoring, avoiding, or leaving a stressful situation.

Mackie, K.S. et.al. (2001) The study stated that perceived exposure to employee involvement management practices was related to perceived work stress, sense of coherence, and depression. And increased exposure to employee involvement practices was indirectly associated with lower levels of depression through both perceived work stress and a sense of coherence.

Coping styles, preferences, and strategies

Managing stress is all about taking change of one's (his/her) thoughts, emotions schedules, environment, and the way one deals with stressful situations. Better management of stress can help to reduce stress-induced thoughts, feelings, and behaviours, as well as improves one's overall health and sense of well-being.

Significance of managing stress

Managing stress is a synthesis of wisdom accrued knowledge and personal experience. The stressful situation in the workplace can have devastating effects on the morale of employees causing increasing absenteeism and employee turnover. Good stress management skills help the morale of employees and better focus on their job and performance. The successful implementation of stress management programs and other health and safety interventions, such as policy formation, visible support from top management, unions and staff associations, adequate resources, (time and people as well as finance and technology), and communication will support the individuals to reducing or eliminating the source of the problem in the work environment.

Coping with stress

When individuals experience stress or face a demanding situation, they adopt a different way of dealing with it as they cannot remain a continued state of tension. Coping refers to how an individual deal with stressful situations, which differs from person to person and from situation to situation. There or two major ways of coping: changing oneself or changing one's environment. Coping is done with a desire to maintain a sense of personal integrity and to achieve greater personal control over the environment.

Coping styles and strategies

Coping style refers to a characteristic way of handling situation, there are stable tendencies on the basis of which inferences are drawn about how an individual will cope in some or all types of stressful situations. The strategies adopted by an individual are determined by a number of personal and environmental factors and their effectiveness depends on the approach the individual takes. A person's coping style or disposition typically assessed by personality test not by actual observation of what the person says or does in a particular situation. Coping strategies are behaviours directed towards specific stressors. Coping style, on the other hand, reflect relatively consistent or habitual way of dealing with stressors generally. (Dewe, P.J., 2010, P-69). There are two major dimensions of coping: (1) problem-focused coping, which addresses the stressful situation and (2) emotion-focused coping, which deals with feelings and reaction to the stressful event.

People using problem-focused strategies try to deal with the cause of their problem. Problem-focused coping has been found to decrease emotional distress and is negatively related to depression, whereas, emotion-focused coping is "oriented toward managing the emotions that accompany the perception of stress. Which involves releasing pent-up emotions, distracting oneself, managing hostile feelings, meditating, or using systematic relaxation procedures. An emotional-focused coping increases emotional distress and is positively related to depression. According to Cox (1985), coping is a form of problem-solving behaviour, whereas stress is the result of failed problem-solving. Coping involves cognitive and behavioural strategies and represents either an adjustment to the situation or an adjustment of the situation. Coping is successful if the sources of the problem have been dealt with or because the experience of the stress has been directly reduced.

Preferences

There are individual differences in stressors experienced by men and women, in the distress symptoms they report, and in the ways, they choose to cope with stress. Men tend to use problem-focused coping strategies, planned and rational actions, humour and fantasy as ways of coping. Women, on the other hand, gravitate toward emotion-focused strategies, such as expression of emotions and seeking social- support, which are positive, and others such as self-blame and avoidance, which are less functional. Vingerhoets *et. al* (1990), found that men are more inclined to use active problem-focused coping strategies, plan and rationalize their actions, and engage in positive thinking, perseverance, self-adaption, and personal growth. In contrast, women prefer emotion-focused solutions, engaging in self-blame and wishful thinking. However, women's tendency to engage in emotion-focused strategies serves to exacerbate the negative effect of a lack of personal control, further increasing women's risk factors.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the ability to cope with stress is an important aspect of working life both in terms of work performance and general health. Coping or coping strategies are brought about by a person and interpersonal problems to manage stress. Stress management strategies, however, can be used in order to reduce the intensity of a stress response in situations where individuals have exceeded their coping resources. Successful coping requires a set of knowledge, skills attitudes, values, and habits that are adequate for dealing with a variety of situations. In addition, stress management involves improvement in cognition (perception), affect (feeling), and conation (action). In the process of stress management, every individual can acquire the requisite competencies to handle critical situations with a well-balanced mind and victorious life.

References

1. Cox, (1985) The nature and measurement of stress. 28(8) pp-1155-1163
2. Cox, T (1993) Stress Research and Stress Management: Putting Theory into Work. *HSE contract research report 61/1993*.pp10-26
3. Dewe, P.J., Michael P.O' Driscoll & Cooper C. L. (2010) Coping with Work Stress: A Review and Critique. p-69.
4. Frankenhaeuser, M., Lundberg, U., Fredrickson, M., Melin, B., Tuomisto, M., Anna-Lisa Myrsten, Hedman, M., Bergman-Losman, B., & Wallin, L. (1989) Stress on and off the job as related to sex and occupational status in white-collar workers, *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 10(4), pp-321-346.
5. House, J. S. Wells, A., Landerman, L.R., McMichael, A. J. & Kaplan, B.H. (1979) Occupational Stress and Health among Factory Workers, *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 20(2), pp. 139-160.
6. Jick, T.D., & Mitz, L.F., (1985) Sex differences in work stress, *The Academy of Management Review*, 10 (3), 408-420
7. Karasek, R Gardell, R., & Lindell, J. (1987) Work and non-work correlates of illness and behaviour in male and female Swedish white-collar workers, *Journal of Occupational Behaviour*, 8 (3), 187-207.
8. Kashalikar., S.J. (2005) Stress: Understanding & Management, A Way to Total Well-being p-19
9. Kawakami, N., Haratani, T., & Araki, S. (1992) Effects of perceived job stress on depressive symptoms in blue-collar workers of an electrical factory in Japan, *Scandinavian Journal of Work, Environment & Health*, 18(3) pp. 195-200
10. Lennon M.C., (1987) Sex Differences in Distress: The Impact of Gender and Work Roles, *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 28 (3), pp- 290-305
11. Newman J.E., & Bheer, T.A., (1979) Personal and Organisational Strategies for Handling Job Stress: A Review of Research and Opinion *Personal Psychology*, 312, pp-1-43
12. Olson D.A., and Shultz, K.S., (1994) Gender differences in the dimensionality of social support, *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*,24(14), 1221-1232
13. Olsson, K., I. Kandolin, I. & Kauppinen-Toropainen, K. (1990) Stress and Coping Strategies of Three-Shift Workers. *Le Travail Humain*. 53(2), pp. 175-188
14. Pettegrew, L.S. Thomas, R. C., Ford, J., & Raney D.C., (1981) The effects of job-related stress on medical centre employee communicator style, *Journal of Occupational Behaviour*. (24), pp.235-253.
15. Rahim M.A., (1997) Relationships of stress, locus of control, and social support to psychiatric symptoms and propensity to leave a job: a field study with managers, *Journal of Business and Psychology*.12(2), pp-159-174.
16. Sand, G., Anthony D., & Miyazaki A.D. (2000) The Impact of Social Support on Salesperson Burnout and Burnout Components, *Psychology & Marketing*. 17(1), pp-13-26.
17. Sorensen, G., Pirie, P., Folsom, A., Luepker, R., Jacobs, D., & Gillum, R., (1985) Sex differences in the relationship between work and health: the Minnesota heart survey, *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 26 (4), 379-394.

Websites

<https://www.brainline.org/article/stress-management-how-reduce-prevent-and-cope-stress>

<https://www.helpguide.org/articles/stress/stress-management.htm/>

<https://www.verywellmind.com/stress-management-4157211>

<https://nerdomeblog.com/2013/10/13/importance-of-stress-management/>