

Understanding the Role of Positive Stress as a Mediating Tool for Employee Performance: A Conceptual Insinuation

¹Neha Nangia, ²Dr.Vijit Chaturvedi

Assistant Professor, Lingaya's University, Faridabad, Haryana, India

Head & Assoc Prof, School of Management Sciences Lingaya's University, Faridabad, Haryana, India

Abstract

The foremost Aim of this study is to find how Stress can be a optimistic aspect in the overall development of Employees. Stress causes various psychological and physiological problems over time. It can increase the vulnerability to certain health problems as infectious diseases, endocrine diseases, respiratory infections, cardiac problems, and psychological problems as tensions, distress, anger, insomnia etc. Harmful effects of stress can be mitigated if we are able to cope with it well. This can be achieved by changing thoughts and behaviors to manage distress (emotion-focused-coping) or by managing the problems underlying distress (problem-focused-coping) in context of stressful situations (Folkman 1997a). Stress is a fact of everyday life. When people reach out for help, they are often dealing with circumstances, situation, and stressors in their lives that leave them feeling emotionally and physically overwhelmed. Many people feel that they have very little resources or skills to deal with the high levels of stress they are experiencing. Stress is a normal part of life. In small quantities, stress is good; it can motivate you and help you become more productive. Eustress or positive stress is defined as stress which enables employees to perform better and increase their job satisfaction. This study confirms that eustress is a key factor in motivating employees to achieve high performance and enhanced job satisfaction. Not enough eustress lead to employee boredom and turnover. On the other hand, large amount of negative stress or distress significantly leads to physical and psychological illness.

Keywords

Positive Stress (Eustress), Productivity, Attitude, Motivation

I. Introduction

Many people are unaware that there are two categories of stress: Eustress and Distress. Eustress is the good stress that motivates you to continue working. Stress can be a motivator and provide incentive to get the job done. This "good stress" is what eustress can be identified as and some people enjoy it. Everyone needs a little bit of stress in their life in order to continue to be happy, motivated, challenged and productive. It is when this stress is no longer tolerable and/or manageable that distress comes in. Bad stress, or distress, is when the good stress becomes too much to bear or cope with. Tension builds, there is no longer any fun in the challenge, there seems to be no relief, no end in sight. This is the kind of stress most of us are familiar with and this is the kind of stress that leads to poor decision making. Physiological symptoms of distress includes increase in blood pressure, rapid breathing and generalized tension. Behavioural symptoms include overeating, loss of appetite, drinking, smoking and negative coping mechanisms. Stress tolerance is the power to endure stress. If you feel stress, lose against or not all depends on your stress tolerance. A person's tolerance to stress is not only different according to the person but is also influenced by time and condition. So tolerance to stress may differ largely to the same person according to the time and condition in which it is experienced. Mainly, the personality

and physique, environment and condition change the strength of tolerance to stress.

II. Eustress V/S Distress

Eustress, or positive stress, has the following characteristics:

1. Motivates, focuses energy
2. Is short-term
3. Is perceived as within our coping abilities
4. Feels exciting
5. Improves performance

In contrast, Distress, or negative stress, has the following characteristics:

1. Causes anxiety or concern
2. Can be short- or long-term
3. Is perceived as outside of our coping abilities
4. Feels unpleasant
5. Decreases performance
6. Can lead to mental and physical problems.

III. Factors That Helps in Increasing Eustress

There are several factors that may increase or decrease one's chances of experiencing eustress and, through eustress, experiencing flow.

1. Stress is also influenced by hereditary predispositions and expectations of society. Thus, a person could already be at a certain advantage or disadvantage toward experiencing eustress
2. If a person enjoys experiencing new things and believes they have importance in the world, they are more likely to experience flow.
3. Flow is negatively related to self-directedness, or an extreme sense of autonomy.
4. Persistence is positively related to flow and closely related to intrinsic motivation. People with an internal locus of control, or high levels of self-control, have an increased chance of flow because they believe they can increase their skill level to match the challenge.
5. Perfectionism, however, is negatively related to flow. A person downplays their skill levels therefore making the gap too big, and they perceive the challenge to be too large to experience flow. On the opposite end of perfectionism, however, there are increased chances of flow.
6. Active procrastination is positively related to flow. By actively delaying work, the person increases the challenge. Then once the challenge is matched with the person's high skill levels, the person can experience flow. Those who passively procrastinate or do not procrastinate do not have these same experiences. It is only with the purposeful procrastination that a person is able to increase the challenge.
7. Mindset is a significant factor in determining distress versus eustress. Optimistic people and those with high self-esteem contribute to eustress experiences. The positive mindset increases the chances of eustress and a positive response to

stressors. Currently, the predominant mindset toward stress is that stress is debilitating. However, mindsets toward stress can be changed.

IV. The Impact of Stress on Performance of Employees

Various studies have been piloted to examine the relationship between job stress and job performance. Job performance can be viewed as an activity in which an individual is able to accomplish the task assigned to him/her successfully, subject to the normal constraints of reasonable utilization of the available resources. At a conceptual level, four types of relationships were proposed to exist between the measures of job stress and job performance (Jamal M, 2007). One is a negative linear relationship, when productivity decreases with stress (distress). Productivity can also increase as a consequence of stress, thereby implying a positive linear relationship between the two. Thirdly, there could be a U-shaped or a curvilinear relationship wherein, mild stress could increase the productivity initially up to a peak and then it declines as the person descends into a state of distress. Alternately, there need not be any quantifiable relationship between the two.

A. Factors that Result in Job Stress in Employees

Job stress could be as a result of a number of factors, which can be broadly classified into (1) external factors relating to organization and work-family conflicts, and (2) internal factors. External factors are well described by Cooper and Marshall's five sources of stress.



Fig. 1:

B. The Factors Inducing Job Stress are

1. Organisational Factors

According to Cooper & Marshall, stress could be due to factors intrinsic to the job, such as poor physical working conditions, work overload or time pressures. Often, one's role in the organization and the ambiguity associated with the job resulting from inadequate information concerning expectations, authority and responsibilities to perform one's role as well as the conflict that arises from the demands placed on the individual by superiors, peers and subordinates could also result in stress. A third factor is the impact of status incongruence, lack of job security and thwarted ambition on one's career progression. Rayner and Hoel (1997) theorized that relationships at work with bosses and colleagues, including bullying in the workplace could result in a lot of stress. At an organizational level, the structure and climate, including the degree of involvement in decision making and participation in office politics could result in a stressful climate.

"Stress could be due to factors intrinsic to the job, such as poor physical working conditions, work overload or time pressures".

2. Cary Cooper and Judi Marshall

Additional sources of stress documented in the ASSET model include the impact a person's working life has on their life outside of work (work-life balance), the amount of satisfaction people derive from their work, the degree of control and autonomy people have in the work place, and the levels of commitment in the work place both from the employee to the organisation and from the organisation to the employee (Sheena 2005).

(i). Work Family Interaction

The rise of families in which both partners are earning and increasing female participation in the sphere of employment has transformed the ways in which couples manage work and family responsibilities. Work and family integration can result in both negative (i.e., work-family conflict) and positive interactions (i.e., work-family enrichment). Work-family conflict and work-family enrichment can occur in either direction - "work-to-family or family-to-work". Work demands, family demands and work flexibility are recognized to be important determinants of the work-family interaction (Luo Lu et al, 2008).

(ii). Personality

Besides external factors, there are internal factors too that can cause stress, like the age of the individual, Gender, education and a personality that is deemed Type A or inherently stressful.

V. Stress Management at the Work Place

Stress resulting from work is a major problem and it takes a toll on one's physical and mental well being. Moreover, the management of stress is not easy, as can be ascertained by the documented ineffectiveness of stress management interventions (Beehr & O'Driscoll, 2002; Sulsky & Smith, 2005). However, a few pointers could be had for managers to counter and mitigate stress effectively.

First and foremost, one should be able to identify the stressors at work, assess them and manage them too. One should be careful not to remove the rewarding aspects of the job. Occupational stress does not always lead to distress and if challenges are dealt with effectively, then growth and positive changes can result in an individual. The challenge lies in providing the tools required to handle the effective management of workplace demands. The implications of cognitive appraisal models which suggest that stress is an 'individual problem', best addressed by positive appraisal techniques, are flawed.

"...one should be able to identify the stressors at work, assess them and manage them too. One should be careful not to remove the rewarding aspects of the job".

Primary assessment includes a subjective assessment of the balance between demands and resources. Rather than increasing resources or reducing demands straightaway, one must train the individual to assess these demands positively. Training in 'coping strategies' has had limited impact so far (Folkman & Lazarus, 1988). Since a combination of strategies is almost always more effective than a single strategy, these techniques should be used flexibly and individuals must be encouraged to use coping strategies in new situations.

Stress management includes taking care of organisational issues like leadership, peer support, organisational culture and policies, work design and reporting arrangements as well as job analysis, staff selection and training to enhance role clarity such that there

is a balance between the individual and his work environment. Effective systems for motivation and performance management are essential (Jennifer et al, 2006).

While meditation, yoga, pranayam, self hypnosis, biofeedback etc are techniques which can be practiced at an individual level to deal with stress, Pestonjee (1987) had proposed proactive intervention at an organizational level to manage employee stress. Some of these techniques have been listed in Exhibit 2. An organisation relies on its employees for success and thereby, it must spare no efforts in improving employee welfare.

Stress management techniques	Description
Undertake a stress audit	Organisation decides to take a peep into mental cum physical health status of its employees. Questionnaires and interviews are used to collect data on various stressors, coping techniques and outcomes.
Use scientific inputs	Spread awareness and information about effective dealing with stress, both inside and outside the organisation.
Check with the company doctor	The medical officer can conduct stress management programmes.
Spread the message	The importance of regular work habits, leisure, diet, exercise and practicing personal relaxation should be emphasized.

VI. Conclusion

Workplace stress places significant psychological, physiological, and financial costs on both the individual employee and his or her organization. Workplace stress has been associated with the physical disorders such as heart disease, hypoadrenia, immunosuppression, and chronic pain. In addition, the psychological impact of workplace stress includes depression, persistent anxiety, pessimism, and resentment. The impact of these symptoms on organizations is significant as these symptoms lead to hostility in the workplace, low morale, interpersonal conflict, increased benefit expenses, decreased productivity, and increased absenteeism. By providing the foundation for employees to flourish while also allowing employees to take responsibility for their stress related symptoms, organizations will find significant improvement in productivity and an improved workplace dynamic.

References

- [1] Helena M Addae, "Stress at work: Linear and curvilinear effects of psychological-, job-, and organisation-related factors: An exploratory study of Trinidad and Tobago", *International journal of stress management*, Vol. 13, No. 4, pp. 476-493, 2006.
- [2] Jamal, M., "Job stress and job performance controversy revisited: An empirical examination in two countries", *International journal of stress management*, Vol. 14, No. 2, pp. 175-187, 2007.
- [3] "World Health Organisation", [Online] Available: <http://www.who.int/about/definition/en/print.html>, Last accessed on: 20th September, 2009.
- [4] Johnson, Cooper et al, "The experience of work related stress across occupations", 2005, HSE.
- [5] Jennifer McGowan, "Positive and negative affective outcomes of occupational stress", *New Zealand journal of Psychology*, Vol. 35, No. 2, 2006.
- [6] Luo Lu, Shu-Fang Kao, Ting-Ting Chang, Hsin-Pei Wu, Cary L. Cooper, "Work/Family Demands, Work Flexibility, Work/family Conflict, and Their Consequences at Work: A National Probability Sample in Taiwan", *International Journal of Stress Management*, Vol. 15, No. 1, pp. 1-21, 2008.
- [7] Madeline Weiss, "Effects of Work Stress and Social Support on Information Systems Managers", *MIS Quarterly*, Vol. 7, No. 1, pp. 29-43, 1983.
- [8] McGowan, J., Gardner, D., Fletcher, R, "Positive and Negative Affective Outcomes of Occupational Stress", *Massey University, Auckland .New Zealand Journal of Psychology*, Vol. 35, No. 2, 2006.
- [9] Pestonjee.D.M., Pareek.U., Agrawal.R., Tripti Desai, "Studies in stress and its management Oxford & IBH Publishing co. Pvt. Ltd., Stress and mental workload: A conceptual synthesis, pp. 48-52, 1999.
- [10] Sheena Johnson, Cooper, C., Cartwright, S., Ian Donald Paul Taylor., Millet, C, "The experience of work-related stress across occupations", *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, Vol. 20, No. 2, pp. 178-187, 2005
- [11] Pestonjee.D.M., Nina Muncherji, "Studies in stress and its management, Oxford & IBH Publishing co. Pvt. Ltd., Stress and coping: some lessons and suggestions", pp. 310-313, 1999.