"OCCUPATIONAL STRESS & JOB PERFORMANCE – A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK"

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"Stress is not what happens to us. It's our response to what happens.

And response is something we can choose." **- Maureen Killoran**

Abstract

Today, corporate world is no more a 'nine to five' scene. It has registered radical transformations over the past years accredited to globalization, liberalization, greater freedom to private sector, technological revolution especially extensive use of computers and enormous 'gadgetization' in general. Heavy competition and dynamic production of corporate products or services have created hectic work hours, more expectations from employees, rigid deadlines and work targets, pressing work environments, constant demands and so on. This, in turn, takes a toll on the executives and as a result 'This job is killing me' has become a common phrase at workplace. Miserably, this is not just an expression, a report of World Health Organization (WHO) is projected to account for 35% of deaths among India's working age population between 2000 and 2030 as compared to about 12% in the United States, 22% in China and 25% in Russia only because of stress. A growing body of evidence also suggests that job stress is associated with a wide variety of physical ailments, including cardiovascular disease, musculoskeletal disorders and psychological illness. 'We live longer than our forefathers; but we suffer more from a thousand artificial anxieties and cares. They fatigued only the muscles; we exhaust the finer strength of the nerves', wise saying by Edward George Bulwer-Lytton, every bit of which is true to the core. The present paper is an attempt to understand the concept occupational stress through a conceptual framework and its impact on attributes like; job involvement, job satisfaction and job performance, which helps to understand in detailed.

Key words: Occupational Stress, job involvement, job satisfaction and job performance.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

It is difficult to define the three terms exactly i.e., Job Involvement, Job Satisfaction and Job Performance; some effort has been made to draw some conclusions on the basis of views given by several credible authors. Various authors and dictionaries have given the meanings of these variables in their own way which have been discussed as follows.

Job Stress

Broad-spectrum perceptible idea about job stress is the strain associated with one's work and workplace. Even so, our thorough understanding of the concept of job stress is of immense significance as it underlies all studies and theories regarding its behaviour. Different behavioural scientists have approached the problem of defining job stress in different ways.

The word 'stress' is defined by the Oxford as 'a state of mental or emotional strain or tension resulting from adverse or demanding circumstances'. A condition or circumstance (not always adverse), which can disturb the normal physiological and psychological functioning of an individual. In medical parlance 'stress' is defined as a perturbation of the body`s homeostasis. This demand on mind-body occurs when it tries to cope with incessant changes in life. A 'stress' condition seems 'relative' in nature. Extreme stress conditions, psychologists say, are detrimental to human health but in moderation stress is normal and, in many cases, proves useful. Stress, nonetheless, is synonymous with negative conditions.

As was given by NIOSH (1999), "Workplace stress is the harmful physical and emotional response that occurs when there is a poor match between job demands and the capabilities, resources, or needs of the worker".

Causes of Job Stress

An approach was adopted by Caplan and Jones (1975) where identification was done of four different types of role conflict: 1. Intra-sender role conflict; 2. Inter-sender role conflict; 3. Person-role conflict; and 4. Role overload. The use of role concepts suggests that job related stress is associated with individual, interpersonal, and structural variables. The presence of supportive peer groups and supportive relationships with supervisors are negatively correlated with role conflict.

Beehr and Newman (1978) defined occupational stress as "a condition arising from the interaction of people and their jobs and characterized by changes within people that force them to deviate from their normal functioning."

According to Van Sell et al. (1976), "Stress is oft en developed when an individual is assigned a major responsibility without proper authority and delegation of power. Interpersonal factors such as group cohesiveness, functional dependence, communication frequency, relative authority and

organizational distance between the role sender and the focal persons are important topics in organizational behavior."

While Beehr and Newman and Van Sell et al. underscore the importance of people's interaction and interpersonal relationships in job stress, Pestonjee (1992) opined that "the responsibility load creates severe stress among workers and managers." If the individual manager cannot cope with the increased responsibilities it may lead to several physical and psychological disorders among them.

According to French and Caplan (1972), "Pressure of both qualitative and quantitative overload can result in the need to work excessive hours, which is an additional source of stress." Having to work under time pressure in order to meet deadlines is an independent source of stress. Studies show that stress levels increase as difficult deadlines draw near.

Another report said common causes of excessive workplace stress are:

a) Fear of layoffs

b) Increased demands for overtime due to staff cutbacks

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

d) Pressure to work at optimum levels – all the time! (www.helpguide.org, 2010).

As per one report it was stated that job stress might be caused by a complex set of reasons. Some of the most visible causes of workplace stress are:

a. Job insecurity

b. Reorganizations, takeovers, mergers, downsizing and other changes have become major stressors for employees.

c. High demand for performance

d. Unrealistic expectations, especially in the time of corporate reorganizations, which, sometimes, puts unhealthy and unreasonable pressures on the employee, can be a tremendous source of stress and suffering.

e. The expansion of technology-computers, pagers, cell phones, fax machines and internet has resulted in heighten expectations for productivity, speed and efficiency, increasing pressure on the individual worker to constantly operate at peak at performance levels.

f. Adjusting to the workplace culture, whether in a new company or not, can be intensely stressful.

Stress develops when an individual feels he is not undertaking the role assigned to him effectively. The individual feels that he lacks knowledge, skill and training on performing the role. Personal or family problems are also stress augmenters. Employees going through personal or family

problems tend to carry their worries and anxieties to the workplace. When one is in a depressed mood, his unfocused attention or lack of motivation affects his ability to carry out job responsibilities" (www.lifepositive.com, 2005).

Symptoms of Job Stress

The signs of job stress vary from person to person, depending on the particular situation, how long the individual has been subjected to the stressors, and the intensity of the stress itself. Typical symptoms of job stress can be:

a. Insomnia
b. Loss of mental concentration
c. Anxiety, stress
d. Absenteeism
e. Depression,
f. Substance abuse,
g. Extreme anger and frustration,
h. Family conflict
i. Physical illnesses such as heart disease, migraine, headaches, stomach problems and back problems (www.lifepositive.com, 2005).

Job Involvement

In a broad context, job involvement is the extent to which an employee's job occupies his central life interest, i.e., the limit to which an employee is willing to dedicate oneself to one's job. Job involvement would also be defined by the significance attached to one's job by an employee, i.e., in his ideology how crucial is his job in meeting all his vital needs in life. Various authors have probed into this variable and have illuminated dimensions to it as discussed ahead.

Gurin et al. (1960) described job involvement as the extent to which individuals seek some expression and actualization of the self in their work. Their concept of job involvement was further illustrated by Lodahl and Kejner (1965) who defined job involvement in terms of the degree to which people are identified psychologically with their work and the importance of work in the individual's self-image.

Rabinowitz and Hall (1977) also concluded from their evaluation of research on job involvement that the data is consistent with this "psychological identification with work" definition of job involvement provided by Lodahl and Kejner.

Job Satisfaction

The term "Job Satisfaction" has been described by different psychologist in different ways. Bullock (1952), defined job-satisfaction as an attitude which results from balancing and summation of many specific likes and dislikes experienced in connection with job. Pistonjee (1973) defined job-satisfaction as the summation of employee's feelings in four important areas-two of these are job and management, which are directly concerned with job and remaining two social relation and personal adjustment which are not directly connected with job, but which are presumed to have a bearing on job-satisfaction.

According to Locke (1974), job-satisfaction and dissatisfaction are a function of perceived relationship between what one expected and obtains from one's job and how much importance or value is attributes to it. Blum, M.L. (1956), "Job satisfaction or dissatisfaction is the result of various attitudes the person holds towards his job, towards related factors and towards life in general."

Simpla, D. (1974), "Job satisfaction refers or covers the satisfaction derived from being engaged in work or any pursuit of a high order." Crites (1969), "If it is over, all job in which the individual is presently employed, then the concept would be job satisfaction."

Job Performance

Occupational stress affects employee performance. Empirically researches have shown a negative relation between stress and performance. High level of stress is known to bring down job performance (Beehr and Newman, 1978).Interestingly, very low or no stress is also found to be associated with low performance. The stress – performance relationship is best shown as an inverted – U (McGrath, 1976) wherein moderate level of stress seems to maximize performance. Besides the degree of stress, performance may also be a function of different kind of stressors e.g. Job pressures due to time, financial responsibility etc.

Performance of an employee can be stated as all of the behaviour employees engage in at work. The definition probably is slightly misleading because at times people might be engaging themselves in work which has no relation to their job performance (e.g. making personal phone calls). More appropriate way then would be as suggested by Campbell, (1990), according to which job performance is stated as a collection of behaviour employees engage in at work, as long as that behaviour contributes to the attainment of organizational goals. When we try to draw a link between behaviour and performance, the study becomes a matter of prediction, as to what type of behaviour will lead to what type of performance e.g. interviewing an employee and predicting his future performance. Therefore most of performance based research centres around performance prediction.

Conclusion

Job stress, job involvement and job satisfaction play a vital role in adjustment of employees working in organizations. Stress in job is totally different from one's expectations and dreams, gives an employees the strength for transforming her or himself into a powerful person. The present study is related to study of job stress, job involvement, and job satisfaction of employees. Job involvement is the degree to which one psychologically identifies with one's job and therefore, one's motivational orientation to the job.

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