THE EFFECTS OF NEGATIVE STRESS ON EMPLOYEES BEHAVIOR

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Abstract:

Managing stress at work was the aim of the European Week for Safety and Health at Work in 2014, the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA) and its network partners intending to identify ways to prevent, evaluate and fight risks at European level.

Stress, a problem and a responsibility for both employers and employees, is considered the second most common health problem associated with work declared in Europe, first place being occupied by musculoskeletal disorders. Costs incurred by companies related to mental health disorders exceed 200 billion per year. Precarious design, organization and management of work and the improperly social context at work can generate psychosocial risks and can have adverse effects, such as stress at work, exhaustion and depression.

In this article I chose to approach only negative stress, called distress and to present how it affects not only the performance at work, but also the personal life and employee's behavior.

Keywords: *stress, health distress, employee behavior*

JEL Classification: *I15, J24, O15*

1. Introduction

A syndrome of the new millennium, the word "stress" has become one of the most pronounced words, as an American study places it as the second most frequent in human language after „communication'.

Seldomly seen as something positive (eustress), the stress has become an usual culprit for all ailments, being used more and more often for mist diverse cases.

2. Methodology

As I have studded and I have bases my studies on various sources o information (specialized literature, case studies, media articles, various organization reports and so on), n this paper, I have tried to provide a brie presentation o the factors which determine stress, woays of prevention, benefits of stress reduction at the workplace, the current attitude towards this syndrome of the new millennium.

3. Terms and Approaches. Distress and Stress.

The term o „stress" was developed by Hans Hugo Bruno Selye, professor of histology, who defines stress as the totality of human responses to exterior action of some generating agents (physical, chemical, biological, psychical) consisting of morpho-functional modifications, most commonly of an endocrine nature.

Psychological or biological stress is an organism's response to a stressor such as an environmental condition. Stress is a body's method of reacting to a challenge.

What is STRESS? We can find the meaning of stress in the letters that compose this word.

S stands for strength, „power struggle" physically, emotionally, intellectually and spiritually.

T stands for traffic control, struggle to control your mind.

R stands for re-design, „fight for remodeling".

E stands for erase, exceedes the time, „get over the situation".

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S is for sharing, to share with others the knowledge, welfare, duties. Gheordunescu M., Panoiu L., 2014, Stress in organization, Managerial Strategies Magazine no. 4 (26) Ed. Independenta Economica, p.622.

There are two fundamental rypes of stress, as Selye ponts out in 1973: distress (negative stress) and eustress (positive stress).

Distress is the term which describes the type o stress which has a negative potential on the body. In literature, distress generally overlaps the whole notion of stress, being found n various situations with extremely unfavorable meanings for most individuals.

According to some authors (Kaplan, Lazarus), the basis o stress consists of an inconsistency between the resources, ablates, capabilities o an individual and the requirements or the necessities mposed on this individual.

- Threat – signifies the anticipation o a danger;
- Frustration – appears when we encounter an obstacle in acheveing our goal;
- Conflict – situation occurring upon collision o two or more requirements with opposite and competeing motivations;
- Resolution o some problems;
- Losses, not only material, but also emotional;
- Overstretching, requirements which surpass the intellectual capacity;
- Understretching (lack of information, lack of activity, monotony and so on). A more subtle form, but which is far more harmful consists of aspirational understretching, through the unfulfilment of social needs;
- Persistency of negative emotional feelings (loss of a loved one, professional failure and so on) or reoccurrence of these feelings upon the action of conditional stimuli of recovered to a conscious level through dreams, ideas and so on.

Lazarus points out the subjective nature of an individual's perception of requirements which he consider as beyond his capabilities, so distress occurs upon an imbalance between the objective requirements on the body and the capabilities the subject considers he has in order to cope with the situation.

Eustress – is another type o stress, but a positive one. The difference between eustress and distress is fundamental both from the point of view of stress causing agents (stimuli with a positive meaning for the individual, pleasant stimuli of the environment or positive or "exciting" emotions, from emotions to feelings), as well as its consequences on the body, which are, generally, favorable (von Eiff).

Differences between distress and eustress besed on the stress causing agents, on the types of reactions or situations, on the immune system or on the mental and behavioral disorders are presented in the table below:

Table no. 1 Distress and eustress

	Distress	*Eustress*
Quality o stress causing agents	Unpleasant, threatening, overstretching	Pleasant, moderate requirement in a positive emotional environment
Types of reactions	Active: anger, shame, terror Passive: deep sadness, helplessness, uncertainty, lack o hope	Joy, triumph, ecstasy, laughter, moderate physical effort
Types of situations	Conflict, overstretching, frustration, major losses	Financial and moral winnings, ecstatic contemplation, laughter sources
Immune system	Inhibition	Stimulation

Source: http://umfcv.ro/files/c/u/Curs%204%20Psihologie%20Medicala%20-%20Stresul%20Psihic%20-%20Factor%20modulator%20complex%20al%20sanatatii.pdf

Table no. 2 Mental and behavioral disorders occurring in cases of acute stress

Disorders	Distress	Eustress
Cognitive	- Diminution of attention and memory; - Ideational block ; - Diminution o imagination, creativity; - Lack of self-confidence; - Lack of hope; - Helplensess; - Overestimating difficulties.	- Diminution of power of concentration and of intellectual capabilities; - Diminution of vigilance; - Excessive confidence in oneself and in others (diminishing critical sense); - Underestimating difficulties.
Affective	- Irritability, revolt, mania, anger; - Shame, embarrassment; - Inexplicable restlessness, panic (different degrees o anxiety), horror; - Fear, phobia; - Impatience, irritability, anger; - Apathy, boredom, asthenia; - Sadness, lack of joy of living, the feeling of uselessness; - Psychogenic insomnia; - Uncertainty versus stubbornness; - Diminished willpower versusle effort.	- Satisfaction, amusement; - Triumph, winning; - Pride; - Revelation (artistic, moral, scientific values); - Sensory or intellectual excitement; - Joy; - Frenzy; - Sexual excitement; - Extasy (artistic, intellectual, religious).

Source: http://umfcv.ro/files/c/u/Curs%204%20Psihologie%20Medicala%20-%20Stresul%20Psihic%20-%20Factor%20modulator%20complex%20al%20sanatatii.pdf

Coping mechanisms

The term o "coping" has appeared in 1978, when Lazarus and Lavin have described a series of conscious strategies (cognitive and behavioral) in order to adjust or cope through a nuanced adaptation elaborated by the individual in order to make the interior tension more tolerable (mental stress) induced by an opposing situation (which surpasses personal resources).

Based on the way in which an individual concentrates his attention on the problem which has arisen, or on his own emotions generated by the problem, there are three types of adjustments (according to Suls and Fletcher):

1. "Coping" based on problems (vigilant coping) – used in the cases of stress generated by potentially reversible situations
- Remember the previous experience
- Counts on social support
- Request information and seek means
- Elaborate and action plan.

2. "Coping" based on problems (avoidant coping) generated by situations without a solution, It represents a passive "forgetting" strategy, avoiding confrontation of the seriousness o the situation, the subject tries and emotional derail in order to abandon trials of solving the problem and adopts defensive strategies (denial, resignation, fatalism, aggressivity).

3. Reevaluation of the problem – reduction of the differences perceived initially by the subject between the seriousness of the threat and own resources, which helps in perceiving the situations as more tolerable ("positive reinterpretation").

It is of great importance to study coping mechanisms in any tentative in reducing the negative effects of distress it is compulsory to keep in mind the adequacy or inadequacy of this adaptive strategy in actual stressful siruations for the subject.

Unconscious Defense Mechanisms
(Bewältigung, „deferise")
They are used by the subject when he evaluates the requirements of a situation (stressor) which he has to cope with, as it is beyond his capabilities. For this reason, they are consciously set in action (Bewältigung, defense) as they are meant to decrease the powerful psychical tension (distress) generated by that situation.

Among these mechanisms, there are:

1. Repression – a short-circuit mechanism of the consciousness during a psychical tension or the subject, generated by certain ideas, images pulses or wishes of the subject, which are repressed in the social environment;

2. Switching – unconscious channeling of needs, impulses, reasons towards objectives which can be reached causing a sustainable satisfaction or the subject;

3. Denial (substitution) – predominantly unconscious tendency of the subject to pick from the potentially dangerous characteristics of some stressors, with a great threatening potential, the ones which can be most easily overcome;

4. Projection – defense mechanism of unconsciously calming a state of extreme emotional tension by attributing the feelings, wishes and impulses the subject reuses to attribute to himself to another person or object, or he ignores them;

5. Regression (temporal) – coming back to a simpler psychical functioning, characteristic to and anterior stage of mental development.

4. Purpose of Work-related Stress Risk Assessment
Stress is commonly defined as a perceived imbalance between the demands made on people and their resources or ability to cope with those demands. Although the experience of stress might appear primarily psychological, stress also affects people's physical health Stress is not a disease but prolonged exposure to it may reduce effectiveness at work and may cause ill-health, ranging from mild headache to severe depression. The symptoms of stress in organisations can result in increased absenteeism, high staff turnover, disciplinary problems, violence and psychological harassment, reduced productivity, as well as reduced attention, mistakes and accidents. Factors, both inside and outside the workplace, can influence workers' health. Work conditions can affect workers' personal health and work-life balance but exposures and activities outside work such as financial problems, unhealthy lifestyles, can also affect workers' health, and performance at work. Therefore not all manifestations of stress at work can be considered as work-related stress and due to its multiple causes stress is thought to be a complex phenomenon. Nevertheless, the accumulated scientific evidence over the last three decades on the study of stress clearly suggests that ill-managed work features, such as constant high job demands, tight deadlines, harassment, and unsupportive managerial style, are likely to provoke the feeling of stress in workers. Legally, all employers have a general duty to ensure the safety and health of workers in every aspect of their work as highlighted in the Framework Directive 89/391 and other regulatory standards.

This includes risks related to psychosocial aspects of work, usually termed "psychosocial hazards" as opposed to physical hazards such as noise, chemicals, etc. To take the measures necessary for protecting workers' safety and health, employers are obliged to carry out a suitable and sufficient risk assessment (RA) of safety and health. This includes assessing the risk of work-related stress causing personal ill health arising

from work activities, and taking measures to control that risk. Measures include the prevention of occupational risks; provision of information and training to workers, providing the means to implement the necessary measures. Where elimination of risks is not possible, the risks should be reduced. Work related stress is largely preventable by taking appropriate action through conducting a risk assessment which is a systematic examination of aspects of work that could cause injury or harm; whether hazards can be eliminated and, if not what preventive or protective measures need to be in place to control the risks.

It is the responsibility of employer to ensure a RA is carried out; however, in practice, this may be done by the employer; an employee or manager designated by the employer; or by an external assessor.

There are many risk assessment tools and methodologies available to help employers assess the psychosocial risks. The choice of method always depends on the size of the organisation, the type of work activities, the particular features of the workplace and any specific risks. A stress RA involves the same basic principles and processes as for other occupational risks. The stepwise approach commonly used includes five steps:

- Identify the hazards and those at risk

Table no.3 Psychosocial hazards

Job content	Lack of variety or short work cycles, fragmented or meaningless work, under-use of skills, high uncertainty, continuous exposure to difficult clients, patients, pupils, etc.
Workload and work pace	Work overload or too little work, machine pacing, high levels of time pressure, continually subject to deadlines
Work schedule	Shift work, night shifts, inflexible work schedules, unpredictable hours, long or unsociable hours
Control	Low participation in decision-making, lack of control over workload, pacing, shift working, etc.
Environment and equipment	Inadequate equipment availability, suitability or maintenance; poor environmental conditions such as lack of space, poor lighting, excessive noise
Organizational culture and function	Poor communication, low levels of support for problem solving and personal development, poor managerial support; lack of definition of, or agreement on, organizational objectives
Interpersonal relationships at work	Social or physical isolation, poor relationships with superiors, interpersonal conflict, lack of social support, harassment, bullying, poor leadership style, third-party violence
Role in organization	Role ambiguity, role conflict, and responsibility for people
Career development	Career stagnation and uncertainty, under-promotion or over-promotion, poor pay, job insecurity, low social value of work
Home-work interface	Conflicting demands of work and home, low support at home, problems relating to both partners being in the labour force (dual career)

Source: https://oshwiki.eu/wiki/Psychosocial_risks_and_work-related_stress_risk_assessment

- Evaluate and prioritise the risks
- Decide on preventive action
- Take action
- Monitor and review

The 2014–15 Healthy Workplaces Campaign

The 2014–15 Healthy Workplaces Campaign has three key objectives: (1) to raise awareness and improve our understanding of stress and psychosocial risks in the workplace; (2) to provide guidance, support and practical tools for managing risks; and (3) to highlight the benefits of managing psychosocial risks for workers and businesses.

Psychosocial risks can be assessed and managed in the same systematic way as 'traditional' workplace risks. This is the main message of the 2014-15 Healthy Workplaces Campaign.

Workers attribute stress to:
- 72% - job reorganization or job insecurity
- 66% - excessive workload
- 59% - being subject to unacceptable behaviors such as bullying and harassment
• 50% say that stress is not well handles in their workplace.
Source: Pan-European opinion poll on occupational safety and health, EU-osha 2013

How is stress managed by company/managers in Europe?
- 79% have concerns
- Less than 30% have procedures
- 40% - 50% (larger workplaces) have measures in place
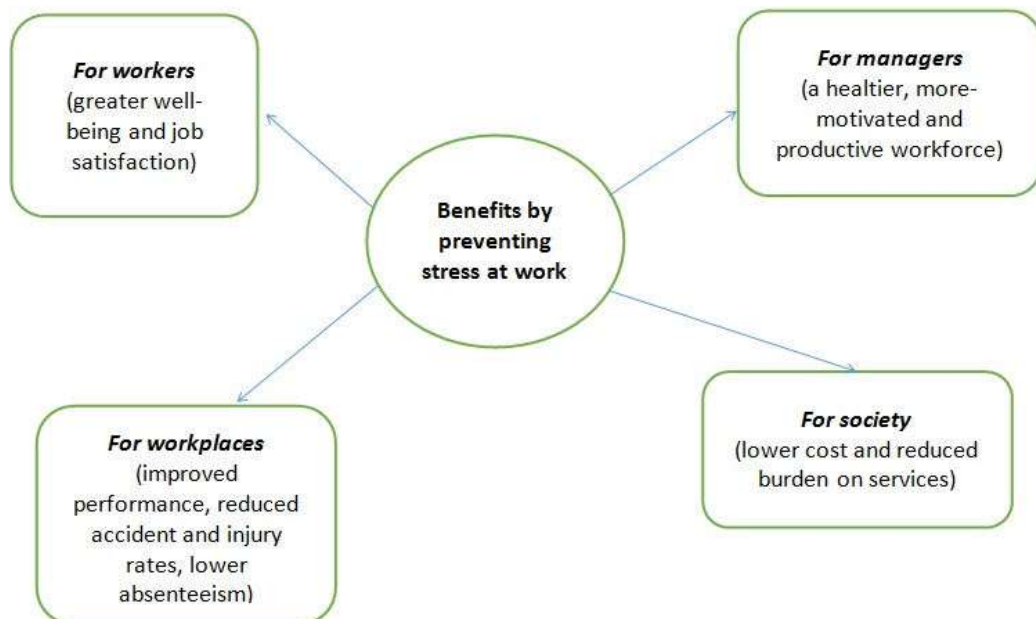- 20% - 30% (smaller workplaces) have measures in place.
Source: European Survey of Enterprises on New and Emerging Risks (ESENER) EU-OSHA 2010

Solutions to prevent stress and create a good psychosocial work environment:
• Ensure workers have enough time and autonomy to manage their work;
• Clarify roles and tasks, providing regular constructive feedback;
• Inform workers about change and involve the, in decision-making;
• Implement policies to prevent harassment and violence;
• Ensure fair work distribution and reward;
• Facilitate open and two-way communication.

Figure no.1 Benefits by preventing stress

Source: https://osha.europa.eu/sites/default/files/infographics/work-stress-risk-assessment-solutions-benefits-infographic3.png

5. Ways of Overcoming Stress in the Workplace
What can an employer do?
On an organizational level:
- Hiring new personnel only when necessary;
- Assuring the proper technical requirements;
- Assuring the proper professional training of the employees;
- Development of promotion possibilities for the company's employees;
- Establishing clear roles and tasks for the employees;
- Introduction of part-time employment;
- Organizing informative meetings;
- Having a polite approach towards all employees of the company;
- An immediate or quick resolution of any conflicts and problems;
- Respecting the 8 hour workday and the rest periods;
- Examining the working conditions and developing ergonomic solutions;
- Recommendation o relaxation techniques for the employees.
- Assuring medical supervision for the employees;
- Analysis of risk potential in the workplace;
- Assuring the coherent integration in the working process of the personnel which undergoes a stressful or exhausting period;
- Organizing courses through which the employees can learn to prevent and manage stress and hazards on their health.

On a workgroup level:
- Elimination of useless tasks;
- Job rotation;
- Identification of incipient signs of stress and establishing constructive work relations with the subordinates;
- Periodical training sessions;
- Development of communication within the organization, optimization of decision evaluation process, efficient management of conflicts;
- Building the team spirit and a good collaboration between the employees of the company;
- Encouraging both positive and negative feedback;
- Encouraging social support among the members o a team;
- Ensuring equitable repartition of tasks and responsibilities;
- Creating a climate in which employees do not feel guilty for accumulating stress or exhaustion;
- Offering support and attention to employees who have resumed their activity after a health issue generated by stress.

What actions can the employee take?
- Breathing exercises;
- Ambient music;
- Stretching;
- Holidays;
- Arranging the working space in order to permit the existence of a personal space, where you can concentrate in peace;
- Delegating responsibilities, when this is possible;
- Dividing important tasks into smaller segments and their gradual accomplishment.

Main Sources of Stress for the Romanians

To what extent do Romanians encounter the stress problem? According to a Daedalus Millward Brown study, increase of prices s the main cause of stress for Romanians, surpassing bank loans, decrease o income, family life or health, and almost 64% of the population admits that they are stressed, which is above the 60,5% average in the region.

Conclusions

Stress is a multi-faceted phenomenon with multiple causes and requires a systematic approach to its identification and management. It is a growing issue in the workplace especially due to the current economic downturn but it is also an issue that can be prevented and reduced so it does not become detrimental to workers' health. Employers will gain in performance improvements if employees are able to give their best and do not feel under constant unbearable pressure. Ample guidance and stress risk assessment tools are freely available to employers to support them in managing stress effectively.

I personally consider that, in the current conditions and with the attention channeled upon this syndrome, the problem o stress in the workplace will be diminished over time, It is important that each of us helps in this endeavor, adopts a more positive attitude and try to reduce stress at a personal level, as change begins with oneself.

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