

STRESS IN ORGANIZATIONS

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Abstract:

Taking into account the changes that are currently taking place in our country, it is clear that these changes, which occur in almost all companies, lead to new stress factors for both employees and the organization.

Occupational stress is a major problem for employees and managers, but also for the whole society. The issue of stress in organizations has given birth to many debates and studies. It is a common theme that is addressed by managers, employees and consultants from different perspectives.

According to a study by the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, in the European Union, work-related stress is the second work-related health issue after dorsal disorders. It affects 28% of EU employees. The European Parliament is fully involved in addressing issues related to the psychological support of the staff. Preventing work-related stress is one of the objectives set out in the Communiqué of the European Commission for Employment and Social Affairs regarding their new health and safety at work strategy.

Manifestations of stress in organizations are easily observable, being manifested by behaviors such as: difficulties in adapting to the changes required to work or the dramatic drop in labor productivity. Also a double action is met: both the person who passes through the stressful situation and at the organization level on which it is reflected the existence of a stressful environment.

This paper aims to address the implications of workplace stress, symptoms of stress in the workplace and strategies to eliminate and prevent stress at work

This paper represents an exploratory research based on qualitative methods, being consulted various sources of information: the literature, case studies, media articles, reports of relevant organizations, etc.

Keywords: *job stress, stress, exhaustion, stress management, adaptation, stress factors*

JEL Classification: I15

1. Introduction

Every day we meet people who are either overworked or overwhelmed or underpaid. Louis Barajas (2009, p.1). We wonder what to do to cope with the stress in our life. Often we forget to put on paper all the tasks we have to do throughout the day, and paradoxically while receiving other new tasks, which we have to fulfill. According to Peter Drucker, we must make a clear distinction between those who today do intellectual work, their situation being more complicated than for workers who used to work once at the production line, meaning that the latter knew or know what to do. Instead, those involved in intellectual work must not only execute the plan, but also conceive it. This puts pressure on the brain big enough that when you go to the doctor, one of the questions is: *How stressed are you?*

Organizational stress returned as a subject of great interest, both internationally and in studies of organizations in Romania, due to economic pressures and social measures that are derived from facing the economic crisis of recent years. Delia Virga, *Stress in organizations* <http://www.ohpedu.ro/articole/stresul-in-organizatii/>.

In America people work weekly more than in any country in the world except New Zealand, according to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. One in three employees in the USA, says he feels chronically ill.

Stress at work is one of the many problems faced by the modern society driven by work, with direct consequences on employment, but also the health of those who work is in question (Pitariu, 2004).

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The fact is that stress at work can affect anyone at any level. It is produced in every sector and in organizations of any size. Stress affects the health and safety of individuals and also welfare of organizations and national economies.

2. Methodology

The main objective of this paper is to highlight the stress at work.

This paper represents an exploratory research based on qualitative methods, for this having been consulted various sources of information on organizational stress: the literature, case studies, media articles, reports of organizations profile etc. The hypothesis we started from in the realization of this study was the existence of a vast literature material, in which is presented the phenomena related to stress at work, but that does not make a clear distinction, so that organizations can speak of a specific stress - organizational stress. In the making of this scope an important place was held by the guide for employers entitled "*Stress at work*", published by the Health and Safety Authority in the UK (HSE, Health and Safety Executive), <http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg281.pdf> available at p: http://www.protectiamuncii.ro/en/pdfs/stresul_in_munca_ghid_angajatori.pdf, and data provided by the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA).

3. Approaches to Stress

The term stress belongs to Hans Hugo Bruno Selye, professor of histology, which together with Alvin Tofler put the foundations in 1977, of the International Institute of Stress. They consider stress is linked to *the adaptation system, the response to stress by each individual being performed after assault from the environment*. Hans Selye defined stress as *"the set of reactions of the body to the external action of the causative agent (physical, chemical, biological and psychological) consisting of morphological and functional changes, often endocrine changes"*. <http://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stres>

According to the Explanatory Dictionary of the Romanian Language (1998), *stress* is *"name given to any environmental factor (or set of factors) which causes abnormal body reactions; adverse effect on the human body produced by an environmental factor."*

According to Terry Looker, Olga Gregson (2009, p.31.), *"Stress is seen as a reaction of the body to changes occurring in our environment."* All authors listed believe that *"stress can be defined as a state that we feel when we feel a gap between perceived demands and ability to cope."*

"Stress is the reaction of defense that people exhibit when exposed to excessive pressure. It is a disease. But if it is intense and if it persists for a while, stress can lead to physical and mental health problems (eg .: depression, nervous breakdown, cardiac disorders)". <http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg281.pdf>; http://www.protectiamuncii.ro/en/pdfs/stresul_in_munca_ghid_angajatori.pdf

According to the Project co-financed by the European Social Fund through the Sectorial Operational Programme of Human Resources Development 2007-2013, *"Invest in people"*, an understanding of the significance of the stress can be found in the letters that compose the word STRESS:

„**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**)- "exceeds the time"; "Crisis"; "Get over"; "Get over the situation";

"S"(**is for sharing**)-" to share" with others the welfare, knowledge, duties, etc. <http://www.thrgroup.ro/files/ManagementulStresului.pdf>

Iamandescu IB (2002), believes that mental stress is "a syndrome consisting of exacerbation, beyond the level of simple homeostatic adjustments of certain psychiatric reactions and of their somatic correlates (affecting almost all body compartments), in connection with external and internal excitation exerted by configuration triggers (stress agents) acting intense, surprising, sudden and / or persistent and having a symbolic, "threat", or a extremely favorable role for the subject (perceived or anticipated as such by the subject). Sometimes stress agents represent major affective stimuli of psychic resonance (positive - or negative stress - distress) or a power overload of a cognitive process (attention, thinking, etc.) and volitional, but with the understanding that mental stress is based primarily on an obvious emotional involvement. "

"Stress is an individual reaction and the result of interaction between environmental demands on the one hand and the resources, capabilities and opportunities of the individual on the other hand." http://stres.protectiamuncii.ro/ce_este_stresul.html.

According to Iamandescu IB (1993), stress can be: **positive (eustress)** or **negative (distress)**.

Eustress ("positive stress") has beneficial effects on the human body, occurring when stress agents have positive significance for the individual. These trigger positive emotions (joy intense ecstasy, triumph, laughing out loud), and the emotions that positively influence the body's organs and apparatus. Eustress appears in the course of positive emotions coupled or not with moderate exercise (eg. Intercourse or jogging). Frequent repetition of eustress helps increasing immunity and anti-infectious agents, becoming a prerequisite for longevity.

Distress ("negative mental stress") is widely recognized as pathological. It produces usually suffering and it occurs as a result of contact with a stressor.

Table no. 1. Generating situations of mental stress

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * The existence of unusual circumstances for the individual which surprise him, unprepared to deal with them; * Significance of an event; * Individual engaging in an act or relationship exaggerated; * Particularities of social context; * Lack of internal conditions; * Subjective way of perceiving environmental demands; * Lack of internal conditions; * Subjective way of perceiving environmental demands; * Solicitation/ strain; * Existing conflict situations in the family, profession or intellectually; * Running out of time; * Isolation; * Appearance of a physical or mental obstacle in the way of a goal that leads to frustration; * Disturbing circumstances arising from physical agents (noise, vibration, temperature fluctuations).
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Source: created by the authors based on information gathered from <http://arborele-vietii.blogspot.ro/2009/12/stres.html>

Stress in organizations is a phenomenon that has spread a lot in Romania, the implications of organizational stress having consequences on human beings, and social implications. Stress is addressed in several scientific perspectives: medicine, psychology, psychiatry, sociology, etc. Stress can be defined both in terms of cause and effect in the <http://egosano.ro/2013/07/10/impactul-psihologic-al-stresului-la-locul-de-munca/stress-ball/#main>. In other words, stress in the workplace can be defined as the harmful physical and psychological response that arises when job requirements do not match the resources, capabilities and needs of the employee. Stress at work can lead to compromised health and even disease.

Andreescu, A., Lita, S., (2006), states that "sometimes professional stress is considered as a positive, beneficial effect on performance. This refers to eustress which

means activation, mobilization of individual resources. It is important to distinguish between eustress and distress, as a state of stress beneficial or adverse health effects. "

According to statistics of the European Agency of Health Protection at Work, 80% of consultations given by general practitioners are motivated by stress-related symptoms. Moreover, the figures show that 25% of cardiovascular morbidity is attributed *to stress*, and more than 60% of all accidents are caused by work **stress**. Also, 50-60% of absenteeism in the workplace is related to occupational stress. Unfortunately, stress at work is often brought to the personal space / family, with negative effects on the couple relationship, quality and time with children. Among the most dramatic consequences that stress has on family life there are included divorces, domestic violence, emotional and behavioral disorders of children. Moreover, besides the fact that stress at work can destroy personal life it can destroy also health. (<http://sanatate.bzi.ro/stresul-in-place-of-work-how-to-show-and-how-can-be-warned-10576>).

Also a study by Robertson Cooper Ltd., a prestigious consulting company in health psychology at work, indicates that only 12% of employers believe that their employees' stress levels will decrease by the end of this decade, while 65% believe it will increase much or very much. (Robertson-Cooper, 2005). <http://www.cubiks.com/asp/document.aspx?documentid=294>

Suciu I., (2010), stated that "in the last Annual Survey of Industrial Society, conducted throughout the European Union, it has been revealed that 76% of employees believe that occupational stress is Europe's largest health and safety issue they are facing and they will face for the next at least two years. Occupational stress is therefore an important issue in organizational development programs. It is one of the most important concerns, if not the most important concern of the modern employee. "

European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA) states that 79% of European managers are concerned by *work-related stress*, but less than a third of businesses have introduced procedures for managing this.

According to the *European survey* among enterprises on new and emerging risks (ESENER), four out of five European managers say they are concerned about the stress at work, which means that stress at work is as important for businesses as accidents work (79%). Stress at work is very acute in health care and social work (89% of businesses in this area believe that stress must cause some concern or is an important concern) and education (84%). Careers, Leadership Journal <http://www.cariereonline.ro/articol/patru-din-cinci-manageri-preocupati-de-stresul-la-serviciu-doar-o-treime-din-organizatii-iau>.

4. Manifestations of stress at work.

Stress at work can affect anyone at any level. It is produced in every sector and in organizations of any size. Stress affects the health and safety of individuals and also welfare of organizations and national economies. (*Agency for Safety and Health at work*-https://osha.europa.eu/ro/topics/stress/index_html).

In the workplace, stress occurs when demands exceed the resources of the professional human being. Stress is not only the result of major adverse events, but also is the result of daily pressures. The latter, by their frequency, they have an important role in the professional and individual affects more than major adverse events.

Based on the frequency and nature of changes in the economy, which is reflected automatically in organizations, Pitariu, H., Rus , C., (2010), states that environmental factors such as economic ones are represented by the global economic downturn affecting three components of occupational stress: perceived stressors, individual differences on trust and stress reactions such as counterproductive behaviors directed at the organization

and the people who interact with employees, employee positive and negative emotions, and their intention to leave the organization.

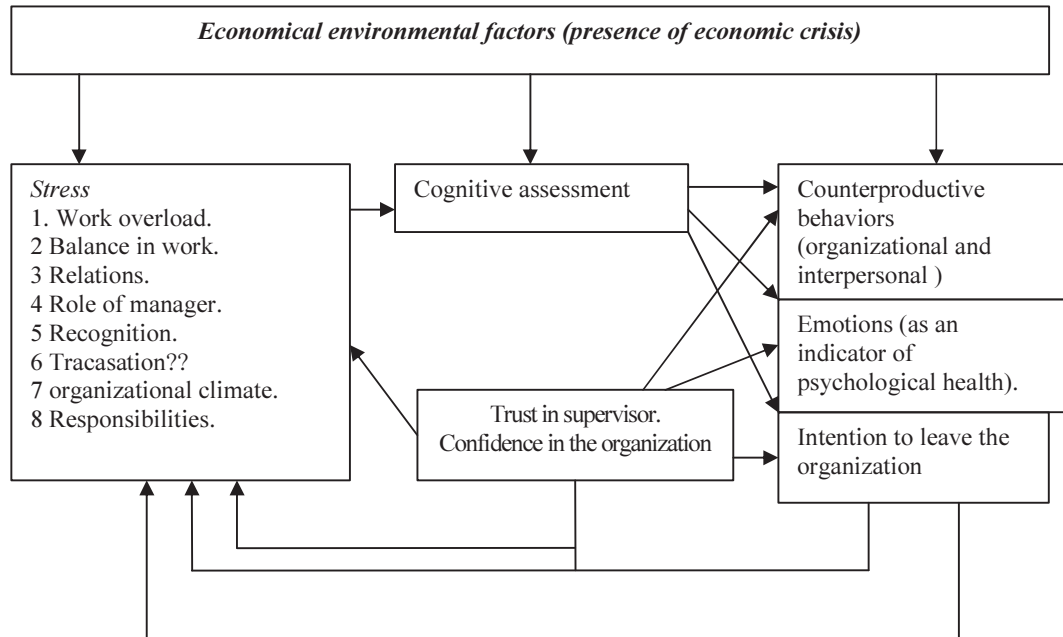


Figure 1. A possible model of occupational stress of managers in the current economic crisis

Source: Pitariu H, Russian C. Occupational stress in the current economic crisis: Comparative dates from two organizations, Journal of Psychology, no.1-2, 2010

http://www.academia.edu/877877/STRESUL_OCUPATIONAL_IN_CONDITIILE_ACTUALEI_CRIZE_ECONOMICE_DATE_COMPARATIVE_DIN_DOUA_ORGANIZATII

Stress greatly affects the image of an organization. Reducing the stress associated with work and the psychosocial risks is not only a moral imperative but also a legal one. It is also a big problem of economic efficiency. The good news is that stress associated with work can be approached in the same way as other logical and systematic health and safety issues. There is an abundance of practical examples to address this problem in the space U E. Using the appropriate methods, workers can be free from stress.

On an organizational level, stress is manifested through increased absenteeism, poor quality of work, decreased moral tone, poor performance and increased staff turnover. The costs are most often enormous. HSE estimates that in the United Kingdom stress related illnesses resulted in the loss of 6.5 million work days per year, and the money of these costs amounted to 370 million pounds for organizations and about 3.75 billion pounds at country level.(www.comunicare.ro/stres/.../Proiect%20Stres%20CNC.)

Sensing stress can change the way you feel, think and act a person.

Table no. 2. Symptoms of stress

At organizational level	At an individual level
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ absenteeism; ➤ high turnover of staff; ➤ a faulty calendar; ➤ disciplinary problems; ➤ harassment; ➤ low productivity; ➤ accidents; ➤ errors and increased costs from compensation or medical care. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ emotional reactions (irritability, anxiety, sleep disorders, depression, hypochondria, alienation, exhaustion, problems in family relations); ➤ cognitive reactions (difficulty in concentration, memory, learning new things, making decisions); ➤ behavioral reactions (drug abuse, alcohol and tobacco, destructive behavior) ➤ physiological reactions (dorsal problems, low immunity, gastric ulcer, heart problems, hypertension)

Source: made by the authors based on https://osha.europa.eu/ro/topics/stress/index_html/definitions_and_causes

The fact is that stress is characterized by intense hormonal changes and massive secretion of adrenaline. We also produce morbid changes (hypertension, ulcers, etc.). Psychological stress is caused primarily due to prolonged emotional frustration, conflict, anxiety. There can be overload stress, and stress due to not enough solicitation. A moderate stress is helpful and boost vitality. Harmfulness of stress occurs when degradation is too large and exceeds the adaptive capacity.

5. Strategies to prevent stress at work

Intervention strategies on organizational stress benefit both the organizations and the employees. A healthy organization is defined as an organization with a low rate of morbidity, disability and labor, which is also competitive. Research has identified organizational characteristics associated with health, minimum stress at work and a high level of productivity.

According to Florea C, M., (2011), organizational stress management strategies are performed at two levels: organizational (being dependent on the capabilities of the organization) and individual (referring to the possibilities and resources of the individual). <http://promep.softwin.ro/promep/news/show/4326> .

Recent studies of the so-called "healthy organizations" suggests that policies for healthy employees lead to benefits for the organizations. These refer to:

- *Recognizing employees for their performance.*
- *Opportunities for career development.*
- *Organizational culture that values employee.*
- *Managerial actions within the values of the organization.*

Study *Solutions to reduce stress at work* (www.itmbucuresti.ro/SOLUTII%20DE%20REDUCER), states that the most effective method of preventing stress at work are the employee assistance programs and services for managers and HR specialists.

a. *Services for psychological assistance for employees* are occupational health services funded / provided by companies for their employees in order to reduce or eliminate problems that reduce performance at work.

b. *Services for managers and professionals* in human resources departments are:

- Critical incident management;
- Consultancy to develop management skills of problem behaviors of employees;
- Consulting and training in the management of employee performance;
- Advice on the development and implementation of employee assistance programs in the company.

Table no. 3

Examples of psychological services for employees:	Examples of services for employers, managers, supervisors, specialists from the human resources department:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ services for screening depression, anxiety, diagnosing alcohol abuse, stress and comprehensive assessment services (medical and psychological); ▶ counseling and psychotherapy services for the employee and his family; ▶ crisis counseling; ▶ training services for employees: performance management, time management, stress management, career management etc. .; ▶ workshop educational sites: parenting, work-life balance, time management, stress management, emotional control, anger 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ counseling in the development of employee assistance programs, stress management and work-life balance programs; for each client (company) there is assigned an advisor from the service provider, who is the program manager in the company, that aims to facilitate the implementation of the program together with someone from the human resources department; the program manager's role is to present and promote employee assistance services within the company; ▶ counseling and performance management training (in terms of the cognitive compartmental perspective), managing difficult behaviors of employees and formulating rules of conduct within the company.

Examples of psychological services for employees:	Examples of services for employers, managers, supervisors, specialists from the human resources department:
management, decision making and problem solving, couple communication, smoking cessation, weight control, etc. .; ►online educational resources - educational information for the employee and his family (access to information and educational resources for the employee and his family - web resources, brochures); ►career management services.	

Source: made by the authors based on information at www.itmbucuresti.ro/SOLUTII%20DE%20REDUCE

According to Armstrong, M., (2003), organizations can develop through their human resources departments strategies to reduce and even eliminate stress level by:

- ✎ Setting clear goals that have realistic performance indicators, adjusted to the job description and feasible;
- ✎ Create and develop an appropriate system of communication between managers and subordinates;
- ✎ Increase the autonomy of employees, clarify their role in the organization;
- ✎ An appropriate work program and easily adaptable to the needs and requirements of employees;
- ✎ Developing anti-bullying policies

However Jörg-Peter Schröder, Reiner Blank (2011), shows us that relaxation helps fight stress. On the other hand, chronic stress cannot be easily overcome. We must learn to be more relaxed. Prevention is crucial.

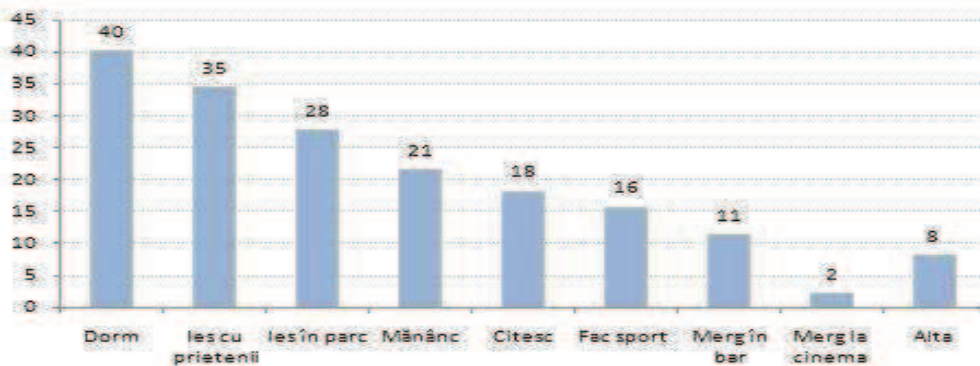
Deaconu, A., Podgoreanu, S., Rascal, L., (2004) argues that there are three types of stress strategies: *primary strategies, secondary and tertiary strategies.*

Primary strategies, radical ones, are very expensive and rarely adopted. They are based on reducing ambiguity and dissatisfaction at work, and even going to the relocation of the organization in green places in offices that have all the necessary facilities to reduce stress. The arrangement of workspaces (an orderly office, reducing as much as possible noise and pollution, natural lighting and proper temperature, decorating and cleaning up the workspace, plants, ensuring adequate storage and filing, ergonomic chairs, tables set for discussions, service availability for the equipment, prompt replacement of damaged materials) should allow a more relaxed atmosphere.

Side strategies are aimed at minimizing the stress level in the organization by giving all employees access to gyms, diets, special treatments.

Tertiary strategies are aimed at supporting people with clear signs of stress, by offering them programs against alcohol abuse and smoking, and giving free and confidential counseling to people suffering from stress.

The study "*How Moldavian man battle stress?*" conducted in 2010 by Magenta Consulting indicated, according to Figure 2, several methods to fight against stress.



Legend: Sleeping=40, Going out with friends=35, Going out in the park=28, Eating=21, Reading=18, Doing sports=16, Going to a bar=11, Going to the cinema=2, Others=8.

Fig 2. Preferred methods of fighting stress

Source:<http://consulting.md/rom/articole/cum-lupta-cu-stresul-omul-moldovean>

Conclusions

In conclusion there is no standardized approach or even a manual for developing stress prevention programs. Designing programs and solutions will be influenced by many factors such as **the size and complexity of the organization, the resources available and in particular the type of problems faced by the organization.**

It appears that some companies have the main problem overloading employees and others an inflexible schedule or lack of communication with the public. In other words it is not possible to make a universal prescription for the prevention of stress at work, but it is possible to provide some guidelines for the prevention of stress in organizations.

We believe that in all cases, the process of stress prevention programs involves three distinct phases: problem identification, intervention and evaluation. For this process to be successful, organizations must be prepared properly.

A minimum level of training for stress prevention program should include the following:

- Awareness of issues of workplace stress (causes, costs, control).
- Ensure quality management and support for the program.
- Involve employees in all phases of the program.
- Establishing the technical capacity and management of the program (specialized training for members of the organization or the use of consultants).

Bringing together the employee or employees and managers in the same committee or "*group problem solving*" can be a very useful approach for developing a stress prevention programs. Research shows that these efforts have been successful in terms of ergonomic issues in the workplace, in part due to the capitalization of direct knowledge of employees about the problems encountered in their work.

In conclusion, stress is a "disease" of our time, affecting people regardless of their lifestyle. Stress is everywhere, more obvious, with greater frequency, in countries super-developed. It is up to us how we handle stressful situations in our lives.

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