

Effective Stress Management: Its Impact on Organisational Growth, Continuity, Increase Productivity, HR Good Health, and HR Planning

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Abstract

This paper look at effective stress management as a gateway to sustaining organisational economic growth, business continuity, increase productivity, employee's health and human resource planning. Stress is a fact of life. Wherever you are and whatever you are doing, you cannot avoid stress, but you can learn to manage it so it doesn't manage you. Human resources, noted as the most valuable asset of any organisation are human and not machines, and as such are subject to stress. Timely recognition of stress symptoms however, can invariably help both the organisation and the individual employees as well. At the same time, we tend to think that stress as something to avoid. Stress is a natural and adaptive response that serves a protective function. At moderate level, therefore, stress helps alert us to potential threats in the environment and enables us also to focus our attention in resolving the threat. Stress also provides us with the energy needed to confront or retreat from the threat via the "fight-flight" response. Over the years, most executives in Nigeria-private or government institutions pays less attention to the impacts of stress in enhancing, and or otherwise factors and its effects in workplaces. Moreover, the efficiency and effectiveness of stress management depends on the techniques, skills, attitude and capabilities employed to ensure effective management. However, the findings from sampled company executives, individuals over the years revealed that most employees do not care, or think about stress as a potential health hazard. It is the opinion of the author to recommend that certain areas be improved, that is, regular checkups by visiting hospitals and clinics, management support; total commitment of management, sufficient fund, provision of feedback to employees and the conducting of employee health checkups on a continuous basis, which undoubtedly will improve employee's performance in the organisation if properly implemented.

Keywords: Effective Stress Management, Organisational Growth, Employee's Safety, Continuity, Increase Productivity, Human Resource Planning.

Introduction

"Stress is the spice of life; the absence of stress is death"

Hans Selye

Think for a moment a time when you've so stressed yourself that it became impossible for you to concentrate on your job performance, or studies? Stress, however, is a fact of life. Wherever you are and whatever you are doing. Stress is one of the most common causes of ill health in our contemporary society, probably underlying as many as about seventy percent of all visits to family doctors. It is also the one problem that every doctor shares

with every patient. You cannot avoid stress, but you can learn to manage it so it doesn't manage you. Although, we generally think of stress as something to avoid, stress is a natural, adaptive response that serves a protective function.

At moderate levels, stress helps alert us to potential threats in the environment and enables us to focus our attention on resolving the threat. Stress also provides us with the energy needed to confront or retreat from the threat via the "fight-flight" response. Our day-to-day activities give room for potential stress. In this token, therefore, changes in our lives such as going to college, getting married, changing jobs, or illness, not having enough rest, excessive travels, etc. are frequent sources of stress. Keep in mind that changes that cause stress can also benefit you. Moving away from home to attend university, for example, creates personal development opportunities; new challenges, friends, and living arrangements. That is why it's important to know yourself and carefully consider the causes of stress. Learning to do this takes time, and although you cannot avoid stress and the good news is that you can minimise the harmful effects of stress, such as depression or hypertension. The key in this paradigm, therefore, is to develop an awareness of how you interpret and react to circumstances. This awareness will help you develop coping techniques for managing stress.

According to the American College Health Association (2009), and the Chronicle of Higher Education (2008), eighty-five percent reports that stress is a major problem and the single greatest obstacle to success. Apart from actual performance in classes, and workplaces achievements, excessive stress affects almost every aspect of life satisfaction. In recent times, economic problems in Africa-particularly Nigeria have led to cutbacks in classes, staff, faculty, and services on campus, and organisations.

Stress adds challenges and opportunities in our life. Stress or anxiety informs us that they may need to prepare for something important. However, too much stress can seriously affect our physical and mental well-being. Recurrent physical and psychological stress can diminish self-esteem, decrease interpersonal and academic effectiveness and create a cycle of self-blame and self-doubt. It is important for your health to find the optimal level of stress that you can learn to manage effectively.

Stress management, therefore, includes thoughts, emotions, planning, and ways to deal with problems, identifying sources of stress in life and coping with stress. Stress management begins by identifying the sources of stress in your life and it is not as easy as it may seem. The real sources of stress are not always obvious, but looking at your thoughts, feelings and behaviours seems easy. Surely, you know that you are constantly worried about job opportunities.

Stress Defined

The word stress is a shortening of the word 'distress' and dates back to circa 1300. In the dictionary, however, stress is defined to mean 'hardship, adversity, force and pressure'. In a similar vein, when we talk about stress in terms of mental health, we are talking about the

emotional and physical reactions we have to any kind of demand or pressure put on us. Usually when we refer to 'being stressed' we see it as a bad thing but some stress can actually be good for us.

And in this context, therefore, stress is difficult to define. It means different things to different people. To some, it represents a complete breakdown in their lives; to others, it means a minor annoyance that is best ignored or tolerated and in some circumstances, stress means an opportunity to rise to new levels of performance in a variety of areas. Some people tolerate stress reasonably well, some fall apart, and others hardly seem to notice the pressure in the first place. One definition of stress is that it represents both a psychological and a physiological reaction to a real or perceived threat that requires some action or resolutions. It is a response that operates on cognitive, behavioural, and biological levels that when sustained and chronic results in significant negative health effects (Linden, 2005). Stress is, therefore, what happens when life exerts pressure on us, but also the way it makes us feel. Stress is the way human beings react to both physical and mental changes, events, and situations in their lives. People experience stress in different ways and for different reasons. The reaction is based on your perception of an event or situation. If you view a situation negatively, you will likely feel distressed, overwhelmed, oppressed, or out of control. Distress is the more familiar form of stress. According to landmark brain researcher Bruce McEwen (McEwen, 2002; McEwen & Wingfield, 2010), it is both a stimulus and a response.

A more humorous (and perhaps accurate) description of stress is offered by Elkin (1999, p. 24) as the condition created when your mind overrides the body, basic desire to choke the living daylights out of some idiots who desperately deserves it, there is a high likelihood that your friends, colleagues and family are going to ask what you are learning in, that stress class you are taking. Please offer them the first definition rather than the second one.

We can also look at stress as a state of imbalance between demands (from inside or outside sources) and our perceived abilities to meet those demands. This is experienced most acutely when the expectation is that the consequences of meeting the demand will be quite different from the consequences of not meeting the demand. For example, if you were asked to create a marketing brochure and you felt confident of your knowledge of the product and your ability to organise the information, create attractive graphics, and put an interesting and attractive spin on the information, you will find the whole experience far less stressful than if you considered yourself inadequately informed, a poor writer, and not particularly creative. It would be doubly stressful if, on top of the pressure for an eye-popping masterpiece, the initial recipients were to be a beta-test group of the company's largest and most valued customers, who would be asked to give feedback on their reactions to the new product based on your marketing piece.

Stress is actually a survival mechanism, programmed a long time ago to increase internal awareness of danger and transform all the body resources to a heightened state of readiness. It is essentially the experience of perceived attack. It doesn't matter whether the

threat is real or not; the autonomic nervous system (think automatic) is activated. This system works well only when it turns itself on and off within a reasonable period of time so as to not wear out its welcome (and deplete your energy). Unfortunately, half of all Americans report significant stress in their lives. Even more disturbingly, according to a recent survey, most people don't intend to do anything about it (Schuler, 2006).

"Stress" has been dubbed the "Health Epidemic of the 21st Century" by the World Health Organisation (WHO) and is estimated to cost American businesses up to \$300 billion a year. The effect of stress on our emotional and physical health can be devastating. In a recent USA study, over fifty percent of individuals felt that stress negatively impacted work productivity.

Also in behavioural sciences, stress is regarded as the "perception of threat, with resulting anxiety, discomfort, emotional tension, and difficulty in adjustment." In their seminal review "The Stressed Hippocampus, synaptic plasticity and lost memories," Kim and Diamond (2002) suggest three component definitions of stress that can be applied broadly across species and paradigms.

- stress requires heightened excitability or arousal, which can be operationally measured using electroencephalography, behavioural (motor) activity or neurochemical (adrenaline, glucocorticoid) levels.
- the experience must also be perceived as aversive.
- there is lack of control. Having control over an aversive experience has a profound mitigating influence on how stressful the experience feels.

The element of control and predictability is the variable that ultimately determines the magnitude of the stress experience and the susceptibility of the individual to develop stress-induced behavioural and physiological sequelae. Aristotle, Hippocrates and the other ancient personalities were aware of stress and its adverse effects, particularly in workplaces. However, Claude Bernard was the first to formally explain how cells and tissues in multicelled organisms might be protected from stress.

Stress management according to Fatemeh Azizi Rostam (2020), include thoughts, emotions, planning, and ways to deal with problems, identifying sources of stress in life and coping with stress. In this spectrum, therefore, stress management begins by identifying the sources of stress in your life and it's not as easy as it may seem. The real sources of stress are not always obvious, but looking at our thoughts, feelings and behaviours seems easy in modern society. Surely, you know that you are constantly worried about job opportunities but maybe it is you who is causing stress and worry, not your job, or your classes, etc. Take a look at your habits, attitudes, and excuses to identify the true sources of your stress.

In any case, stress on its own adds challenges and opportunities in our life. Stress or anxiety informs you that you may need to prepare for something important. However, too much stress can seriously affect your physical and mental well-being. Recurrent physical and psychological stress can diminish self-esteem, decrease interpersonal and academic

effectiveness and create a cycle of self-blame and self-doubt. It is important for your health to find the optimal level of stress that you can learn to manage effectively.

According to David D. Chen (2017), stress is the name given to the pressure that cracks bridges or the force that places strain on an object or body. It is synonymous with tension, fatigue, failure, trauma, or difficulty. The word is derived from the Middle English *stresse*, meaning hardship, and the Old French *estrece*, meaning oppression. More often than not, the subject of stress is thought of in the most negative terms possible it is something to be managed, or at least tolerated, but rarely understood.

Stress can have consequences far beyond temporary feelings of pressure. While you can't avoid stress, you can learn to manage it and develop skills to cope with the events or situations you find stressful. By learning to cope with stress, and by recognising the symptoms of depression and the warning signs of suicide, you'll be better prepared to help not only yourself, but also friends, fellow students, colleagues and the Soldiers you will someday lead. However, some stress is beneficial, prolonged or intense stress can be associated with a variety of negative physical and psychological outcomes. For example, whereas moderate amounts of stress helps to focus our attention, excessive stress leads to diminished attention, concentration, decision-making, and short-term memory. High stress can also lead to a variety of emotional disturbances, including irritability, depression, and anxiety disorders. Indeed, many researchers consider stress a core component of the cause of emotional disorders. Chronic high stress is associated with serious physical health concerns including cardiovascular disease, hypertension, immunosuppression and more frequent illnesses, sexual dysfunction, gastrointestinal disorders, and recurrent headaches. In this paradigm also, high levels of stress are also associated with a variety of behaviours and lifestyle choices that can have negative health outcomes. Research reports over the years indicate that individuals experiencing high stress are more likely to engage in excessive alcohol consumption and increased use of drugs and tobacco products. Ironically, alcohol increases cortisol levels, which can prolong the feeling of tension generated by stress responses. Stress can change the way the body processes alcohol, resulting in a reduction in the pleasant effects of alcohol and increased craving for more alcohol. In addition, chronic alcohol consumption and tobacco use are leading causes of a variety of chronic health problems including lung and liver cancer, cirrhosis of the liver, emphysema, coronary heart disease, and stroke.

It is important to recognise that exceptionally low levels of stress can have negative consequences as well. For example, when arousal levels are too low, people generally experience boredom, poorer cognitive and physical performance, procrastination, and lack of attention to detail. The Yerkes-Dodson Law developed by psychologists in the early 1900s, holds that organisms' physiological and mental functioning tends to be optimal when experiencing mild to moderate levels of arousal. Although, the level of stress and arousal required for optimal functioning varies depending on the type of task and research over the past centuries have generally been supportive of this notion which has shaped how

stress and anxiety are conceptualised and treated.

Possible Causes of Stress

Much has been discussed above about the topic "Stress", and much still need to be look into here. In concise form, however, it is important to note that stress is thought of by many to occur only in adult's life. However, there are so many reasons of stress in young people's life as well." The economic realities of the 21st century such as rates of depression, anxiety, suicide and other mental health disorders among teens have been on the rise in recent years." According to CNN International Health Issue (2019), 'one reason for the increase in depression and suicidal behaviours may be more stress and pressure on kids". The reasons of stress are different for everyone but among young people (particularly among workers), there are still some main causes that affect almost every young person-school, family, friends, relations, worries about career and future, financial problems are some of the causes of stress.

However, being able to identify what may cause you stress is often the first step in learning how to better deal with it. Obviously, different people are affected by different things but stress can generally be classified in terms of internal and external stressors. Internal stress is stress that comes from within us and is often the most common cause of stress. We often worry about things we cannot control (e.g. whether we are going to lose our job, or lose our marriages, etc.) and we actually put ourselves into situations which we know will cause us stress. Other common internal causes of stress include thoughts and feelings which cause unease such as unrealistic expectations, religious beliefs, uncertainty and low self-esteem created by lack of assertiveness and negative self-talk. Some people become addicted to feeling stressed and actively seek out stressful situations. External stress is stress that comes from the environment; anything from noise, overcrowding and pollution to relationship/financial problems, major life changes, pressure from work/family or daily hassles, bad roads in Nigeria's major highways, unfavourable government policies, poor electricity supply, etc. For instance, working too hard or not managing your time well can take its toll. By identifying what your internal and external stresses are and learning how to manage them this will help you cope with stress.

Furthermore, life events such as marriage, changing jobs, divorce, or the death of a relative or friends are the most common causes of stress. Although, life threatening events are less common; they can be the most physiologically and psychologically acute. They are usually associated with public service career fields in which people experience intense stress levels because of imminent danger and a high degree of uncertainty—police officer, fire and rescue worker, emergency relief worker, and the military.

Managing Stress

Michael Armstrong (2010), states in principles four major reasons why proactive organisations should take account of stress and do something about it:

- because they have the social responsibility to provide a good quality of working life;
- because excessive stress causes illness;
- because it can result in inability to cope with the demands of the job, which, of course, creates more stress; and
- finally, because excessive stress can reduce employee effectiveness and therefore organisational.

Collectively, if you take practical steps to manage your stress, you may reduce the risk of negative health effects. Here are some tips that may help you cope with stress:

- Be observant. Recognise the signs of your body's response to stress, such as difficulty in sleeping, increased alcohol and other substance use, being easily angered, feeling depressed, and having low energy.
- Talk to your health care provider or a health professional. Don't wait for your health care provider to ask about your stress. Start the conversation and get proper health care for existing or new health problems. Effective treatments can also help if your stress is affecting your relationships or ability to work.
- Get regular exercise. Just 30 minutes per day of walking can help boost your mood and improve your health.
- Try a relaxing activity. Explore relaxation or wellness programmes, which may incorporate meditation, muscle relaxation, or breathing exercises, schedule regular times for these and other healthy and relaxing activities.
- Set goals and priorities. Decide what must get done now and what can wait. Learn to say "no" to new tasks if you start to feel like you're taking on too much. Try to be mindful of what you have accomplished at the end of the day, not what you have been unable to do.
- Stay connected. You are not alone. Keep in touch with people who can provide emotional support and practical help. To reduce stress, ask for help from good friends, family, community or religious organisations.

Summary and Conclusion

This article cannot be concluded without taking a second thought about 'Hans Selye's statement concerning stress and its notion 'Stress is the Spice of Life; the absence of stress is death'. What can we deduce from this statement? It means that it is a fact of life. Wherever you are and whatever you are doing, you cannot avoid stress, but you can learn to manage it so it doesn't manage you. In any case, stress on its own adds challenges and opportunities in our life. Stress is inevitable. To be entirely without stress is to be dead. However, not all stress is unpleasant. Selye distinguished between pleasant stress, which he labeled eustress, and unpleasant stress or distress. When we discuss stress today we are usually referring to distress, but we can all relate to pleasant situations or occurrences which have caused us stress: weddings, births, promotions, receiving awards, reuniting with old

friends, and countless others. Any change, positive or negative requires a response from our bodies in order to adapt and bring us back to our relatively peaceful state.

Stress or anxiety informs you that you may need to prepare for something important. However, too much stress can seriously affect your physical and mental well-being. Recurrent physical and psychological stress can diminish self-esteem, decrease interpersonal and academic effectiveness and create a cycle of self-blame and self-doubt. It is important for your health to find the optimal level of stress that you can learn to manage effectively.

Stress can also help you rise to meet challenges. Stress is what keeps you on your toes during a presentation at work, sharpens your concentration when you're attempting the game-winning free throw or drives you to study for an exam or accomplish a given task/job. Stress is your body's way of responding to any kind of demand or threat. When you feel threatened, your nervous system responds by releasing a flood of stress hormones including adrenaline and cortisol, which rouse the body for emergency action. Your heart pounds faster, muscles tighten, blood pressure rises, breath quickens, and your senses become sharper. These physical changes increase your strength and stamina, speed your reaction time, and enhance your focus. This is known as the "fight or flight" stress response and it is your body's way of protecting you. When working properly, stress helps you stay focused, energetic, and alert. In emergency situations, stress can save your life-giving you extra strength to defend yourself or spurring you to slam on the brakes to avoid an accident. Stress can also help you rise to meet challenges.

Today, and the dynamics of the 21st century demands, much of the stress we experience is manufactured in our minds. We perceive a threat (loss of job, anger from spouse, not meeting a deadline) and we begin to worry. Our bodies lacking the ability to discern a deadline from a hairy beast still react in much the same way they did 4000 years ago.

Therefore, it is important to clearly understand the symptoms, and or signs of stress early enough to eschew possible health hazard at the long-run.

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