

IMPACT OF STRESS ON WORK PERFORMANCE AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT – APPLICATION OF HERZBERG'S THEORY FOR HANDLING STRESS EFFECTIVELY

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Impact of Stress on Work Performance and Career Development – Application of Herzberg’s Theory for Handling Stress Effectively

ABSTRACT

Stress has always been seen as a negative force, bringing pain, pressure and psychological threats to people. This is more pronounced at work place, where employees undergo stress in different forms. Stress is seen as something that is bad and which is to be avoided. However, many studies have emphasized that positive stress leads to improved performance at work place and promotes professional development. This paper takes a similar view that positive stress is to be encouraged at work place that will help the employees to stay motivated and perform effectively at work. Positive stress leads to career growth and development. Herzberg’s Motivation theory is applied for comparing Eustress and Distress and suggestions are drawn for handling stress effectively from the perspective of employers and employees.

Keywords: Stress Management, Eustress, Distress, Herzberg’s Theory.

1. INTRODUCTION

Stress is inevitable at workplace. It is a common phenomenon at work and something that all employees go through during different phases of their career life. Stress is believed to affect people in different ways. Stress at work is a compelling phenomenon that has been instrumental in making or breaking people in the business environment.

Stress is a phenomenon that is very difficult to define. In 1936, Hans Selye defined it as “the non-specific response of the body to any demand for change”. This became very popular and Selye’s theories attracted the attention of one and all. However, very soon it became a buzzword that completely ignored Selye’s original definition.

Stress was generally considered as being synonymous with distress and dictionaries defined it as “physical, mental, or emotional strain or tension” or “a condition or feeling experienced when a person perceives that demands exceed the personal and social resources the individual is able to mobilize.” Thus, stress was put in a negative light and its positive effects were ignored.

Stressors are triggers that cause us to experience stress. In a workplace people may feel stress that cannot be ignored. The main reason for this is because stress is related to many ailments. There are many examples of stress related problems like stomach upsets, nausea and headache and such other ailments. It disturbs relationships with friends and family. The evidences of many studies prove that stress plays a key role in many chronic health problems.

Stress is of two kinds: Positive stress or Negative stress. Positive stress is known as Eustress and Negative stress is known as Distress. Positive stress is defined as something that is healthy and which brings about a sense of fulfillment. Distress is a state of pain, suffering or extreme worry which brings about mental and physical suffering.

Numerous studies have been made on the negative impact of stress on people, especially at work. Stress is believed to affect the work productivity, lower employee performance, cause health issues and demotivate employees.

Organisations and managements that provide stressful working conditions see increased absenteeism, sluggishness among workers and staff resigning frequently. This is the result of negative stress at workplace. When it appears the body cannot return to a relaxed state even when the stressor does not exist. Negative stress is seen to bring about loads of problems physically, psychologically and emotionally.

On the other hand, positive stress, gives an extra burst of energy which helps people to accomplish their dreams, achieve their goals and meet deadlines. It helps in developing higher self-esteem, motivation and mental alertness. It is believed that Eustress promotes employee well-being and leads to a motivated and satisfied work force. Eustress brings joy and excitement to life which normally comes from completion of a difficult task at work place or getting a note of appreciation from superiors at work place.

Stress can be helpful and act as a positive force that motivates people to accomplish more. Absence of stress can in fact lead to a state of inertia. The authors believe that positive stressful conditions only create chances for growth. Absence of which does not help in career advancement at all. Stress is an important factor that contributes and helps in boosting career growth. Several studies support the authors' views that Eustress is necessary for improved productivity in an organization. (Simmons 2000, Selye 1983, Beard and Edwards 1995) Presence of an acceptable level of positive stress helps in motivating employees and enhances their energy and performance. Positive stress is important for an employee for performing effectively.

In this paper, the authors have made an attempt to compare Herzberg's Motivation Hygiene theory to positive stress and negative stress and have applied this theory for handling stress effectively. The impact of stress on work performance and career development is discussed. The paper sorts out the various factors under Eustress and Distress in a work environment and equates it to the Motivation-Hygiene theory. The satisfiers and dis-satisfiers in terms of Eustress and Distress are drawn and a workable model to manage positive stress indicators among the employees in a workplace is presented that would help in maintaining enthusiasm and high level of motivation among employees.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Stress is an uneasy feeling that every individual faces in his day to day life whether at work or at home. In a working environment also people undergo stress from time to time. Some employers feel that only stressful working conditions lead to productivity, although many research findings disapprove this belief

and some employers make efforts to provide stress free work environment to its employees so that work productivity increases.

Various studies have been made by different authors on the effects of positive and negative stress. Studies have also suggested efforts to be made by organisations to reduce negative stress and provide a conducive working environment for the employees. Few studies related to the focus of this study in terms of positive and negative stress and organizational efforts are presented in the following paragraphs.

Selye (1974) explained that negative stress makes individual experience negative emotions as anxiety or worry those results into lack of productivity and lethargy. Negative stress causes both economic and social losses especially for businesses. (Mehri, 2000) explains that the losses come from ineffective work due to sickness caused by stress, which decreases work time and profit. Research has indicated that job stress has an impact on organisational activity and employees' sense of wellbeing (Cartwright & Cooper 2002; Coetzer & Rothmann 2007; De Bruin & Taylor 2006; Labuschagne et al. 2005; Martin 2005; Rollinson 2005). Cartwright & Cooper 2002; Martin 2005, proved that experiencing high levels of stress may lead to feelings of anger, anxiety, depression, nervousness, irritability, tension, hypersensitivity to criticism and mental blocks among employees. Herr et al (2004) are of opinion that lack of positivity concerning work and career may negatively influence employees' sense of wellbeing.

Short-lived periods of stress pose little risk to individuals but if stressful conditions continue for a longer period of time then it causes harm to physical well-being of the person (University of Illinois Springfield, 2015). The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) declared that stress is a workplace hazard. It costs America annually more than 300 billion dollars.

Positive stress on the other hand fills a person with happiness. According to Selye (1983) "Good Stress" has positive influence on individual's well-being. Positive Stress gives a person the energy to throw oneself into something where one wants to make some contribution. It can give an extra burst of enthusiasm to help oneself accomplish goals and meet deadlines. Eustress provides mental alertness, motivation, and efficiency. It helps in boosting self-esteem. Many researchers (Anakwe et al. 2000; Gallagher 2002; Herr, Cramer & Niles 2004; Rollinson 2005, Mayrhofer, Meyer & Steyrer 2007;) have felt that positive stress generates positive values among its employees but the negative stress results into ill health of its employees that can in turn reflect in overall performance of the organization. stress-related problems. Beard and Edwards (1995) emphasized the need of career orientation in order to increase positive stress and efficiency.

Schabracq & Cooper (2000) mentioned that organisations are increasingly realising that in order to sustain competitive edge in the global market it is important to maintain positive stress levels among its employees. Chiu and Kosinski, (1995), Anna Suttleworth (2004) suggested that an organisation must take essential measures to reduce stress among its workers. Wood and Fields (2007) advised that leaders must build up healthy relationship with their team, because this results into reducing stress and increasing job satisfaction. Jarinto K (2011), while Comparing between US, Japanese and Thai

management styles, mentioned that in US companies, managers experience work flexibility without strict rules but with a focus on individual performance resulting in the less negative stress hence more productivity and success. The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH, 2015) conducted a research that recognised organizational features related to healthy, low-stress work and high levels of productivity.

Quick, (1997) mentions that lack of negative stress does not mean presence of positive stress. (Simmon, 2000) insists that positive and negative stress go hand in hand, they are like two sides of the same coin, hence cannot be separated. Some management styles feel that it is important to maintain some level of stress among employees because it helps in maintaining productivity. On the contrary many studies show that stressful working conditions have a negative effect on individuals which leads to absenteeism, tardiness, and cause workers to change their jobs.

3. OVERVIEW OF HERZBERG'S THEORY

Herzberg (1959) made an extensive research in order to study what motivated people at work. Through his research, he theorized two factors - "motivators" and "hygiene" factors which influenced people at work. 'Motivators' relate to job-centered factors; they relate to the job itself. 'hygiene' factors relate to the external environment. These are peripheral to the job.

He listed aspects like achievement, recognition, challenging work, advancement, and growth in the job as "motivators" and aspects such as company policy and administration, supervision, working conditions, interpersonal relations, salary, status, job security and personal life as "hygiene" factors.

Herzberg went on to explain that the absence of "motivators" does not mean that the employees are dissatisfied at work. They are merely 'not satisfied' at work. Similarly, the presence of "hygiene" factors does not lead to employee satisfaction. The status is just 'not dissatisfied' at work.

To explain further, 'hygiene' or maintenance factors are necessary at work to avoid job dissatisfaction. When the "hygiene" factors are provided at work place, it pacifies the employees and prevents them from being dissatisfied. When the "hygiene" factors are non-existent at work place, employees become dissatisfied at work. However, their presence alone does not lead to job satisfaction.

On the other hand, 'motivators' or satisfiers are necessary for keeping the employees satisfied at work and enabling them to perform effectively. One or more motivators are essential for keeping the employees satisfied at work. However their absence will merely lead to 'no satisfaction' at work and does not lead to job dissatisfaction. According to Herzberg, when people experience the "motivators", they enjoy a sense of job satisfaction. Satisfaction at work is achieved only through one or more motivators. Satisfaction and growth is a result of motivators, dissatisfaction is due to hygiene factors.

Figure 1 illustrates the factors in Herzberg's Motivation hygiene theory. The motivators result in high job performance and growth, which depends on what a person, does. The hygiene factors depend on the environment in which the person works. Hygiene factors must be provided in order to avoid employee dissatisfaction and motivators need to be made effective in order to increase employee satisfaction and performance.

FIGURE 1

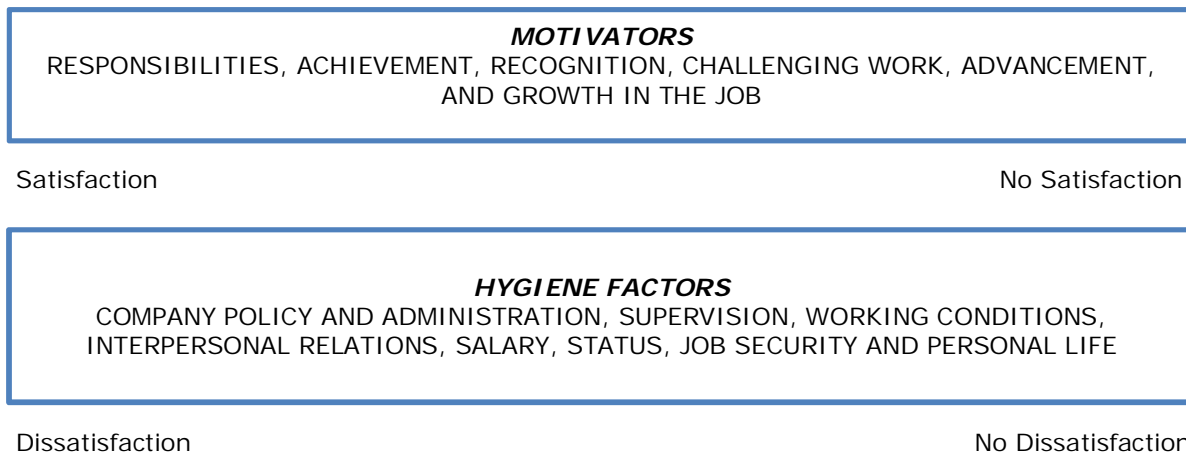


Figure 2 shows that the Motivation – Hygiene combo results in four scenarios. This could be low motivation and low hygiene situation in which the employees have innumerable complaints and are too unmotivated to work. This is the worst possible situation. The other situation could be Low Hygiene and High Motivation which results in having highly motivated employees but having lots of complaints and grudges. This is a situation in which though employees are motivated to work, the working environment makes it impossible for them to contribute towards performance. The third situation is Low Motivation – High Hygiene; here employees have fewer complaints and are not motivated. Though the work environment is healthy, employees are not motivated enough. This is only a starved condition or paycheck situation. The final situation is the High Motivation – High Hygiene scenario in which the employees are highly motivated and have less or no complaints at all. This is the ideal or the win-win situation in which employees exhibit high performance and therefore results in high productivity.

FIGURE 2

	Low	Motivation	High
Low	Unmotivated employees, loads of complaints, factors at work are not conducive for employees Worst situation	Employees are motivated but they have lots of complaints, Salaries & other external conditions do not match Dependence situation	
Hygiene	Not highly motivated, few complaints. Work environment is good but employees lack motivation Only pay check situation	High motivation No or less complaints. There is high performance and high productivity Win-Win situation	
High			

Based on Herzberg's Two-factor theory

4. APPLICATION OF HERZBERG'S THEORY ON STRESS FACTORS

In the following pages, the authors have identified the different factors that cause stress to employees at work. The factors identified are related to Herzberg's Motivation-Hygiene theory from a slightly different perspective. Also presented are few workable measures from the perspective of both employers and employees to improve performance and productivity at work through effective stress management.

Stress Factors at Work place:

There are several kinds of positive and negative stressors at work place. Some of these factors as seen relevant to a work environment have been identified and classified under 'Eustress' and 'Distress'. (Figure 3)

FIGURE 3

<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Eustress (Positive Stress)</i></p> <p>Challenging Responsibilities, Recognition (in Terms of Rewards, Awards and Promotion), Intellectual Tasks, Involvement in Multi-Projects, Achieving KPI's, Accountability, Leadership Roles and Growth Opportunities</p>

Positive Stress

No Positive Stress

Distress (Negative Stress)

Multitasking, Supervision, Deadlines, Workloads, Peer Pressure, Work Place Diversity, administrative/paper work and excessive team projects

Negative Stress

No Negative Stress

The above figure represents the factors that are included under Eustress and Distress. Factors such as challenging responsibilities given at work, recognition for employee's efforts in terms of awards, rewards and promotions, intellectual tasks given by superiors, being included in multiple projects, achieving Key performance indicators, accountability, opportunities for taking up leadership roles and ample growth opportunities lead to positive stress in employees. These factors are taken seriously by employees and they are motivated to achieve these factors in order to perform effectively at work.

The presence of these positive stressors or Eustress compels employees to perform with a competitive spirit. They enjoy these positive stressors at work place which enable them to perform to their full capacity. Positive stress leads to higher performance among employees. However the absence of positive stress does not indicate that the employees have negative stress. It just shows that the employees do not have positive stress. They do not have the 'motivators' which will drive them to work effectively.

On the other hand, factors such as forcing the work force to do multitasking, rigorous supervision, too many deadlines, excessive workloads, peer pressure, work place diversity in which employees have difficulty to cope and too much of administrative/paper work cause negative stress or distress among employees. Distress factors relate to the environment in which the person works. These factors if they are prevalent at a high level lead to negative stress among employees.

Excessive presence of these negative stressors causes all sorts of physical and psychological problems in employees. Health problems, emotional distress, depression, fatigue, strain and frustration occur in employees. This leads to low morale, low productivity, lack of performance and low efficiency among the employees. They lack the motivation to work and further do not have the required support for improved performance. These negative stressors lead to low performance and hamper career development. However in the absence of the negative stressors, the employees are in the state of 'no negative' stressors. It does not imply that the employees have positive stress.

The authors believe that Distress factors are necessary at work to a balanced extent in order to enable an employee to perform. However, their presence alone will not lead to employees' performance and career development. Absence of Distress factors will however lead to low job performance and job dissatisfaction.

Figure – 4 shows the different states of Eustress and Distress. The state of 'low eustress' and 'low distress' is where the employees have low level of negative stress and low level of positive stress. In this stage the employees do not have recognition, challenging responsibilities; no chance of intellectual tasks,

there is no proper KPI's set and no growth opportunities at work place. Similarly, they do not suffer from pressures of negative stressors such as Multitasking, Supervision, Deadlines, Workloads, Peer Pressure and Work Place Diversity. In this stage, the employees are not motivated, there is only moderate performance and there is very less chance for career development. They do not have any kind of positive stress to motivate them for improved performance. This leads to low productivity and slowly leads to stagnation. The authors are of the view that certain negative stressors are required at work place to thrust the employees towards better performance.

FIGURE 4

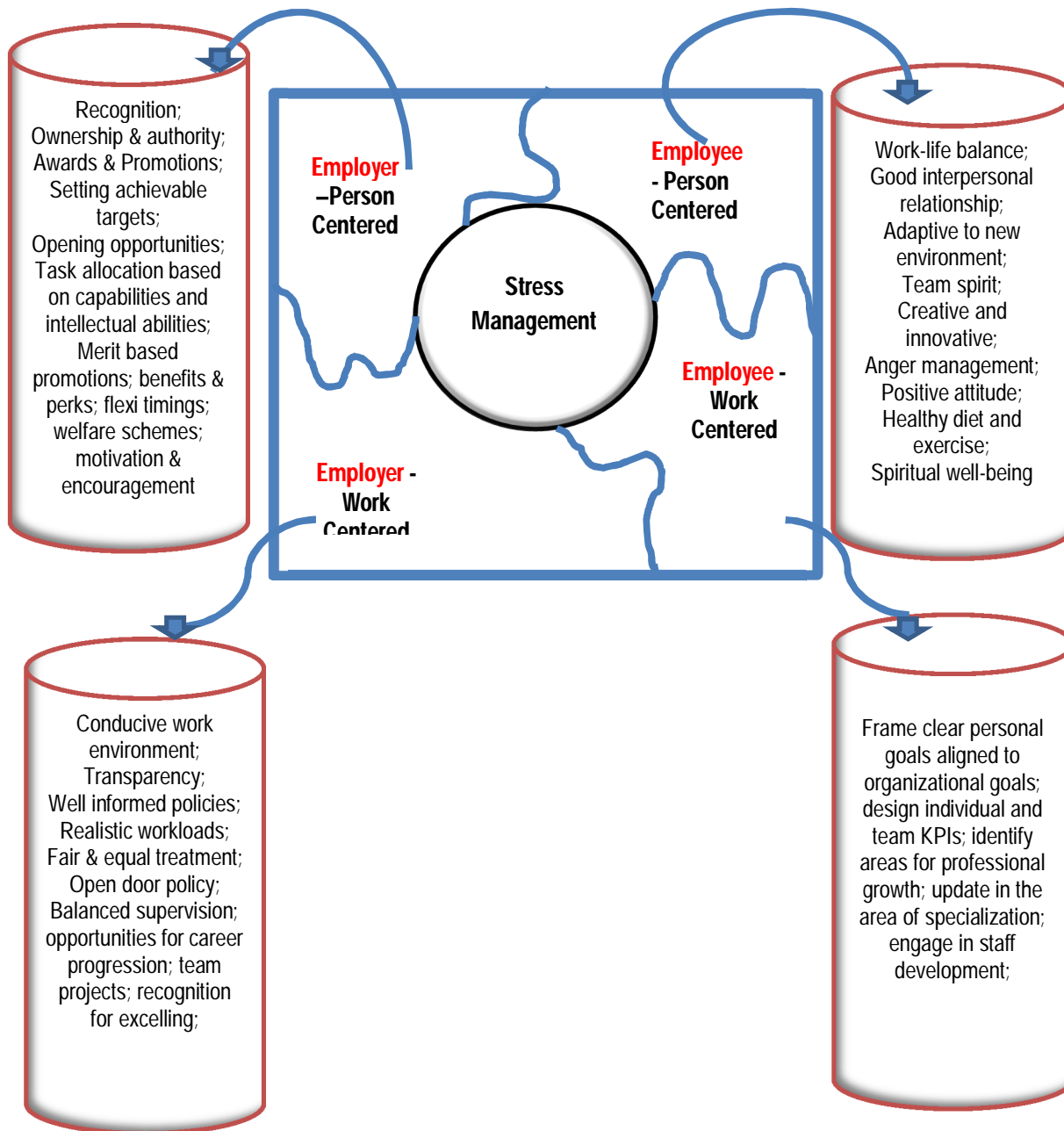
	Low	Eustress	High
Low	Unmotivated employees, moderate performance, less chances for career development Stagnant situation	Motivated employees, High performance, high opportunities for career development Ideal situation	
Distress	Low motivation, low performance, low productivity and no or very less chances for career development Hopeless situation	Highly motivated employees, but not at all supported at work. Dangerous situation, kills employee motivation Worst situation	
High			

In the Low Eustress – High Distress situation, there is low level of positive stress and a high level of distress among employees. Employees lack factors that give them positive stresses. However, they suffer from 'high' distress factors that lead to low motivation and low performance. They feel suffocated by too much of pressure and unrealistic job expectations. Hence, there is low productivity at work and no or very less chances for career development. The third situation is the High Eustress and High Distress situation, which has highly motivated employees but who undergo a high level of distress. Employees suffer from varied kinds of negative stressors which kills their motivation. This is a dangerous and worst situation. The fourth state is the Low Distress – High Eustress scenario in which employees enjoy high positive stressors which opens up opportunities for performing effectively. They have all the necessary ingredients at work that enables them to function effectively. The negative stressors are low and therefore they are able to perform better and enjoy a rewarding work environment. This is an ideal situation for career development and growth.

5. STRESS MANAGEMENT FOR CAREER DEVELOPMENT

The following Figure suggests the measures that the employers and the employees can take for managing stress effectively at work place. It is looked at in terms of 'person-centered' and 'work centered'. If the factors specified in the figure are addressed by the employers and the employees, it will ensure a healthy work environment, accented by a strong and ethical culture which will lead to the employees staying motivated at work. The situation will lead to employees enjoying a state of 'eustress'

where they are recognized for their efforts, rewarded and shown the path of career success. When employees stay motivated at work, it implies that they are directly or indirectly influenced by stress management.



6. CONCLUSION

Stress is something that cannot be avoided in today's fast paced competitive world and employees worldwide are constantly facing the repercussions of stress especially at work place. Stressed out employees lack the motivation to perform effectively and thus both the organization and their personal growth is at risk. Negative stress decreases performance and leads to tension, physical problems and other psychological and behavioral issues. When it becomes unmanageable by the employee it completely demotivates a person and affects his development at work. However, many studies have reported that stress that is positive leads to employee motivation and better performance. This paper shares the same perspective and it is suggested that high eustress factors be provided for the employees in order to be highly motivated. Employees too, need to be focused on their needs and goals and make use of the opportunities provided at the work place for career progression. This will help them to perform well and achieve greater heights in terms of their career. Positive stress is something that an employee enjoys and takes it as a challenge. Eustress is essential to everyone who believes in having a meaningful work life and a rising career. It needs to be remembered that it takes both the employers and the employees to work together to manage stress effectively.

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