

THE IMPACT OF STRESS ON ROMANIAN ORGANIZATIONS' PERFORMANCE

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Abstract: Due to the nowadays economy, people may find it very hard to cope with their job challenges. Organizational problems and changes are on rise, that's why, managers, and workers feel a daily pressure considering that the new demands will exceed their capacity. The psychological response to pressure is called stress and it affects both the employees and the entire organizational performance. We applied on a questionnaire to some Romanian managers and employees, to find out which are the methods they use to cope with stress and the results will be presented in the paper.

1. HOW CAN WE DEFINE STRESS

Stress is defined as a psychological response to demands for which there is something at stake and coping with those demands taxes or exceeds a person's capacity or resources. The particular demands that cause people to experience stress are called stressors. The negative consequences that occur when demands tax or exceed one's capacity or resources are called strains. Our definition of stress illustrates that it depends on both the nature of the demand and the person who confronts it. People differ in terms of how they evaluate stressors and the way they cope with them. As a result, they may experience different levels of stress even when confronted with the exact same situations. [Colquitt, J, Lepine, J, Wesson, M, Organizational Behavior]

Stress affects people at work in many ways and the causes of stress are diverse. These causes can be associated with elements of the physical; environment, such as open plan office layouts, the way the organization is managed, relationships within the organization and even inadequate work equipment. What is important to recognize is that individual stress responses vary considerably. No two people respond to the same stressor in the same way.

2. CAUSES OF STRESS AND ITS NEGATIVE INFLUENCE UPON ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE

Poor working conditions associated with the following can be frequent sources of stress in the workplace: [<http://www.potentia.ie/stress-management/top-ten-work-stress-factors.340.html>]

- Insufficient space to operate comfortably, safely and in the most efficient manner;
- Lack of privacy which may be disconcerting for some people;
- Open plan office layouts, resulting in distractions, noise, constant interruptions and difficulty in concentrating on the task in hand;
- Inhuman workplace layouts requiring excessive bending, stretching and manual handling of materials;
- Inadequate temperature and humidity control, creating excessive discomfort;
- Poor levels of illumination to the extent that tasks cannot be undertaken safely;
- Excessive noise levels, requiring the individual to raise his voice; and
- Inadequate ventilation, resulting in discomfort, particularly in summer months.

The organization, its policies and procedures, its culture and style of operation can be a cause of stress. Culture is defined as a state or set of manners in a particular organization. All organizations incorporate one or more cultures, which may be described as, for example, friendly, hostile, unrewarding or family-style. Stress can be associated with organizational culture and style due to, for instance: [Stranks, J. Stress at work Management and Prevention]

- Insufficient staff for the size of the workload, resulting in excessive overtime working;
- Too many unfilled posts, with employees having to 'double up' at tasks for which they have not necessarily been trained or instructed;
- Poor co-ordination between departments;
- Insufficient training to do the job well, creating uncertainty and lack of confidence in undertaking tasks;
- Inadequate information to the extent that people 'do not know where they stand';
- No control over the workload, the extent of which may fluctuate on a day-to-day basis;
- Rigid working procedures with no flexibility in approach; and
- No time being given to adjust to change, one of the greatest causes of stress amongst employees.

Management styles, philosophies, work systems, approaches and objectives can contribute to the individual stress on employees, as a result of: [Dr. Bernstein, <http://www.drbperformancecoach.com/stressandperformance.html>]

- Inconsistency in style and approach by different managers;
- Emphasis on competitiveness, often at the expense of safe and healthy working procedures;
- Crisis management all the time, due to management's inability, in many cases, to plan ahead and to manage sudden demands made by clients;
- Information being seen as power by some people, resulting in intentional withholding of key information which is relevant to tasks, procedures and systems;
- Procedures always being changed due, in many cases, to a failure by management to do the basic initial research into projects prior to commencement of same;

Overdependence on overtime working, on the presumption that employees are always amenable to the extra cash benefits to be derived from working overtime;

Organizations should pay attention to the potentially stressful effects of their decisions, management style, consultative arrangements, environmental levels and other matters which can have repercussions on people and their home lives. The resulting stress can have adverse effects on performance. In some cases, they may need to assist people in reconciling this 'home-work interface' through counseling and training in various coping strategies.

[<http://www.thefreelibrary.com/Stress+reduction+and+the+small+business:+increasing+employee+and...-a020541274>]

3. DOES STRESS AFFECT ROMANIAN ORGANIZATIONS' PERFORMANCE?

The studies referring to the relationship between stress and performance is extensive and diverse. The question of how stress affects performance is a relevant one given the nature of today's security environment and the challenges faced by managers and employees on frequent and long deployments. [Spiers, Carole, *Tolle's Managing Stress in the Workplace*, LexisNexis Publishing, Great Britain, 2003]

Although several authors posit a negative relationship between stress and performance, other evidence suggests that this relationship is proper for the organization. This shows that individual performance on a given task will be lower at high and low levels of stress and optimal at moderate levels of stress. At moderate levels of stress, performance is likely to be improved by the presence of enough stimulation to keep the employee vigilant and alert, but not enough to divert or absorb his energy and focus.

[http://www.rand.org/pubs/technical_reports/2005/RAND_TR192.pdf]

The relation between stress and organizational performance can be presented graphically like this:

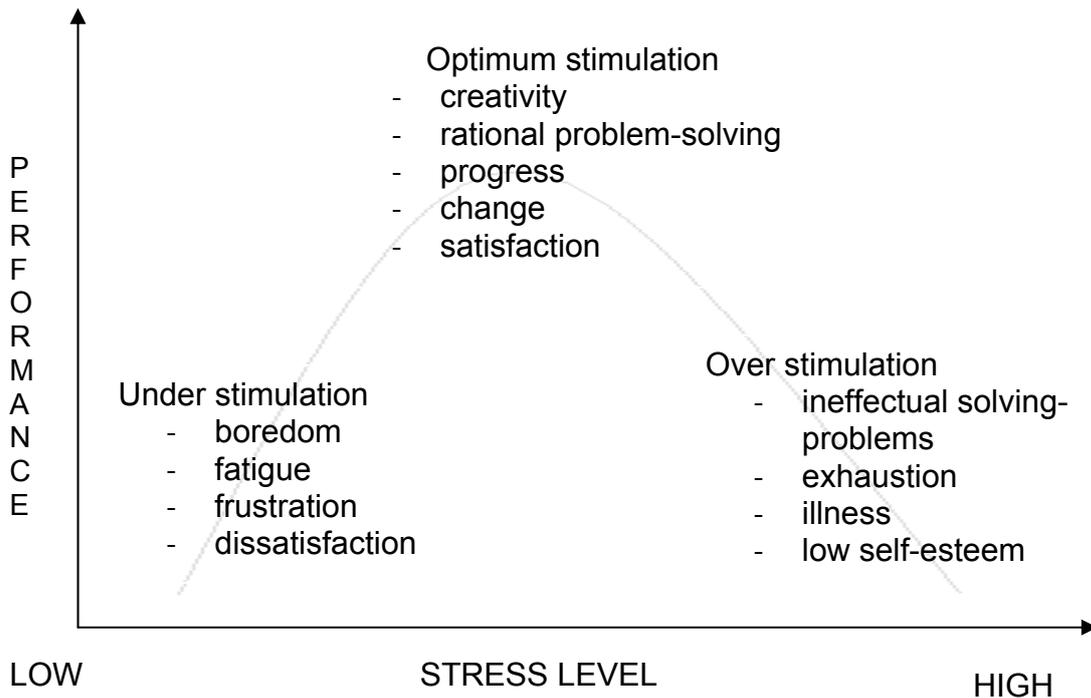


Figure 1. The relation between stress and performance

Adapted by: [<http://www.drbperformancecoach.com/stressandperformance.html>]

In order to give a real answer to this question, we applied a questionnaire to a number of five managers from Bihor County. Each manager had to respond to some sentences by using: "I disagree", "I Agree". The results are as follows:

SENTENCE	NUMBER OF MANAGERS THAT DISAGREED	NUMBER OF MANAGERS THAT AGREED
1. Having work to complete makes me nervous.	1	4
2. When an employee is talking and takes too long to come to the point, I frequently feel like hurrying him/her.	1	4
3. Typically, I get irritated extremely easily.	2	3
4. I definitely tend to do most things in a hurry.	1	4
5. Because of time pressure, I can't focus on my work as I would like to.	0	5
6. I seldom get angry.	1	4
7. I usually forget to set deadlines for my tasks.	1	4
8. I feel very impatient when I have to wait for my employee's work.	0	5
9. I feel that I don't put much effort into my work anymore.	1	4
10. It is obvious that stress has a negative impact among organizational performance	0	5

in the organization I work.		
11. We all know that stress is always present in our organization, but we don't know how to cope with it.	1	4
12. Our daily work is very difficult because of different kinds of pressure.	0	5
13. Our company's last year results are lower than others due to the negative influence of stress.	1	4
14. I usually access Internet pages in order to find out ways of avoiding and coping with stress.	0	5
15. In our organization, each employee knows exactly which our expectations are regarding work.	2	3

In the second part of the questionnaire managers had to name some stressors in the order they consider that have a negative influence above their organizations. After centralizing their answers we explained the first five of the factors. The factors that influence Romanian organizations' performance can be considered the following:

1. Time pressure
2. Work complexity
3. Work responsibility
4. Role overload
5. Role ambiguity
6. Competitiveness between employees
7. Precision required
8. Initiative required
9. Machines or tools used
10. Environmental conditions

Time pressure is one of those sources of stress that appears without managers or employees noticing. There is an important skill to handle time when you have a lot of work to do. Try do finish it without rushing and so you will avoid the suffering produces by the effects of time pressure. Working faster without the stress and strain that comes with rushing is a great reliever of stress, and not only makes you more efficient, it also makes your work more efficient. [Lee, David, www.humannatureatwork.com/Workplace-Stress-2.htm]

Work complexity refers to the degree to which the requirements of the work, in terms of knowledge, skills, and abilities, tax or exceed the capabilities of the person who is responsible for performing the work. Managers should ensure that the tasks their employees have to face do not exceed their capabilities. [Colquitt, J, Lepine, J, Wesson, M, Organizational Behavior]

Work responsibility refers to the nature of the obligations that a person has to others. The level of responsibility in a job is higher when the number, scope, and importance of the obligations in that job are higher. [http://www.rand.org/pubs/technical_reports/2005/RAND_TR192.pdf]

Role overload occurs when the number of demanding roles a person holds is so high that the person simply cannot perform some or all of the roles very effectively. Role overload as a source of stress is becoming very prevalent for employees in many different industries. [Colquitt, J, Lepine, J, Wesson, M, Organizational Behavior]

Role ambiguity refers to the lack of information regarding what needs to be done in a role, as well as unpredictability regarding the consequences of performance in that role.

Employees are sometimes asked to work on projects for which they are given very few instructions or guidelines about how things are supposed to be done. [findarticles.com/p/articles/.../ai_12720965/]

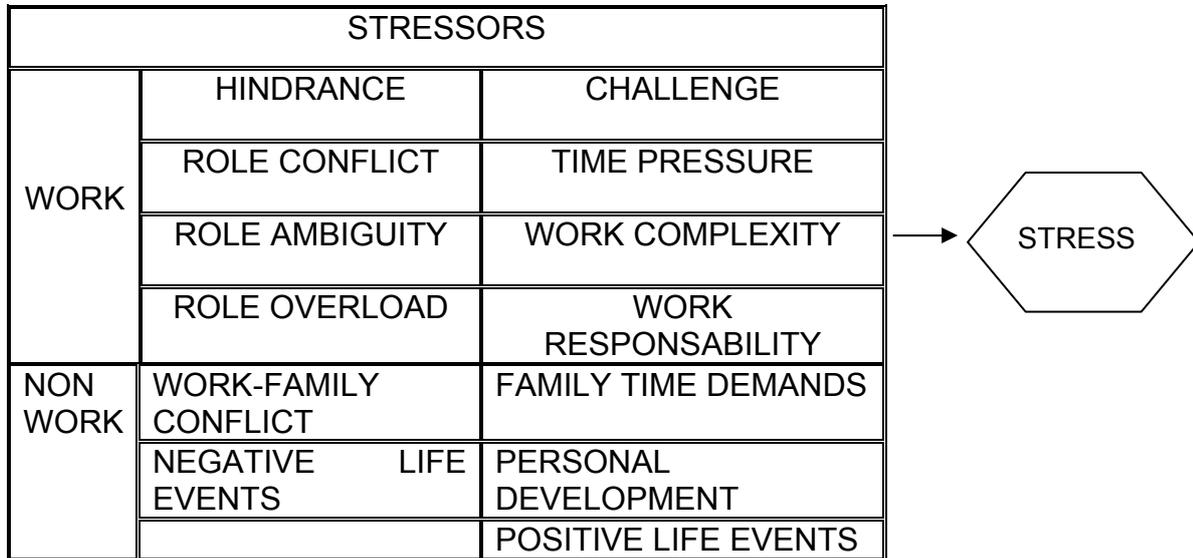


Figure 2 Stressors and their Appraisal
 Adapted by: [Colquitt, J, Lepine, J, Wesson, M., Organizational Behavior]

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECCOMENDATIONS FOR REDUCING STRESS AND INCREASING ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE INTO ROMANIAN ORGANIZATIONS

All of us experience workplace stress at one time or another. We do not have to be “going to work” in the business world to experience it. It is present in every situation where we are responsible for jobs. [Stranks, Jeremy, *Stress at Work*, Elsevier Publishing, Oxford, 2006, Hart, Anna, <http://www.stressmanagementblog.com/work-stress-management/recommendations-to-reduce-workplace-stress-20/>]

In order to reduce stress and improve the organizational performance, Romanian managers have to follow the following steps:

1. Pay attention of the early signs and symptoms of stress. If stress is recognized earlier there can be instituted preventive steps.
2. Try to reduce overload in your day to day life. When there is continued stress, it affects the organizational performance adversely. When employees’ and managers capacity to work reduces, the stress increases proportionally.
3. Keep stress at a minimum level by allocating judiciously time for each task.
4. Make “to do” lists permanently.
5. Try to introduce at least 10 minutes of break in an hour for relaxing mind. Relaxing mind is an easy exercise that can be practised by anyone.
6. Ensure that you have weekly sufficient time for family, work and friends.
7. Always anticipate planned life change events and adjust accordingly.
8. As a manager, ensure that all your employees know exactly what they have to do.
9. Try not to spend overtime work daily.
10. As a manager, allow employees to communicate with you when they feel it is necessary.

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