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CHAPTER—II

CONCEPT OF STRESS AND COPING

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In the fast changing world today, no individual is free from stress and no profession is stress free. Modern life is full of stress. People feel stressed, when they can no longer have complete control over what happens in life. We need to find ways of using stress in a productive way, reducing dysfunctional stress and dealing effectively with it. With the advent of globalization and opening up of the economy there has been an unprecedented boom in Information Technology sector. The rapidity with which the changes were thrust upon the unprepared IT sector left little time for adaptability. This led to stress both ‘on’ and ‘off’ the field. Many civilizations are feeling the impact of global change. The effects of change reach into every crevice of life putting people more and more under pressure. Human biological evolution is lagging behind developments in technology and lifestyle. Physiological and psychological stress emerges as a result of growing deficit between daily demands and coping resources. The problem of stress is very common in present day world. In many job situations, high levels of stress are an integral and largely unavoidable component of the work. The need to cope with complexity, ambiguity, conflict and competing demands is a part of professional life among individuals occupying different positions.

Alwin Toffler (1970) coined the term ‘future shock’ to describe the feeling of vague continuous anxiety that arise in people who are subjected to rapid changes. It is as if we feel that future is rushing upon us; and there is nothing we can do to stop it or even slow it down. We are forced to do continuous adaptation and this adaptation produces underlying feeling of apprehension and longing for stability.

One of the pioneers in stress research, Selye (1974) wrote that stress is essentially reflected by the rate of all the wear and tear caused by life. The consequences of high levels of job stress, personal frustration and inadequate coping skills have major personal, organizational and social costs—and these are increasing day by day.
Stress has become an inevitable part of human life in recent times. It makes life more challenging and charming, however if it is there within limits. When stress is beyond the coping ability of a person, it causes disturbances in the person’s life. Stress can be due to organizational demands on a person or the demands of personal life. Any demand either physical or psychological in nature, encountered in the course of living, is known as a stressor. Thus we can say that stress is a naturally occurring experience which may have beneficial or destructive consequences, depending upon how it is managed.

When all the psychological processes of an individual like attention, perception, remembering, thinking, reasoning and creativity etc, functions in a normal way, the person is able to adjust and cope with his environment, he meets the various demands of life on his own quite successfully, he is said to be of sound mental health. Such a person experiences reasonably less tension, anxiety, worry, conflict and stress. He is able to solve the problems of life successfully. But a person who, on the contrary fails to do so is said to have unsound mental health and is affected frequently by stress. When the demand on a person from the environment is more and his capability to meet such demands is less, then this incapability might lead to anxiety and stress.

The employees of various organizations, especially employees working in IT companies have to spend time under heavy pressure of conflicting demands and work situations. They perform managerial functions under very compelling situations. This leads to anxiety and stress.

Causes of stress and unhealthy mental conditions of the organizational employees are varied like, excessive desire and conflicts for power, adverse decisions affecting the employees, unhealthy and excessive competition, lots of pressure at work place, instability in organizational structure, frequent transfers, misbehavior from the management and colleagues, unhealthy personal relationship with co-workers, frequent quarrels and back biting, increased mechanization, the tendency to revolt against the management due to gap in communication, prestige, recognition, desire for self-esteem and status, lack of job feedback and job security, family problems, divorce, childlessness, unfavorable relationship with group etc.. Thus the life style of the employees has become very complex, due to which their mental
health is affected with anxiety, frustration and stress. Everybody now speaks of pressure of work, like pressure of political parties on executives, pressure of trade unions on management or the vice-versa, the pressure of needs and finally pressure of conscience. Thus one experiences stress in the modern world in some form or the other.

2.2 CONCEPT OF STRESS

Stress is a person’s adaptive response to a stimulus that places excessive psychological or physical demands on that person. Selye (1974) pioneer in stress research has put forth that stress can also be positive. It is referred to as eustress. Eustress is necessary in each person’s life. According to Selye (1976) stress is a general adaptation syndrome and it may occur due to several factors like lots of pressure from inside or outside, desire to do more work in less time, conflict, tension and anxiety due to general incidental problems, frustrations, excessive demand from the environment and less supply to fulfill one’s needs etc. Stress produces various physiological and psychological dysfunctions like severe tension, undue fatigue, high blood pressure, excessive worry and sometimes it may also lead to heart attack. If a person is experiencing stress and has the stress tolerance capacity, then he may be able to manage it temporarily but those who do not have that capacity might get excessively upset and angry unreasonably.

Selye (1976) also conceptualized the psycho physiological response to stress. He put forth the three phase defense reaction- General Adaptation Syndrome (GAS). The three distinct phases are- alarm, resistance and exhaustion. Hans Selye’s “General Adaptation Syndrome (GAS)” has been widely held as a comprehensive model to explain the stress phenomenon. This three-stage model states that when an organism is confronted with threat, the general physiological response occurs in three stages:

1. Alarm Reaction: The first stage includes an ‘Initial-Shock Phase’ in which resistance is lowered, a ‘Counter Shock Phase’ in which defensive mechanism becomes active. Alarm reaction is characterized by increased respiration, rise in the blood pressure, dilated pupils and tensed muscles. Depending on the nature and intensity of the threat and the condition of the organism, the periods of resistance vary and severity of symptoms may differ from ‘mild invigoration’ to ‘disease adaptation’.
2. **Stage of resistance**: Maximum adaptation occurs during this stage. The bodily signs characteristic of alarm reaction disappear. Resistance increases to levels above normal. If the stressor persists, or the defensive reaction proves ineffective, the organism deteriorates to the next stage. A sign of being in the resistance stage includes fatigue, anxiety and tension.

3. **Stage of exhaustion**: When the adaptation energy is exhausted, signs of alarm reaction reappear and resistance level begins to decline irreversibly. The organism then collapses.

Stress at work can be categorized into four major categories. The *occupational stressors* can be physical environment- like noise, light, temperature, polluted air etc; *individual stressors*-like role conflict, role ambiguity’ work overload, responsibility, working conditions; *group stressors*- poor relationship with peers, subordinates, boss etc and organizational stressors- like poor structural design, no specific policy.

However these stressors act on different people in different ways due to the individual differences which can again be classified as Cognitive/ affective components- like Type A/ Type B personality, hardiness, social support; biological/demographic like age, sex, occupation etc.

Available research has implied that there is no universally accepted list of stressors; each organization has its own unique set of stressors that should be examined. Individual differences explain why the same stressor that is disruptive and unsettling to one person is challenging to another. There are also *life events* which can cause stress like, death of the spouse, divorce, pregnancy etc. Social Readjustment Rating Scale by Richard Rahe and Thomas homes gives *mean values* to each life event and is able to assess the amount of stress and its effects on individuals.

Consequences of stress can be *subjective*- like anxiety, apathy; *behavioral*-like alcoholism, drug abuse, accident proneness; *cognitive*- like poor concentration, mental blocks; *physiological*- like increased blood pressure, increased heart rate and *organizational*- like absenteeism, low productivity etc. Most costly effects of stress could be withdrawal (absenting or quitting), alcoholism, drug abuse, physical and mental health etc.
Selye first introduced the concept of stress in 1939. Derived from Latin, the word “Stress” was popularly used in the seventeenth century to mean hardship, strain, adversity or affliction. It was used in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to denote force, strain or strong effort with reference to an object or person. In psychophysiology, stress refers to some stimulus resulting in a detectable strain that cannot be accommodated by the organism and which ultimately results in impaired health behavior.

Stress has been conceptualized in the following ways: (i) as an external force which is perceived as threatening (ii) as response to a situation demanding an individual to adapt to change physically or psychologically (iii) as an interaction outcome of external demand and internal resource and (iv) as a personal response to a certain variation in the environment.

The term, ‘stress’ has come into wide use in behavior study only since the past two or three decades. Originating in the physical sciences, the term has meaning of force which acting on a body produces strain or deformation. Later stress has come to represent the bodily condition under strain. Both in the physical and biological sciences and behavioral study, the concept of stress meant an extreme condition, involving tension, perhaps damage and some form of resistance to the straining force.

2.3 DEFINITION OF STRESS

Stress is an adaptive response, mediated by individual differences and/or psychological processes that is a consequence of any external action, situation, or event that places excessive psychological and/or physical, and/or demands upon a person. Stress is an interaction between individuals and any source of demand (stressor) within their environment. A stressor is the object or event that the individual perceives to be disruptive. Stress results from the perception that the demands exceed one’s capacity to cope. The interpretation or appraisal of stress is considered an intermediate step in the relationship between a given stressor and the individual's response to it. Appraisals are determined by the values, goals, individual commitment, as personal resources (e.g., income, family, self-esteem), and coping strategies that employees bring to the situation.
According to Webster, stress means constraining force or influence as:

a. A force exerted when one body or body part presses on, pulls on, pushes against or tends to compresses or twist another body or body part,

b. The deformation caused in a body by such a force,

c. A physical, chemical or emotional factor that causes bodily or mental tension and may be a factor of disease causation, and

d. A state resulting from a stress, especially from factors that tend to alter an existing equilibrium.

According to Selye (1956), any external event or internal drive which threatens to upset the orgasmic equilibrium is stress. He has defined stress as the non-specific response of the body to any demand made upon it.

Lazarus (1966) maintains that stress occurs when there are demands on the person which tax or exceed his adjustment resource. According to Caplan, Cobb, French, Van Harrison and Pinneau (1975), stress refers to, any characteristic of the job environment which is a threat to the individual. Mc Garth (1976) explains that, there is a potential for stress when an environmental situation is perceived as presenting a demand which threatens to exceed the person’s capacities and resources for meeting it, under conditions where he has expected a substantial differential in the rewards and cost from meeting the demand versus not meeting it”.

McLean (1979) concluded stress is neither a stimulus nor a response, nor an intervening variable, but rather, a collective term which deals with any demands on the system (physiological, psychological or social) and the response of that system to taxing demands.

Schuler (1980), defines stress as a dynamic condition in which an individual is (a) confronted with an opportunity for being/having/doing what(s) he desires and/or (b) confronted with a constraint on being/having/ doing (s) he desires and/or (c) confronted with a demand on being/having/doing what(s) he desires and for which the resolution is often perceived to have uncertainty but which will lead (upon resolution) to important outcomes.
Robert Holden (1992) put forth that, stress is an umbrella term for a comprehensive catalogue of words that include anxiety, tension, conflict, pressure strain, panic etc. Essentially stress is a reaction to a basic threat and the basic threat is a perceived inability to cope. However a distinction has to be made between productive or functional stress (eustress) and dysfunctional stress (distress).

Stress can be defined as, an adverse reaction a person has to excessive pressures or other types of demands placed upon them. Given an excess of pressure, stress can therefore happen to anyone, and should not be seen as a weakness. Instead, an individual needs to be helped to deal with these pressures. As reactions to stress will vary from one individual to another – and may also vary at different times of our lives it is important that we learn to recognize stress and understand what to do to reduce it. Tackling personal stress is an individual’s responsibility; however, employers have a responsibility to help reduce any stress which may arise in their employees as a result of their work.

Most people respond to the word stress in negative ways. However it needs to be highlighted that stress is not always bad. In the absence of stress, individuals may experience lethargy and stagnation. An optimal level of stress on the other hand can result in motivation and excitement. Too much stress, however, can have negative consequences. It is also important to understand that stress can be caused by ‘good’ as well as ‘bad’ things. Excessive pressure, unreasonable demand on one’s time and bad news can all cause stress. Thus stress is obviously not a simple phenomenon. The word ‘eustress’ has been coined to describe positive stress. Eustress results from exhilarating experiences. Eustress is the stress of winning and achieving. Negative stress is distress. It is the stress of losing, failing, overworking and not coping. Distress affects people in a negative and often harmful manner. We all experience distress from time to time. It is a normal unavoidable part of living.

2.3.1 Occupational stress:

Occupational stress is defined as adaptive response to an external situation that results in physical, psychological and or behavioral deviations for organizational participants. Stress is associated with constraints and demands. The former prevents an individual from doing what he or she desires. The latter refers to the loss of
something desired. Constraints and demands can lead to potential stress. In organizations, frequent causes of stress are task demands, physical demands, role demands, and interpersonal demands. Task demands are factors related to a person’s job. They include the design of the individual’s job working conditions and the physical work layout. Jobs where temperatures, noise or other working conditions are dangerous or undesirable can increase anxiety.

Beehr and Newmann (1978), defines job stress as a condition arising from the interaction of people and their jobs and characterized by changes within people that force them to deviate from their normal functioning. According to Lazarus stress occurs when there are demands on the person which tax or exceed his adjustment resources.

Occupational stress is a state of tension that is created when a person responds to the demands and pressures that come from work, family and other external sources, as well as those that are internally generated from self imposed demands, obligations and self criticism. Job stress is the stress that results from demands placed upon the individual by his/her work environment. Since work imposes many demands upon the individual, a lot of research has been carried out on stressors, stress, and strain at workplace.

Occupational stress or job stress is of growing concern because it leads to physical and psychological problems of employees. Researchers have argued that occupational stress, either as a result of its detrimental effect on the health of the individual or directly, also lead to low productivity high absenteeism, more tiredness low enthusiasm for work, low creativity and high dissatisfaction with work (e.g. Cooper & Marshal, 1978; Matteson & Ivancevich, 1987). Because of its negative effects in the workplace, the occupational stress has significant economic implications for organizations.

2.4 NATURE OF STRESS

Stress is an adaptive response, mediated by individual characteristics or a psychological process that is a consequence of any external action, situation or event that places special or psychological demands upon a person.
External and Internal Stressors:

People can experience either external or internal stressors.

- External stressors include adverse physical conditions (such as pain or hot or cold temperature) or stressful psychological environments (such as poor working conditions or abusive relationships). Humans like animals, can experience external stressors.

- Internal stressors can also be physical (infections, inflammation) or psychological. An example of an internal psychological stressor is intense worry about a harmful event that may or may not occur. As far as anyone can tell, internal psychological stressors are rare or absent in most animals except humans.

Acute Stress: Acute stress is the reaction to an immediate threat, commonly known as the fight or flight response. The threat can be any situation that is experienced, even subconsciously or falsely, as a danger. Common acute stressors include:

- Noise
- Isolation
- Hunger
- Danger

Chronic Stress: Modern life poses on-going stressful situations that are not short-lived and the urge to act (to fight or to flee) must be suppressed. Stress, then becomes chronic. Common chronic stressors include:

- On-going highly pressured work
- Long-term relationship problems
- Loneliness and
- Persistent financial worries.
2.5 CAUSES OF STRESS

Stressors are those actions, situations, or events that place special demands on a person. The antecedents of stress or the so-called stressors, affecting today’s employees are summarized in Figure 1(a). As shown in the figure, the potential sources of stress can be broadly classified into six categories:

- **Factors intrinsic to the job:** The various factors intrinsic to the job that seem to affect smooth functioning of executives are: work overload, time pressure and deadlines, having to make too many decisions, fatigue from the physical strain of the work environment, excessive travel, long working hours, having to cope with changes at work and the expenses (monetary and career) of making mistakes.

- **Role in the organization:** The research already carried out suggests that organizational membership, one of the vital components of a social system, is a potential source of stress. Kahn et al. (1964) developed a theory of role dynamics which reports stress resulting from conflicting and vague expectations. The theory points out that when the behavior of an individual in the organization is inconsistent, he will be in a state of role conflict which produces stress. Role theory also indicates that role ambiguity stemming from lack of necessary information leads to stress.

- **Relationships at work:** Another major source of occupational stress is the nature of relationship which one has with people working in the same organization. Selye (1956) suggested that learning to live with other people is one of the most stressful aspects of life. There are three critical relationships at work – those with supervisors, those with subordinates, and those with colleagues/co-workers – which can produce stress.

- **Career uncertainty:** Issues such as job security, fear of job loss, obsolescence, under promotion, status incongruities and frustration of having reached career stagnation can create pressure and strain. Satisfaction with salary and promotional opportunities has been found to be associated with increases in self-esteem and job commitment in management population.
Figure 2.1. A Model of Organizational Stress

- **Organizational structure and climate**: Organizational structure and climate, being one of the largest constructs of the work environment, does have some bearing on the job stress experience of the organizational members. Factors like restrictions on behavior, office politics, lack of effective consultation and no participation in decision making process can contribute to stress.

- **Home / Work interface**: Finally, factors external to work environment or extra-organizational factors can also contribute to the personal stress which affects the physical and mental well-being of individual at work. The various factors apart from work that cause stress in an individual are: family relations, economic problems, conflict of company with family demands, etc.

Source: Selye (1976)
Cavanaugh et al. (2000) identified kinds of daily work stress.

1. **Challenge related stress** which includes pressure and a high level of responsibility that lead to feelings of fulfillment and achievement. Challenge related stress is motivating and positively related to job satisfaction.

2. **Hindrance related stress** which includes excessive job demands and constraints such as poor support from higher management and job security that interfere with achieving goals. Hindrance related stress is associated with frustration and low job satisfaction.

3. **Hardiness** is a personality variable that may explain individual differences in vulnerability to stress. So called hardy persons believe they can control the events in their lives and thus may be more resistant to stress.

4. **Work overload and Work under load**: Psychologists use the term work overload to describe the common condition of over work. They have identified two types:

   Quantitative over load is the condition of having too much to do in the time available. It is an obvious source of stress and has been linked to stress related ailments such as CHD. The key factor seems to be the degree of control workers have over the rate at which they work rather than the amount of work itself.

   Qualitative overload involves work that is too difficult. Having insufficient ability to perform a job is stressful. Even employees with considerable ability can find themselves in situations in which they cannot cope with the job’s demands.

   The opposite condition *work under load* having work that is too simple or is insufficient to fill one’s time or challenge one’s abilities is also stressful. Thus an absence of challenge in the work place is not necessarily beneficial. A certain level of job stress can be stimulating, invigorating and desirable.

5. **Role ambiguity and role conflict** an employee’s role in the organization can be a source of stress. Role ambiguity arises when the scope and responsibilities of the job are unstructured or poorly defined. Adequate orientation and socialization programs for new employees can reduce role ambiguity.
Breaugh and Colihan (1994), have proposed three components of ‘role ambiguity’.

- **Performance criteria ambiguity** – Uncertainty about the standards used to evaluate a workers job performance.

- **Work method ambiguity** - Uncertainty about the methods or procedures appropriate to the successful performance of the jobs.

- **Scheduling ambiguity** - Uncertainty about the timing or sequencing of work.

Role conflict arises when a disparity exists in job requirements or between the job’s demands and the employee values and expectation. Problems of career development such as when an employee fails to receive an anticipated promotion may also lead to stress. Over promotion can be stressful when employees are advanced beyond their level of competence to positions with which they cannot cope, leading to qualitative overload. The fear of failure on the job can induce considerable stress. Performance appraisal is a source of stress.

### 2.6 CONSEQUENCES OF OCCUPATIONAL STRESS

Nearly everyone agrees that job stress results from the interaction of the worker and the conditions of work. Views differ, however, on the importance of worker characteristics versus working conditions as the primary cause of job stress. These differing viewpoints are important because they suggest different ways to prevent stress at work.

According to one school of thought, differences in individual characteristics such as personality and coping style are most important in predicting whether certain job conditions will result in stress. In other words, what is stressful for one person may not be a stressful for the other. This viewpoint leads to prevention strategies that focus on workers and ways to help them cope with demanding job conditions.

Although the importance of individual differences cannot be ignored, scientific evidence suggests that certain working conditions are stressful to most people. Examples of individual and situational factors that can help to reduce the effects of stressful working conditions include the following:
• Balance between work and family or personal life
• A support network of friends and co-workers
• A relaxed and positive outlook

Employee stress is an increasing problem in organizations. The employees are stressed out from greater workloads and having to work longer hours because of downsizing at their company. Stress shows itself in a number of ways. There can be subsumed under 3 general categories

1. Physiological
2. Psychological

1. PHYSIOLOGICAL SYMPTOMS: Most of the early concern with stress was directed at physiological symptoms. Stress could create changes in metabolism, increase in heart and breathing rates, increase blood pressure, bring headaches, and induce heart attacks.

2. PSYCHOLOGICAL SYMPTOMS: Stress can cause dissatisfaction; job-related stress can cause job-related dissatisfaction, which is the simplest and most obvious psychological effect of stress and shows itself in other psychological states like tension, worry, anxiety, boredom. The evidence indicates that when the employees are placed in jobs that make multiple and conflicting demands or in which there is a lack of clarity about the incumbent’s duties, authorities and responsibilities, both stress and dissatisfaction are increased. Similarly, the less control people have over the pace of their work, the greater the stress and dissatisfaction.

3. BEHAVIORAL SYMPTOMS: Behavior related stress symptoms include changes in productivity, absence and turn over etc. The low to moderate levels of stress stimulate the body, and increase its ability to react. Individuals then often perform their tasks better, more intensely or more rapidly. But too much stress places attainable demands or constraints on a person, which result in lower performance.

Stress affects millions of employees, but it operates in more silent and subtle ways. Stress is a psychological agent that influences physical and emotional well being and the ability to perform jobs. Stress in work place is also costly to employers
as reflected in lower productivity, reduced motivation, increased errors and accidents. High stress is related to increase in turn over intentions and counterproductive behavior such as theft drug and alcohol abuse. Stress affects employees at all levels and types of jobs. Those employees who report being very satisfied with their jobs suffers fewer harmful effects of stress, those who are very dissatisfied with their jobs show many more stress related effects.

2.7 ORGANIZATIONAL STRESS

In the past two or three decades there have been many empirical studies on the theme of stress. Researchers have focused on the casual factors of stress-strain relationship, types of stresses experienced by different work populations and also various coping strategies adopted by organizations (Pestonjee, 1992).

Stress in organization can be defined as a misfit between a person’s skills and abilities and demands of his/her job, and as a misfit in terms of a person’s needs not being fulfilled by his/her job environment (French; Rogers & Cobb, 1974).

2.8 COPING WITH STRESS

Coping is defined as a stabilizing factor that allows individuals’ to maintain psychological adaptation during stressful periods. The ability to cope with stress is an important aspect of working life, both in terms of work performance and general health. The magnitude of stress that an executive experiences, and the extent to which its harmful effects occur, perhaps hinges on how and how well the person copes with stressful situations.

Coping refers to the way of dealing with stress, or the effort to master conditions of harm, threat or challenge when a routine automatic response is not readily available. Coping has two major functions. The regulation of emotions or distress i.e., emotion focused coping and also managing the stressful situations i.e., problem focused coping.

Coping styles or strategies may either be oriented towards avoiding stress or towards dealing with stress. The former are dysfunctional while the latter are functional managerial effectiveness. It is evident that challenges posed by changing business scenario are forcing IT employees to perform their task under a very
compelling situation. Coping with such stressors is also one of the mechanisms followed by the professionals, where varieties of coping strategies are helpful for employees in dealing with such every day stressors.

Studies have suggested that control over the workplace dictates the patterns of non-adrenaline and adrenaline balance and may determine the degree of experienced anxiety. Working conditions form an important source of potential stress and may have a pervasive influence on mental state and physical health in the long term.

Stress at work is no longer thought to be the prerogative of white collar and professional workers. Repetitive manual work is associated with adrenaline levels paced assembly line workers who have been found to be very anxious and computer operators who spend more than 90% of their time working at the interface may be tense for unwound periods after work. Depression is likely when personal discretion is reduced. There is lack of social support or when social communication is impaired, as in condition of high machine noise. General physical health is related to susceptibility to stress, people in better physical condition suffer fewer harmful effects from a stressful work environment than do people in poorer physical condition. Employees with high skill levels usually find their work less stressful than do employees with lower skill levels.

Landsbergis, Cahill, and Schnall, (1999) has put forth that strategies for combating stress can be carried out taking into consideration two key points namely,

- Job stress has multiple causes, and so has to have multiple solutions.
- Interventions with the individual worker alone will not solve the problems of occupational stress. Organizational change also has to occur.

They have identified three levels of change at the individual level, small group level and at the organizational or structural level. The most important of the three was said to be organizational level.

Personal Intervention Strategies are designed to help the individual employee cope more effectively with stress. Examples include, diet, exercise, cognitive techniques, assertiveness training, EAP programs, relaxation training etc.
Small group interventions are intended to help workers develop more social support both on the job and at home. Examples include, supervisory training, family counseling, team building, sensitivity training etc.

Structural or organizational change is directed towards improving the conditions of work. Examples include, modifying shifts, reducing physical hazards, improving career ladders, modifying the use of training and technology, job rotation and enrichment, increasing skill levels, worker decision making etc.

2.9 MANAGEMENT OF ORGANIZATIONAL STRESS

Mismanaged organizational stress can produce individual strain and distress which is detrimental for an organization’s human resources and leads to low productivity. When an organizational stress is well managed it can lead to improved performance, workers’ satisfaction and productivity.

Organizational Stress Management programs abound and a growing body of research has given us insight into the causes and potential antidotes for stress. Yet, stress has not gone away. The problem is stress can be cumulative. What goes on at work can add to the "volume" of stress a person perceives and experiences.

Some stress clearly can be traced to individual factors (e.g., personality, social support, coping skills). Research has shown a number of factors to be important in our capacity to tolerate stress. Some people who see problems as challenges, and who experience a sense of control are buffered against the effects of stress. For the most part, an organization can do little to modify or change these individual factors (except perhaps more rigorous recruitment and selection practices that screen those especially susceptible to stress, or those who are known carriers of stress).

Besides an individual's personality, emotional predisposition or coping skills, there are many organizational sources of stress. Without addressing organizational sources of stress, individual stress management programs usually are ineffective with respect to productivity and quality of work life outcomes. Some of the organizational stressors could be, bad bosses, work overload, job designs that do not make sense, lousy feedback, money, unpleasant co-workers, work itself, multitasking, work life balance etc.
Employers can do quite a bit to help alleviate employees’ stress. Some of the methods generally adopted are investing in talent management, managing the pace of change, getting the right person for the jobs, providing services (like child care centers, wellness programs, employees assistance programs), having family friendly policies, make sure employees know that the organization cares about their well being.

The employees also can do their part to relieve stress. Positive thinking, positive lifestyle and health habits (like nutrition, regular exercise, relaxation, meditation, restful sleep, social support etc.), humour, taking a vacation etc are some such measure.

Lazarus (1991) has identified three main strategies for reducing work-related stress.

1. Alter the working conditions so that they are less stressful and/or more conducive to effective coping. This strategy is most appropriate for large numbers of workers working under severe conditions. Examples include altering physical annoyances such as noise levels, or changing organizational decision-making processes to include employees.

2. Help individuals adapt by teaching them better coping strategies for conditions that are impossible or difficult to change. A limitation to this strategy is that it is costly to deal with each individual’s unique transaction with the environment. Intervention strategies could include individual counseling services for employees, Employee Assistance Programs, or specialized stress management programs, such as cognitive behavioral interventions (Long, 1988).

3. Identify the stressful relationship between the individual or group and the worksetting. Intervention strategies might include changes in worker assignment to produce a better person-environment fit, or it could involve teaching coping strategies for individuals who share common coping deficits (e.g., training in relaxation skills).
2.9.1 MANAGING STRESS AT WORK PLACE

Given that stress is widespread and is also disruptive in organizations, it is essential to manage stress more effectively. Many strategies have been developed to manage stress in the workplace. Coping Strategies can be of two types: Individual coping strategies and Organizational coping strategies. They may be individual coping strategies like exercise, relaxation, time management, role management, support group and organizational coping strategies like, institutional programs; properly designed jobs, proper work schedule, organizational cultures, supervision etc; collateral programs like stress management programs, health promotion programs; employee fitness programs, career development programs etc.
Individual Coping Strategies:

- **Exercise**: Research has suggested that people who exercise regularly feel less tension and stress, are more self-confident, and show greater optimism. People, who do not exercise regularly, feel more stress, are more likely to be depressed, and experience other negative consequences.

- **Relaxation**: Coping with stress requires adaptation. Proper relaxation is an effective way to adapt. Relaxation can take many forms. One way to relax is to take regular vacations. Another way is that people take regular breaks during their normal workday. A popular way of resting is to sit quietly with closed eyes for ten minutes.

- **Time Management**: One popular approach to time management is to make a list of things to be done that day. Then group the items in the list to three categories: critical activities that must be performed, important activities that must performed and trivial things that can be delegated or postponed. Then you do the things on the list in their order of importance. This strategy helps people get more of the important things done every day.

- **Role Management**: Role management is where the individual actively works to avoid overload, ambiguity, and conflict. If one does not know what is expected of him/her, he/she should not sit and worry but clarify with his/her boss. Another strategy is learning to say ‘no’. Lot of people creates problems for themselves by always saying ‘yes’.

- **Support Groups**: A support group is simply a group of family members or friends with whom a person can spend time. Supportive family and friends can help people deal with normal stress on an ongoing basis. Support groups can be particularly useful during times of crisis.
Organizational Coping Strategies:

Organizations are increasingly realizing that they should be involved in managing their employees’ stress. Two basic organizational strategies for helping employees manage stress are institutional programs and collateral programs.

- **Institutional programs** for managing stress are undertaken through established organizational mechanisms (For e.g. properly designed jobs and work schedules can help ease stress). Organization’s culture can also be used to help manage stress. Thus the organization should strive to foster a culture that reinforces a healthy mix of work and non-work activities. Supervision can play an important institutional role in managing stress. A supervisor can be a major source of overload. If made aware of their potential for assigning stressful amounts of work, supervisors can do a better job of keeping workloads reasonable.

- **Collateral programs**: It is an organizational program specifically created to help employees deal with stress. Organizations have adopted stress management programs, health promotion programs and other kinds of programs for this purpose. Many firms today also have employee fitness programs. These programs attack stress indirectly by encouraging employees to exercise, which is presumed to reduce stress. However the firms must invest enough to develop the required physical facilities. Finally organizations try to help employees cope with stress through other kinds of programs like career development programs. Some companies use programs from promoting humour to massage in order to relieve stress. Thus, the managers must take several steps that any organizational effort to help employees cope with stress is at least reasonably effective.

Identifying the source of stress and making use of various interventions to reduce the amount of stress is what is most important. In this light we shall see what is coping and how various coping strategies are made use of to reduce stress.
2.10: CONCLUSION

Concept of stress is vast and in exhaustive. The studies reveal that there are various factors that contribute to stress. The causes of stress could be varied like the personal variables, factors intrinsic to the job, role in the organization, relationships at work, career uncertainty, organizational structure and climate, home/work interface etc. However, personality factors and social factors act as moderators between stress and its consequences. The consequences of stress can be at the individual or at the organizational level. The consequences at the individual level could be physiological, psychological or behavioural and the consequences at the organizational level could be, reduced work performance and reduced job satisfaction. There have been plenty of research studies on stress over a period of time. Different writers have different views about the concept of stress. A study of different views has been made under the current study to understand the concept of stress and get an in-depth insight into it. This study intends to find out the levels of stress among the Information Technology employees and the methods adopted by them in managing stress. A study about the concept of stress and coping has been helpful to develop curiosity towards the various aspects of stress and its management.