CHAPTER – 1

1.0 INTRODUCTION

When all the psychological processes of the individual like attention, perception, remembering, thinking, reasoning and creativity etc. function in a normal way the person is able to adjust and cope suitably with his environment, when he meets the various demands of life on his own quite successfully, he is said to have sound mental health. Such a person experiences reasonably less tension, anxiety, worry, conflict and stress, is able to resolve his emotional problems in a reasonable and balanced way and by and large solves the various problems of life successfully. But a person, who on the contrary fails to do so, is said to have an unsound personality and is affected frequently by stress etc.; conditions of the job, socio environmental factors may also contribute significantly to organizational stress leading to mental health. When the demands on a person from the environment are more and his output is less, because of failure he suffers from anxiety and stress. Normally when we have a lot of work to do and we are not able to complete the work, we experience a sense of anxiety, unfulfillment, dissatisfaction, worry and finally an unpleasant feeling. This affects our psychological and mental state and ultimately the capacity to perform. The employees of various organizations (Call centers, MNC’s) have to spend their time under heavy pressure of conflicting demands and work situations. They perform critical managerial functions under very compelling situations.

Stress at managerial level manifests itself because they do not have control over certain situations but they are accountable for the outcome. The present research is designed to make a comparative study of psychological problems of employees of Call centers with the employees of Multinational companies.

Causes of stress and unhealthy mental conditions of the organizational employees are varied. They are Conflicts for power, adverse decisions affecting the employees, unhealthy and excessive competition, lots of pressure in work, 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 and boredom among young and old, the
tendency to revolt against the management due to gap in communication, excessive desire for power, prestige, recognition, desire for self-esteem and status, lack of job feedback and job security, family problems, divorce, no children, unfavorable relationship with group etc. Thus the lifestyle of the employees become very complex, complicated their mental health is affected with anxiety, frustration and stress. Everybody now speaks of work pressure political parties on executives, pressure of trade unions on management or the vice-versa, the pressure of needs and finally the pressure of conscience. Thus one experiences stress in the modern world in some form or the other.

1.1 DEFINITIONS:

According to Webster- Stress means constraining force or influence as:

a. force exerted when one body or body part presses on, pulls on, pushes against or tends to compress 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 disease causation, and

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

Hinkle (1973) states that in the 17th century the word stress was used to describe hardship or affliction and during the 18th century, stress denoted force, pressure strain or strong effort referring primarily to an individual, to an individual’s organs or mental powers. The growing rate of social and technological changes is quite obvious and the major outcome of these changes would increase the level of psychological stress, and it is apparent that increasing stress might shape our vital life experiences in a negative manner and affect our physical and mental health. Hence stress has been rightfully called the disease of the 20th century. There is a growing body of evidence from studies in various organizational settings suggesting that occupational stress has been increasing implicated in the etiology of poor mental and psychosomatic disease (House et. al 1979). Apart from occupational stress, inherent characteristics of the
individual and his behavior may contribute to occupational ill health. Therefore, there are 2 main features of stress 1. Dimensions or characteristics of the person 2. The environmental stressors at work.

McGrath (1971) developed a model to explain stress related task performance, particularly work related task performance. This model is based on the premise that task performance is a function of actual task ability and difficulty in perceived stress. The stress experienced also depends upon the perceived consequences of task performance and the uncertainty associated with it. Actual task difficulty depends on the objective situation (i.e. stressor) which affects the perceptions of task difficulty (perceived situation). In turn the whole process results in the perception of stressfulness of the task. The person then engages in a decision process to decide on how to cope with the stressor. These responses result in the performance process, in which selected behaviors are evaluated on quantity, quality and speed. The last link is the outcome process which indicates whether the behavior produced the desired outcome feeds back into the original situation and may influence future situations.

1.2 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, 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 temperature, noise or other working conditions are dangerous or undesirable can increase anxiety.

Beehn and Newmann (1978) define 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.
1.3 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 up on 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.

1.4: 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 1.0. As shown in the figure, the potential sources of stress can be broadly classified into six categories:

1. **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, cope with changes at work and the expenses (monetary and career) of making mistakes.

2. **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.

3. **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.
4. **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 increased self-esteem and job commitment in management population.

5. **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.

6. **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.

**Figure 1.0. A Model of Organizational Stress**

Source: Selye (1976)
1.5: COPING WITH STRESS:

Coping is defined as a stabilizing factor that allows individual 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 an individual experiences, and perhaps the extent to which harmful effects occur, 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 in 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 Call centers employees to perform their task under a 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 every day stressors.

In the present study more focus is given on employees of Call centers. Call centers are where workers communicate with customers via the telephone. Calls can be inbound or outbound. Often they use a computer to provide information and enter data, such as payments for accounts. This can be either for their own employer or for companies that have contracted the Call centers to do work. The Call centers can be small or very large. They can be in the public, private and privatized sector. Staff often works through computer programs to answer the caller’s questions, take orders, record details and so on.

1.6: CONSEQUENCES OF OCCUPATIONAL STRESS

Nearly everyone agrees that job stress results from the interaction of the worker and the conditions of work. Views differ. Further, 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 problem for someone else. 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 coworkers
- 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 three general categories

1. Physiological
2. Psychological

1. PHYSIOLOGICAL SYMPTOMS

Most of the early concern with stress is 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 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 employees as reflected in lower productivity, reduced motivation, increased errors and accidents. High stress is related in increase turn over intentions and counter productive behavior such as theft drug and alcohol abuse. Stress affects employees at all levels of jobs. Those employees whose report being satisfied with their jobs suffer fewer harmful effects of stress, those who are very dissatisfied with their jobs show many more stress related effects.

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 2 types

   a. **Quantitative overload** 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.

   b. **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.

   a. **Performance criteria ambiguity** – Uncertainty about the standards used to evaluate a workers job performance.
b. **Work method ambiguity** Uncertainty about the methods or procedures appropriate to the successful performance of the jobs.

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

d. **Role conflict** arises when a disparity exists in job requirements or between the job’s demands and the employee values and expectations. Problems of career development such as when an employee fails to receive an anticipated promotion may also lead to stress.

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 and performance appraisal is a source of stress.

1.7: **IMPACT OF STRESS ON EMPLOYEES**

The phenomenon of stress is highly individualistic in nature. Some people have high levels of tolerance for stress and thrive very well in the face of several stressors in the environment; as for example, working under deadlines and time pressure, meeting high expectations of performance, working with inadequate resources. In fact, some individuals are not able to perform well except when subject to a level of stress that activates and energizes them to put forth their best efforts. Yet, others may have very low levels of tolerance for stress and become paralyzed when they have to interface with commonly experienced everyday factors that appear noxious to them; as for example, having to deal with two customers who arrive and ask for assistance at the same time.

For every individual there is an optimum level of stress for performance at full capacity. If the stress experienced is below this optimum, then boredom results, the motivation to work reaches a low point, and apathy sets in. A person operating in a very low stress environment and experiencing frequent boredom is likely to psychologically or physically withdraw from work. Psychological withdrawal results in careless and repeated mistakes, forgetting to do tasks and mental distractions at work. Physical withdrawal manifests itself in increased rates of tardiness and absenteeism, which may ultimately lead to turnover. If, on the other hand, the
stressors in an individual’s environment are too many or too intense, as for instance, when one is constantly being “picked on” by the boss, has too many conflicts with the supervisor or disagreeable coworkers, or is engaged in a job that is exposed to high health hazards, the effects on performance will again be adverse. The error will increase, bad decisions will be made and the individual may experience insomnia, stomach problems, psychosomatic illnesses and burnout. Job performance and individual health are at their best at optimum levels of experienced stress.

Though the optimum level varies with individuals, each can sense and determine how much stress is functional for good performance.

**Table 1.2 Stress levels and consequences**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stress level</th>
<th>Low Stress</th>
<th>Optimum Stress</th>
<th>High Stress</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Behaviours</td>
<td>Low motivation, careless mistakes, Psychological withdrawal, physical withdrawal, inactivity.</td>
<td>High motivation heightened perception high involvement.</td>
<td>Anxiety and nervousness indecisiveness bad judgement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance</td>
<td>Low performance</td>
<td>High performance</td>
<td>Poor performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health effects</td>
<td>Dull Health</td>
<td>Good Health</td>
<td>Insomnia, psychosomatic illnesses</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**1.8 : STRESS AND HEALTH STATUS**

Job stress can be defined as the harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when the requirements of the job do not match the capabilities, resources, or needs of the worker. Job stress can lead to poor health and even injury. The concept of job stress is often confused with challenge, but these concepts are not the same. Challenge energizes us psychologically and physically, and it motivates us to learn new skills and master our jobs. When a challenge is met, we feel relaxed and satisfied. Thus, challenge is an important ingredient for healthy and productive work. Stress sets off an alarm in the brain, which responds by preparing the body for defensive action. The
nervous system is aroused and hormones are released to sharpen the senses, quicken the pulse, deepen respiration, and tense the muscles. This response (sometimes called the fight or flight response) is important because it helps us defend against threatening situations.

The response is preprogrammed biologically. Everyone responds in much the same way, regardless of whether the stressful situation is at work or home. Short-lived or infrequent episodes of stress pose little risk. But when stressful situations go unresolved, the body is kept in a constant state of activation, which increases the rate of wear and tear to biological systems. Ultimately, fatigue or damage results, and the ability of the body to repair and defend itself can become seriously compromised. As a result, the risk of injury or disease escalates.

In the past 20 years, many studies have looked at the relationship between job stress and a variety of ailments. Mood and sleep disturbances, stomach upset and headache, and disturbed relationships with family and friends are examples of stress-related problems that are quick to develop and are commonly seen. These early signs of job stress are usually easy to recognize. But the effects of job stress on chronic diseases are more difficult to see because chronic diseases take a long time to develop and can be influenced by many factors other than stress. Nonetheless, evidence is rapidly accumulating to suggest that stress plays an important role in several types of chronic health problems—especially cardiovascular disease, musculoskeletal disorders, and psychological disorders. Some employees assume that stressful working conditions are a necessary evil—that companies turn up the pressure on workers and set aside health concerns to remain productive and profitable in today's economy.

Fisher (1984) has proposed that mental activity in the perception and response to stress forms the essential basis of worry and preoccupation and is likely to be concerned with the assessment and establishment of control. The perception of personal control is not only likely determinant of psychological response, but also as shown to determine hormone pattern.

Studies have suggested that control over the work place 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 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 unwind 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.

According to Selye (1976) stress is a general adaptation syndrome, 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, stress produces various physiological and psychological dysfunctions like severe tension, undue fatigue, high BP, excessive worry, sometimes it may also lead to heart attack. Person’ experiencing stress but having frustration tolerance capacity may be able to manage it temporarily. But those who do not have stress tolerance capacity might get excessively upset and angry unreasonably.

Hans Selye’s ‘General Adaptation Syndrome (GAS)’ has 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 become active. Alarm reaction is characterized by autonomous excitability, adrenalin discharge, increased heart rate, muscle tone, and blood content, and gastro intestinal ulceration. 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.

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

A report by the Industrial Society suggested a link between badly run Call centers and mental health problems. The report, *New Work, New Stress*, indicated that the obsession with efficiency and productivity resulted in reduced control for employees, a significant factor in mental health problems. Health status is also defined as the ability to perform strenuous activity without excessive fatigue and to show evidence of the trails and capacities that limit the risk of developing diseases or disorders that limit a person’s functional capacity. Components of related factors were suggested by Tanored, health related aspect of physical fitness concerns with the development of qualities necessary to function efficiently and maintain a healthy lifestyle. Each of the components of health related is respiratory endurance, muscular strength and endurance, flexibility and body endurance.

**1.9: BURNOUT**

The effect of job stress that results from overwork can be seen in the condition called burnout. Employees suffering from burnout become less energetic and less interested in their jobs. They are emotionally exhausted, apathetic, depressed, irritable and bored. They tend to find fault with all respects of their work environment including co-workers and react negatively to the suggestions of others. The quality of their work deteriorates but not necessarily the quantity.

Employees suffering from burnout tend to become rigid about their work, following rules and procedures compulsively because they are too exhausted to be flexible or to consider alternative approaches. In time the burned out employee will have an
impact on the emotional health and efficacy of co-workers and subordinates. Advanced burn out is characterized by even lower energy, job involvement, as well as an increase in physical stress symptoms and social withdrawal at the very time social support is most needed. Deterioration in job performance becomes noticeable, and poor performance appraisals are usually the result.

Maslach (1982) has described three components of the burnout syndrome.

1. Emotional Exhaustion

The feeling of being drained and empty that is caused by excessive psychological demands, often brought about by work load or unrealistically high expectations.

2. Depersonalisation

A feeling of callousness and cynicism and a reduced sensitivity towards others.

3. Reduced sense of personal accomplishment

The feelings that one’s actions and efforts are wasted and worthless.

Burnout typically strikes employees who are highly dedicated and committed to their work those who put in overtime, take work home, or come to the office on weekends. Women managers show more frequent and intense effects from the emotional exhaustion. Emotional exhaustion has also been related to lack of opportunity for promotion.

All the above mentioned aspects clearly reveal that employees of Call centers definitely suffer from various types of psychosomatic disorders, mental ill-health, and depression and so on.
1.10: STRESS AND PRONENESS

Stress related disease is wide spread among employees. Nearly half of all employed adults considered their jobs to be extremely stressful. A major share of physical complaints may be psychosomatic that is actual physical disorders caused by or related to emotional factors such as stress on the job. Physical problems associated with stress include high blood pressure, heart disease, headaches, neck and lower back pain and cancer. Stress has been linked to an increase in infectious diseases that involve in suppression of the immune system. Mood and sleep disturbances, stomach upset and headache, and disturbed relationships with family, friends and girlfriends or boyfriends are examples of stress-related problems. The effects of job stress on chronic diseases are more difficult to see because chronic diseases take a long time to develop and can be influenced by many factors other than stress. Nonetheless, evidence is rapidly accumulating to suggest that stress plays an important role in several types of chronic health problems—especially cardiovascular disease, musculoskeletal disorders, and psychological disorders.

1.11: PHYSIOLOGICAL EFFECTS OF STRESS

Stress involves physiological and psychological; responses to excessive and unusually unpleasant stimulation and to threatening events in the environment. The stress faced on the job is psychological or emotional in nature, such as an argument with the boss, the belief that we have been treated unfairly, or concern about a promotion. These constitute to hassles or insults in everyday life. Individually, they are low level sources of stress, but they are hard on the body because they accumulate. Each stress adds to the previous one and can tax the body’s energy reserves because of the physiological changes it produces. If stressors are frequently found in the workplace, the body remains in a state of high physiological arousal and alertness for long periods, a condition that can lead to physiological damage as well as psychosomatic illnesses.

Psycho somatic disorders are not imaginary; they involve specific tissue and organ damage. Although their origin lies in physiological and emotional factors, they have a definite physical impact on the body. Further the illnesses brought about by stress can serve as new sources of stress. When physical health has declined resistance has been
lowered, and bodily energy has been reduced, as a result motivation and job performances are bound to suffer. It is widely assumed that executives experience enormous job stress and consequently have a higher rate of heart attacks than does the general population. High level executives have 40% fewer heart attacks than do middle level managers, who are popularly assumed to work under less stressful conditions.

1.12: FACTORS RELATED TO STRESS

The extent to which stressors will produce stress reactions or symptoms is moderated by various factors. A moderator is a condition, behavior, or characteristic that qualifies the relationship between two variables. Personality factors have been related to tolerance of stress. The relationship is particularly apparent with Type A and Type B personalities, and their differential susceptibility of heart disease, which is a major consequence of stress. The effect may be to intensify or weaken the relationship. The variables which moderate the impact of stressors on stress are considered to be extremely vital in the stress process. These primarily consist of personality profiles (Type A or B) of the individuals and social support.

1. Type A Behavior Pattern:

Friedman and Kosenman (1974) — define Type A personality as “an action-emotion complex that can be observed in any person who is aggressively involved in a chronic, incessant struggle to achieve more and more in less and less time, and if required to do so, against the opposing efforts of other things or other persons”. It is characterized by aggressiveness, easily provoked impatience, abruptness of gesture and speech, over commitment to the profession and excessive drive and hostility. Type B behavior on the other hand, is the opposite of Type A. It is characterized by the relative absence of the behaviors associated with Type A persons. Type A behavior pattern has long been identified as a significant contributor to stress and Coronary Heart Disease (CHD). Type A personalities are attracted to high stress, fast paced, competitive and demanding jobs. They can be hostile, though they are successful in hiding that quality from others. They express their aggression through competitiveness, especially on the job. Type A’s are thought to be in a continual state of tension perpetually under stress. Even when their work environment is relatively
free of stressors, they carry their own stress as a fundamental part of their personality. Type B’s experience less stress at work and at leisure. They may work as hard and in equally stressful environments but they suffer fewer harmful effects. These two personality types respond differently to prolonged stress over which they have little control.

2. Social Support:

Social support can broadly be defined as “the availability of helping relationships and the quality of those relationships.” In other words, it is the comfort assistance, or information one receives through formal or informal contacts with individual or groups. It has been hypothesized that positive relation between stress and strain responses is stronger for individuals who have low levels of social support than those who have high levels of support. Two factors that may reduce a person’s susceptibility to stress - high job satisfaction and control over the conditions of one’s work. Several other variables have been related to our vulnerability to the effects of stress, one factor involved in coping with stress in social support, network of families and social ties. The person who lives alone or is emotionally alienated from others is more likely to be sensitive to stress than is someone who has strong ties with family and colleagues. Family support can help compensate for negative feelings about one’s job and can enhance self – esteem acceptance and worth. Social support on the job such as cohesive work group or a good relationship with one’s boss can also reduce the effects of stress. Lack of social support can increase the risk of heart disease. In general lower the level of available social support, greater the health risk. Variations in social support over the course of the work have been found to affect blood pressure.

Schuler (1982) Further, proposed a complex model of stress in organizations. In Schuler’s model, some environmental work stressors is appraised by the worker as being stressful. The individual perception of stress results in stress response and outcome. The model conceives the stress responses and outcome in terms of Selye’s GAS. After the individual perception of stress, the alarm reaction occurs followed by the resistance stage. Both of these responses have physiological (elevated blood pressure, heart rate etc.) and psychological (anger, anxiety) components. The final stage which is the exhaustion stage has physiological, psychological and behavioral components which eventually terminate the process. This mode includes mediating
variables such as individual perception and the GAS which aids the understanding of
the process of stress. It emphasizes the total experience of stress. And also the
pervasive influence of explanatory variables and individual characteristics at various
stages of stress.

**Figure 1.2**

*Schuler’s integrative transactional process model of stress in organization:*

1.13: DEFINITION OF A CALL CENTER

A Call centers (UK) or Call centers (US) is a centralized office of a company that answers incoming telephone calls from customers. A Call centers may be an office that makes outgoing telephone calls to customers (telemarketing). Such an office may also respond to letters, faxes, e-mails and similar written correspondence. Further, the term contact center (UK) or contact center (US) is often applied when such multiple functions are blended in one office.

Call centers are generally set up as large rooms, with work stations that include a computer, a telephone set (or headset) hooked into a large telecom switch and one or more supervisor stations. It may stand by itself or be linked with other centers. It may also be linked to a corporate data network, including main frames, microcomputer and LANs. Increasingly, the voice and data pathways into the center are linked through a set of new technologies called CTI, or computer-telephony integration. A diverse range of businesses use call centers to interact with their customers. Examples include utility companies, mail order catalogue firms, and customer support for computer hardware and software.

1.14: WORK IN CALL CENTERS

Call centers are designed as 'operations, in which a managed group of people spend most of their time doing business by phone, usually working in a computer-supported environment'. The basic tenet is that work in Call centers has to be conceptualized in terms of distributed knowledge. This means that only part of the knowledge needed to carry out any transaction is (or rather has to be) in the mind of the operator, and important knowledge may be distributed among colleagues in the organization, available and accessible cognitive artifacts in the work environment, and clients.

Operators in Call centers are knowledge workers, because they carry out any activity by manipulating internal and external knowledge. The original Call centers in the 1960s were a 'claims office' with a toll-free phone line that answered standard requests. Agents had limited knowledge and basic communication skills. Later, in the 1970s and 1980s, claim factories were served by Automatic Call Distribution (ACD) systems that handled a large number of mostly repetitive requests. Operators had
limited specialist knowledge and a few restricted communication skills; stress was high and the agent had to cope with a quantitative cognitive workload.

During the 1990s, the Call centers became a *communication node* dedicated to customized interactions, in which the process of communication was dynamic and long-lasting, and whose objective was customer care and retention. Operators were supported by the integration of computer and telecommunication technologies (CTI), and had good communication skills.

Call centers are among the most rapidly growing forms of employment. In Europe, 1.3% of the total European workforce (i.e. 2m people) employed in the Call centers by 2002. North European countries have the highest Call centers concentration with southern Europe falling far behind; the figures for eastern Asia and Australia are very similar, and in the USA, more than 5m of new jobs have been created in this sector since 1990. On average, Call centers are growing at something like 30-35% per annum in terms of call volumes, and 20-25% per annum in terms of the number of agents. According to some estimates, 1 in 20 jobs in the USA nowadays are in Call centers, and by the year 2005 that figure has risen to 1 in 7. Further, the crucial point is not the number of people in Call centers, but the fact that people are critical to their success.

**a. Mathematical theory**

Queuing theory mathematics can be used to demonstrate that a single large Call centers is more effective at answering calls than several smaller centers. The most dramatic improvement comes when a large number of offices are centralized. The mathematical problems encountered in a Call centers are generally statistical in nature and revolve around the probability that an arriving call will be answered by an available and appropriately trained person. Forecasting the call arrival rates and then scheduling the number of staff required on duty at particular times of the day are challenging problems faced by most Call centers managers.

**b. Accommodation**

The centralized approach aims to rationalize the company's operations and reduce costs, whilst producing a standard, branded, front to the world. The approach naturally
lends itself to large companies with a large, distributed customer base. Owing to the size of companies and their customer bases, these offices are often very large, such as converted warehouses.

c. Personnel management

Centralized offices mean that large numbers of workers can be managed and controlled by a relatively small number of managers and support staff. They are often supported by computer technology that manages measures and monitors the performance and activities of the workers. Normally, personnel costs are the most significant expense of a Call centers operation and even seemingly small inefficiencies can have significant cost issues. Computer systems take 1 or 2 seconds longer than necessary to process a transaction can often be quantified in staff cost terms that may be sufficient to justify a complete system upgrade or replacement. Consequently the level of computer support that may be adequate for staff in a branch office may prove totally inadequate in a Call centers.

d. Technology

Call centers have been aided by a range of telecommunications and computer technologies, including automatic call distribution (ACD), interactive voice response (IVR), computer telephony integration (CTI), which allows the actions of the computer to be synchronized with what is happening on the phone. In addition, early customer relationship management (CRM) technologies, such as Siebel, and other database systems, have been heavily employed in Call centers. The latest internet technologies allow "virtual" Call centers to be established across a company's telecommunications network without physically putting all the people in one office.

e. Call dynamics

Types of calls are often divided into outbound and inbound. Inbound calls are calls that are initiated by the customer to obtain information, report a malfunction or ask for help. This is substantially different from outbound calls where the agent initiates the call to a customer mostly with the aim to sell a product or a service to that customer. The staff of the Call centers is often organized in tiers, with the first tier being largely unskilled workers who are trained to resolve issues using a simple
script. If the first tier is unable to resolve an issue the issue is escalated to a more highly skilled second tier. In some cases, there may be third or higher tiers of support.

Call centers have their critics as well. Some critics argue that the work atmosphere in such an environment is de-humanizing. Others point to the low rates of pay and restrictive working practices of some employers. There has been much controversy over such things as restricting the amount of time that an employee can spend in the toilet. Furthermore, Call centers have been the subject of complaints by callers who find the staff of the Call centers often does not have enough skill or authority to resolve problems.

Owing to the highly technological nature of the operations in such offices, the close monitoring of staff activities is easy and widespread. This can be argued to be beneficial, to enable the company to better plan the workload and time of its employees. Some people have argued that such close monitoring breaches human rights to privacy. Yet another argument is that close monitoring and measurement by quantitative metrics can be counterproductive in that it can lead to poor customer service and a poor image of the company.

Many Call centers in the UK have been built in areas that are depressed economically. This means that the companies get cheap land and labor, and can often benefit from grants to encourage them to improve employment in a given area. There has also been a trend to move Call centers to India, where there is a large pool of cheap English-speaking labor. This phenomenon has led to media reports of poor telephone connections and operators with insufficient local knowledge to do their job. But the fact remains that these Call centers in India are much professionally managed than their counterparts elsewhere in the world. This is possible due to the fact that a typical Call centers employee in the developed world would be a high school drop out; the typical employee in an Indian Call centers is a graduate.

f. Interactive voice response

In telephony, interactive voice response, or IVR, is a computerized system that allows a person, typically a telephone caller, to select an option from a voice menu and otherwise interface with a computer system. Generally the system plays pre-recorded voice prompts to which the person presses a number on a telephone keypad to select
the option chosen, or speaks simple answers such as "yes", "no", or numbers in answer to the voice prompts. The latest systems use natural language speech recognition to interpret the questions that the person answered.

Other innovations include the ability to speak complex and dynamic information such as an e-mail, news report or weather information using Text-To-Speech (TTS). TTS is computer generated synthesized speech and is no longer the robotic voice people associate with computers. Real voices are used to create the speech in tiny fragments that are glued together before being played to the caller.

IVR systems are found operating telephone-banking services, voicemail systems are similar to IVR systems but offer limited functionality. IVR systems can be used to create services from telephone banking, order placement, caller identification and airline ticket booking. ACD systems are often the first point of contact when calling many larger businesses. IVR systems are generally used at the front end of Call centers to identify what service the caller wants and to extract numeric information such as account numbers as well as provide answers to simple questions such as account balances or allow pre-recorded information to be heard.

IVR systems are often criticized as being unhelpful and difficult to use due to poor design and lack of appreciation of the callers' needs. A properly designed IVR system should connect callers to their desired service promptly and with a minimum of fuss. The nature of work is changing at whirlwind speed. Perhaps now more than ever before, job stress poses a threat to the health of workers and, in turn, to the health organizations. Through its research program in job stress and through educational materials provide organizations with knowledge to reduce this threat. Many of the problems in the Call centers are because the processes are developed to fit technology, not the workers and sometimes not even the customers. Some of them are:

**g. Monitoring**

It is common for Call centers workers to be subjected to a variety of personal and group surveillance and monitoring mechanisms. Calls can be taped, key strokes recorded, quality of work monitored, what is said, how it is said.
h. Rate of Work

One of the biggest problems reported by Call centers workers is the rate of intensity of work. Many companies require workers to meet targeted numbers of calls, sometimes with absolutely no time between each call. Some centers have a screen showing the rate of calls being processed; can identify slower workers to their colleagues/supervisors; and/or have computer programs which push for more work to be done by displaying messages on individual screens. A forced pace of work can lead to stress, repetitive strain injuries and other ill-health. The repetitive and monotonous nature of the work can also be a cause of stress.

i. Overuse Injuries

Because workers are sitting at computer workstations for long periods of time, they are at risk of developing overuse injuries, back problems and so on.

j. Sight disorders

Computer operators have reported such symptoms as soreness or dryness of the eyes, blurred vision, light sensitivity and headaches from working long hours in front of a computer screen for VDU (visual display unit). This is sometimes called “computer vision syndrome”.

k. Voice Loss

Call centers workers’ voices are under great pressure because of the nature of their work. Conditions affecting the voice (dysphonia) can be short or long term, some can be permanent.

l. Angry Customers

Often people who are speaking to workers are often ringing with complaints about the company’s systems – lack of service, faulty goods, and errors with accounts and so on. Call centers workers are the one’s who bear the brunt of very agitated callers when things go wrong. Dealing with this constantly is another potential cause of stress for the worker, who after all is not responsible.
m. Rest and toilet breaks

Where workers who required to sit in one position for long periods of time must be allowed breaks away from their workstation. Natural breaks like going to the toilet, refreshments or lunch breaks help but might not be enough. Some employers in this industry have restored to bullying tactics over the length of time for toilet breaks, all with the aim of keeping up productivity. There is a range of ill-health conditions that can develop if people are not allowed to go to the toilet when they need to. There are also circulatory diseases which can arise through not being able to move and stretch your legs.

n. Headsets

Call centers workers wear headsets to operate a computer and listen and talk to the callers at the same time. There are many different types, and could be for both or just one ear, may sit outside the ear resting on the other ear or plug into the actual ear hole itself. These present three main problems suitability and comfort, noise levels and hygiene.

1. Suitable Headsets: Headsets must be comfortable to wear over a working day, light weight, adjustable to fit the different sized heads and ears of those at work, and must not restrain the movement of the worker.

2. Noisy Headsets: Some headsets may not have adjustable volume controls and are set at high volume levels. In some workplaces the general office background noise levels can be very high and the volume for the headsets will be adjusted louder still. This can be a problem as their continued use is likely to damage hearing over a period of time. Some standard headphones can and do breach the noise regulations.

3. Acoustic Shock: This is where the wearer is exposed to short but very loud bursts of noise which can temporarily or permanently damage the wearer’s hearing. It is also reported as being very painful to receive. There have been a number of compensation cases both in Victoria and around the world. In the UK, British Telecom paid out 93,000 pound to one worker.

4. Unhygienic Headsets: Some employers operate a pool of headsets where workers put them in a box at the end of the day and pick any one out of them when they return
to work. This system creates a serious risk of ear infections being passed around a workplace. Some ear infections can lead to serious hearing disorders.

1.15: THE WORKLIFE OF CALL CENTER REPRESENTATIVES

Several important trends were identified in the work lives of Call centers workers. The findings are summarized in terms of training; work space, work practices, and scheduling; and stress. It is seen that these jobs are becoming quite demanding and stressful.

1. Training

Regular training is an important component of employment practices and can provide workers with the tools to adapt to the kinds of changes we are seeing in the utility industry. A majority of respondents report receiving some training in the past year, ranging from 1 hour to 1520 hours of training. The median worker received 2 days (16 hours) of training. The most common form of training received was in new procedures, and the least common was in sales. Table 1 lists the types of training received.

Table 1.2: Types of Training Received in Past Year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of training</th>
<th>% of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Computer/software</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New procedures</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task-related</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overall, employees seem eager to receive the training they need to do the work properly. This indicates that the Call centers workers we surveyed take pride in their work and are committed to providing high-quality customer service.

Call centers employees seem somewhat satisfied with their work space and equipment. While few rated their conditions as “excellent,” almost three-quarters found their space “very good” or “adequate.” One major exception to this is in the area of sufficient privacy. Approximately two thirds of our respondents (61 percent) rated this factor as “poor” or “extremely poor.” Related to this, 37 percent rated
“quiet location” as “poor” or “extremely poor.” Otherwise, most employees found the computer equipment, headset, and physical design of the workplace to be “adequate” or better. A number of employees noted additional concerns in their comments. These include fluctuating temperatures in the workplace and inadequate climate control, bathrooms not being kept clean, and on-going renovations interfering with work and creating hazards.

In general, workers are not happy about the pace at which they must make their calls, and are particularly frustrated with the loss of quality that results from faster calls. Although the pace of work has increased for most respondents, there is not a widespread concern about mandatory overtime. While just about half the respondents feel that there is an adequate number of staff, 36 percent report an “inadequate,” and 12 percent an “extremely inadequate” staffing level. Employees remarked that they need more workers to handle the work. Many employees spend a good portion of their day on-line, although some define that as being on the phone and others on the computer. Regardless, the median worker is on-line 84 percent of their day. As a result, 23 percent feel they never have enough time to complete other tasks, and 44 percent feel they have enough time.

Likewise, employees do not feel positively about their employer’s attendance policy and practices. More than a third feels it is not flexible at all, and another 42 percent say it is only somewhat flexible. This rigidity of scheduling imposes a burden on employees’ ability to balance work, family, and other outside activities. Overall, 52 percent say the attendance policy hinders “somewhat” or “a great deal” their ability to balance work and family. This is slightly higher for those with children at home, but even those without children under 18 report difficulties balancing work and other concerns. The other concern is the lack of adequate maternity leave. “This Call centers is primarily made up of women and ironically does not have in place a maternity package.”

1.16: STRESS IN CALL CENTERS

Overall the employees report an extremely high level of stress in Call centers. On a ten-point scale, with ten being the highest, one third of those surveyed (32 percent) rate their current stress as a ten. The overall average is 7.9. Looking at specific
factors, “demanding customers” stands out clearly as the most stressful aspect of the
job, with 60 percent reporting this feature as very stressful, and more than three-
fourths reporting this as causing “very much” or “much” stress (see Table 1.3). The
other most stressful features are “time pressures,” “monitoring,” and “pressure to
complete calls.” Least stressful is the “pressure to sell services.” This reflects earlier
responses noting formal quotas for the number of calls that must be made per day, but
not for the amount of sales.

Table 1.3 Factors Contributing to Stress on the Job

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stress factor</th>
<th>% who report factor causes “very much” or “much” stress</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Demanding customers</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time pressures</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pressure to complete calls</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changes in policy/procedure</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treatment by management</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threat of outsourcing/consolidation</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of training</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandated scripting</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance policy</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dealing with technology</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inability to take breaks</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pressure to sell services/products</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Many employees remarked that mandated scripts and pressure to take calls cause low
morale and stress. Others had comments about the impact of constant monitoring.
Along with the monitoring come penalties. If Call centers representatives fail to try
to sell a particular service or product, they may get marked down. Employees
complained that they receive many e-mails throughout the day from management,
telling them to speed up, stay on the phones, and take more calls. This results in
workers feeling like they are being treated disrespectfully. Others feel their privacy is
invaded in multiple ways, with management listening to calls, reading e-mail, telling employees how to dress even though they don’t see customers, and redesigning seats and workstations without employee input. Approximately one third (30 percent) of employees reported that stress often affects them physically and emotionally, while another 20 percent to 25 percent report that they are affected regularly. Roughly 40 percent report that stress “often” or “regularly” affects their work performance. In terms of physical conditions, more than 40 percent of the respondents say that they often or regularly experience fatigue, irritability, inability to relax, headaches, backaches, and vision problems (Table 1.4). Much less common are hearing and respiratory problems.

Table 1.4. The Physical conditions contributing to Stress on the Job

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stress factor</th>
<th>% who report experience outcome “often” or “regularly”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fatigue</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irritability</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inability to relax</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Headaches</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Backaches</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vision problems</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sleep problems</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stomach problems</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carpal tunnel/repetitive motion</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High blood pressure</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hearing problems</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respiratory problems</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some long-term employees seem particularly affected, experiencing multiple physical ailments due to stress: Some of the health problems may arise because at least some employees are restricted on their use of the restroom. Several respondents commented on their frustrations about being monitored on their bathroom breaks. The result of this stress is that one third (31 percent) of respondents report having missed some work days due to stress-related illness over the past year.
The number of sick days used due to stress ranges from 1 to 330, with a median of 5 days per year. The number of vacation days ranges from 1 to 26, with a median of 4. The median worker that has missed work due to stress lost almost two weeks (9 days) of work. Many observe that they need to use sick time for stress-related illnesses, but if they take sick leave it will be held against them in their reviews.

1.17: WORKING AND HEALTH CONDITIONS AT CALL CENTERS

Call centers are relatively new organizational units that use telephony and computers to manage communication with e.g., customers, the public, or government agencies. There are In-house corporate Call centers that are independent companies (sometimes called “outhouse” Call centers). The term Call centers is usually associated with an independent company that uses Telecommunications technology to handle everything from advice, e.g., computer and mobile telephone support, to ticket booking and telemarketing. Independent Call centers are proliferating rapidly as many companies are outsourcing their telephone services to Independent companies in order to more efficiently manage uneven demand for services. Their operations are similar to a greater or lesser extent to earlier businesses specializing in telephone exchange services, telemarketing, various kinds of customer service, or information departments. The main new features are that operations are on a larger scale, are outsourcing, and are computerized.

There are no established definitions of a Call centers. The terminology is varied and more or less similar to operations run under many different names, such as Contact Center, Support, Helpdesk, Customer Care Network, etc. Since the early 1990s, Call centers operations in Europe have been concentrated to the Netherlands and the British Isles. There have been Call centers in Sweden since the mid-1990s. There is little in the literature on Call centers, their operations, working conditions and employees. There is no established occupational category for Call centers employees. The term “Operator” is used in this paper, but job designations vary widely, from “supporter” to “Service manager” and “operator”. Consequently, there is no information available on the number of employees in Call centers in Sweden in any occupational database, or information about job-related injuries in the occupational injury record kept by the Swedish Board of Occupational Health and Safety. The Call centers are perhaps the most rapidly growing labor market sector today. There are an
estimated five million people employed in Call centers in the United States, and
approximately one and a half million in Europe. According to the state-run Invest in
Sweden Agency, growth forecasts call for some 130,000 employees by 2005,
corresponding to an annual growth of 25 to 30%.

Sweden is also a particularly interesting target country for expansion of Call centers
for international service. Computer and mobile telephone density in Sweden is among
the highest in the world, and language skills are comparatively good among the
population. We are considerably advanced in the field of pioneering IT-based
technology, a position further accentuated by planned expansion of broadband
technology. These factors will put the spotlight on Sweden, particularly for inter-
Nordic Call centers. Call centers are expanding primarily in rural areas, where there is
good supply of available labor. The computer is used in Call centers to search
information. A central computer to the next available and logged-in operator typically
directs incoming calls. The computer also tracks how long it takes until the customer
is connected, how long the call lasts, and the time that the operator is not working
actively with calls or is disconnected because he or she has left the workstation. Some
70% of working hours are usually spent on customer calls, including related work;
about 10% on stand by for new calls; and the remaining 20% on other activities, e.g.,
administration, meeting and training. Calls are often monitored by a supervisor for
quality assurance purposes.

Working at a Call centers is characterized by the incoming phone calls that need to be
answered quickly. The call time need to be as short as possible, but with a good
quality. The complexity is different from information about timetables to more
demanding computer support or insurance information. Beyond that the conditions
that have been described above could be stressful; the working characterizes high
mental load and constant attention, often together with irregular working time. The
work at the Call centers is often performed 24 hours a day, all days during the week.
From results of the research the hypothesis of a long time of psychosocial strain with
frequent demand on strong energy mobilization even could involve disturbance in the
hypothalamus-hypophysis- bi kidney system. There is not known about-prolonged
psychosocial strain in the working life is enough to cause exhaustion in the cortisol
regulation. Not much of data is available in Indian scenario.
1.18 : DEFINITION OF MULTINATIONAL COMPANY

Multinational company is a company which does business in many countries. Multinational companies are becoming stronger than nation states. Generally, these international corporations are immune from the democratic controls which often limit the actions of national governments. The UN has noted that more than half of world trade is produced by multinational companies and more than one third of world trade is composed of goods transfers within different branches of the same multinational corporations. Two thirds of all international transactions in goods and services combined are dependent on multinational company operations.

There are various issues which are related to MNCs and the impact that they have on the economy.

- Need to consider the scale of global investment which is in the hands of, and controlled by, MNCs - just 1% of companies controlling around 50% of investment.
- They have influenced the change in the international division of labour.
- The MNCs form a power base in the core companies which are located in the USA and EU.
- MNCs dominate world markets and have very large scale operations away from the host country.
- MNCs are present in every continent.
- They occupy an important position in areas of the world where economies are rapidly growing, such as the Pacific Rim.
- There is some controversy about the use of cheap labour and reduced labour legislation, with stories of sweatshops and poor working conditions.
- They have strong bargaining position with governments, and can often negotiate favourable conditions for entry into countries.
- MNCs are responsible for multiplier effects.
Workplace stress is the harmful physical and emotional response that occurs when there is a poor match between job demands and the capabilities, resources, or needs of the worker. Stress-related disorders encompass a broad array of conditions, including psychological disorders (e.g., depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder) and other types of emotional strain (e.g., dissatisfaction, fatigue, tension, etc.), maladaptive behaviors (e.g., aggression, substance abuse), and cognitive impairment (e.g., concentration and memory problems). In turn, these conditions may lead to poor work performance or even injury. Job stress is also associated with various biological reactions that may lead ultimately to compromised health, such as cardiovascular disease.

Stress is a normal occurrence. Further, with increasing demands of work and home life, stress on the job is a problem causing physical, mental, and financial consequences for employers as well as employees. Studies show that stressful working conditions are associated with increased absenteeism, tardiness, and intentions by workers to quit their jobs—all of which have a negative effect on a company’s success. Employers, managers, supervisors, and business owners have many reasons to consider the stress level of their workers. Stressed employees take more sick days and file more disability claims than do contented employees. Disgruntled employees often quit after extensive investment has been made in their training, and another person has to be trained in their place. Job stress can result in decreased productivity. Errors made by stressed workers can result in faulty products that cannot be sold, or worse, that fail after sale and lead to lawsuits.

1.19: WORK ORGANIZATION AND CONTROL STRATEGIES AT CC

CC is a large global operation specializing in providing a broad range of IT services to business clients in a diverse range of industries. The company has benefited from the trend to outsourcing IT and sees itself as managing IT services and providing IT solutions in the areas of IT infrastructure design and installation, applications management and network management and support. The organizational unit reported here was one of the regional offices of the Australian branch responsible for a number of regions in Australia and responsible for selected clients across Australia. At the time of the study the organizational unit employed approximately 75 staff, supplemented by a large and varying number of short-term contractors on contracts.
of up to 3 months duration. Job security at CC appeared to be relatively low, consistent with the situation across the sector as a whole. Management noted that turnover was very low, as might be expected with an excess supply of skills in the labour market. There had, of course, been significant labour shedding since 2001. Moreover CC had shifted the balance of permanent/ongoing employees to contractors at that time to afford greater numerical flexibility. The GM estimated that what he used to run a permanent to contractor staff ratio of about 70:30 he now used a 50:50 ratio with the vast majority of contractors on 1 to 3 month contracts.

Over the past five years, and especially over the past couple of years since 2000, the demand for IT services had declined significantly and clients were using favourable market conditions to insist on low cost, high quality service partnerships. In elaborating these changes the GM (and other managers) emphasized:

- pressures on margins and the expectation that CC would be transparent with respect to its pricing model
- the need to be prepared to share risk with clients as a precondition to winning business
- the need to understand and work within the client’s financial situation.
- the need to meet the exact requirements of the client regarding the skill sets required

1.20: OUTCOME

Low morale, health and job complaints, and employee turnover often provide the first signs of job stress. But sometimes there are no clues, especially if employees are fearful of losing their jobs. Lack of obvious or widespread signs is not a good reason to dismiss concerns about job stress or minimize the importance of a prevention program.

Step 1 - Identify the Problem. The best method to explore the scope and source of a suspected stress problem in an organization depends partly on the size of the organization and the available resources. Group discussions among managers, labor representatives, and employees can provide rich sources of information. Such
discussions may be all that is needed to track down problems and find the remedy to reduce stress in a small company. In a larger organization, such discussions can be used to help design formal surveys for gathering input about stressful job conditions from large numbers of employees. Regardless of the method used to collect data, information should be obtained about employee perceptions of their job conditions and perceived levels of stress, health, and satisfaction.

**Step 2 - Design and Implement Interventions.**

Once the sources of stress at work have been identified and the scope of the problem is understood, the stage is set for design and implementation of intervention strategy. In small organizations, the informal discussions that helped identify stress problems may also produce fruitful ideas for prevention. In large organizations, a more formal process may be needed. Frequently, a team is asked to develop recommendations based on analysis of data from Step 1 and consultation with outside experts. Certain problems, such as a hostile work environment, may be pervasive in the organization and require company-wide interventions.

Other problems such as excessive workload may exist only in some departments and thus require more narrow solutions such as redesign of the way a job is performed. Still other problems may be specific to certain employees and resistant to any kind of organizational change, calling instead for stress management or employee assistance interventions. Some interventions might be implemented rapidly (e.g., improved communication, stress management training), but others may require additional time to put into place (e.g., redesign of a manufacturing process). Before any intervention occurs, employees should be informed about actions that will be taken and when they will occur. A kick-off event, such as an all-hands meeting, is often useful for this purpose.

**Step 3 - Evaluate the Interventions.** Evaluation is an essential step in the intervention process. Evaluation is necessary to determine whether the intervention is producing desired effects and whether changes in direction are needed.

Time frames for evaluating interventions should be established. Interventions involving organizational change should receive both short- and long-term scrutiny. Short-term evaluations might be done quarterly to provide an early indication of
program effectiveness or possible need for redirection. Many interventions produce initial effects that do not persist. Long-term evaluations are often conducted annually and are necessary to determine whether interventions produce lasting effects. Evaluations should focus on the same types of information collected during the problem identification phase of the intervention, including information from employees about working conditions, levels of perceived stress, health problems, and satisfaction. Employee perceptions are usually the most sensitive measure of stressful working conditions and often provide the first indication of intervention effectiveness. Adding objective measures such as absenteeism and health care costs may also be useful.

Further, the effects of job stress interventions on such measures tend to be less clear-cut and can take a long time to appear. The job stress prevention process does not end with evaluation. Rather, job stress prevention should be seen as a continuous process that uses evaluation data to refine or redirect the intervention strategy.

1.21: SUMMARY

Workplace stress is the harmful physical and emotional response that occurs when there is a poor match between job demands and the capabilities, resources, or needs of the worker. Job stress results from the interaction of the worker and the conditions of work. Views differ on the importance of worker characteristics versus working conditions as the primary cause of job stress. 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 problem for someone else. This viewpoint leads to prevention strategies that focus on workers and ways to help them cope with demanding job conditions. A combination of organizational change and stress management is often the most useful approach for preventing stress at work. Stress is a prevalent and costly problem in today's workplace. About one-third of workers report high levels of stress. One-fourth of employees view their jobs as the number one stressor in their lives. Three-fourths of employees believe the worker has more on-the-job stress than a generation ago. Evidence also suggests that stress is the major cause of turnover in organizations.