CHAPTER - I
INTRODUCTION
There is a feeling among people that stress is something endured almost exclusively by harassed businessmen rushing from airport to airport, clutching alligator cases stuffed to the twin brass combination locks with documentation and contracts.

In practice, of course, it is quite impossible to classify stress sufferers by occupation or by any other criterion. The simple truth is that anyone can suffer from too much stress and it is the individual’s susceptibility to stress rather than the extent of stress, which governs the amount of damage that is done. Some people are extremely vulnerable to stress and they will suffer a good deal from a fairly minimal amount of pressure. Other individuals on the other hand, are capable of withstanding enormous pressure without suffering any ill effects at all and may indeed seem to thrive as the pressure builds up. Nevertheless, despite the fact that there is a good deal of individual variation in susceptibility of stress, it is a fact that there are some situation and some pressure which are likely to produce stress-induced diseases.

Organizations come into existence to realize certain objectives, which cannot be achieved by any one individual alone. In other words, they are composed of individuals and groups who come together to achieve defined goals by means of differentiated functions. Though we are also members of some informal organizations like the family, the club etc., our membership of formal organization is more significant as it is associated with the gratification of most of our needs.

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There is mutual dependence between the organization and the individual. The latter seeks the gratification of his/her needs in the organizational context. The organization, in turn, comes into existence when individuals, based on the principle of division of work and rational coordination, relate to each other through time in a sustained relationship.

In all type of jobs there is an interplay between the demands that the job makes on the employee and the demands that the employee requires of the job. The lack of accommodation is both a significant social issue and an important topic for research. Research on the accommodation of the organizational members and organizations to one another can focus on outcomes such as productivity, profits, employee commitment to the organization goals etc. These are obviously important outcomes for the well being of both the organizational members and the organization.

Clearly the attainment of the most healthy and work environments requires an understanding of how one can reduce the effects of physical and psycho-social stressors. Satisfaction with relationships and activities in the work ambience is a bitter victory if they are cut short by disabilities due to physical hazards. On the other hand, a chemically pristine environment is only minimally rewarding if employees constantly fight back the pangs of boredom or the stress of being pushed beyond their intellectual, emotional and motivational limits.
Stress has also become a topic of great concern in Management because of the steep increase in medical expenses. The costs of stress to American organizations, assessed by absenteeism, reduced productivity, compensation claims, health insurance and direct medical expenses is in the region of $150 billion annually (Karasek and Theorell, 1990). In the UK, the Confederation of British Industry recently calculated that the costs of sickness absence to the UK economy was over 12 billion, of which around 50 percent has been estimated to be stress related, while the British Heart Foundation found that over 21 percent of all male absence and 45 percent of all premature deaths at work are due to heart and circulatory diseases, in which stress plays a significant role. A report by the Nordic Council of Ministers (Lunde-Jensen, 1994) calculated the economic costs of work related sickness and accidents in the Nordic countries; estimating the cost in Denmark to be 2.5 percent of GNP per annum and in Norway to be 10 percent of GNP. In the European Union, the cost of stress to organizations and countries is estimated to be between 5-10 percent of GNP per annum (Cooper et al., 1996). Modern thinkers have characterized our times as an 'age of stress'. Stress has been a subject of exploration and study for a very long time; its origin may be dating back to the pre-historic past. Evidence of this has been the yogic literature, meditational techniques & respiratory controls given in the Eastern Scriptures.

Stress is an inevitable consequence of socio-economic complexity. People experience stress, as they can no longer have complete control over what happens in their lives. For example, the following stressful situation is confronted by an individual in his everyday life.
Mr. X, an Executive gets ready for office in the morning hours. As he walks into the garage, it is discovered that one of the tyres of the car is flat. He hurriedly changes it and tries to make up the loss of time. On the way it is found that the gates are closed at the railway crossing. Mr. X has no option of fight or flight and has to simply wait till the gates open. When he arrives late in the office, an altercation takes place with the union leaders. Mr. X finds an increased workload in the office. When he arrives back home in the evening, an inflated bill for electricity charges awaits him and its last date of remittance is the next day. All this causes strain as a result of the cumulative impact of a large number of such stressful situations.

The modern day man does not always exercise flight or fight option due to tactical reasons and consequently could fall prey to stress related diseases. Kornhauser\(^1\) in his classic book on the Mental Health of the Industrial worker reflected on what individuals at work needed, not only to survive the ‘9 to 5’ but to positively enjoy it. Mental health is not so much of a freedom from specific frustrations as it is an overall balanced relationship to the world, which permits a person to maintain a realistic, positive belief in himself and his purposeful activities. Insofar as his entire job and life situations facilitate and support such feelings of adequacy, inner security and meaningfulness of his existence, it can be presumed that his mental health will tend to be good. What is important in a negative way is not any single characteristic of his situation but everything that deprives the person of purpose and zest, that leaves him with negative feelings about himself, with anxieties, tensions, a sense of being lost, emptiness and futility.\(^2\)
Technology and Stress: “What are you doing with all the time you are saving, using all of those time saving devices?” asks Tim O’Brien, Institute for Stress Management, a consulting company in the U.S. The most common answer is “More work”. So when do you relax? The most common answer is: uneasy laughter. Shouldn’t we preserve and protect the time gains technology has allowed us? Haven’t we just allowed technology to encroach and entrench itself ever more deeply into our lives? There is a commercial on television showing a couple scrambling for their cellular phone from inside their tent, deep in the woods. Is this the new definition of being alone with nature? We must set boundaries on the extent to which we would allow ourselves to be available or technology will continue to creep into our lives further and further.

A question that one should ask is, “Am I overworked or under relaxed?” Have you allowed a cellular phone into your car to usurp a precious bastion of privacy? Our Cars were once where we retreated to be alone with our thoughts, a place where we could have meaningful discussions with our children, or fellow car poolers. It was a place where we could consider and think through, in detail, questions we faced in our lives.

Now, many of us use our cars to do business or stay in touch with friends from our cellular phones. We ignore ourselves and often our children riding with us. Where is that time we saved now? Do we just do more business, or just keep in touch with more friends? We can break our lives into three sections; sleep, work and discretionary/leisure time.
We need about 7 or 8 hours of restful sleep each night to function properly for extended periods. Do we get that much restful sleep? If not, we must eventually have some physical or mental health problems. Most of us work, including transit and preparation time, about 10 hours. That leaves 6 hours per day for discretionary/leisure use. What do you do with your 6 hours? How would you like to spend those 6 hours? If we allow our work related time to expand beyond its normal boundaries, either sleep or leisure time must suffer. Prolonged sleep deprivation leads to serious illness. Prolonged neglect of leisure/relaxation time can lead to increased errors; a lower sense of self-satisfaction and what we commonly call “burn out”

**Stress and Economic Depression:**

As the economy cools, the hiring door shams shut on job seekers. The US workforce has a new acronym to learn R I F, as in Reduction In Forces. Still, despite the pileup of layoffs, the U.S unemployment rate is hovering near 30 – year low. Until recently, the sizzling growth in service jobs seemed to have no problem scooping up any and all laid off workers into new jobs. Now, that could change. The problem: an onslaught of hiring, throughout Corporate America. From the unemployed blue-collar workers cast off by a manufacturing sector deep in recession, to white collar managers, workers facing layoffs at companies, stunned by the suddenness of the downturn, job seekers in a wide swath of industries are finding their prospects limited, as a slogan of “No Vacancy” signs pops up across the country.
The new hiring freezes may well prove to be a harbinger of worse news to come, how unemployment and the buoyant job market have been a key reason. Consumer confidence – and consumer spending– have remained relatively strong even as the economic downturn has intensified. But if the number of jobs on offer continues to shrink, while layoffs increase, a sharp rise in unemployment could be the inevitable result. Until very recently, workers who bounce back could feel confident about new opportunities. But that’s no longer the case. “Just about everybody has freezes on right now, even if they are quiet freezes,” says Jeffrey E Christian, CEO of Cleveland Search firm Christian & Timbers. The economic warning signs are clearly mirrored in the wave of hiring freezes announced by companies high-tech and low. The freeze is on at Texas Instruments, Walt Disney, Procter & Gamble, NBC and Northwest Airlines, to name a few. Moreover, in a recent Duke University survey of 153 Chief financial officers at companies whose median revenues run from $100 million to $500 million, half said they intended either to reduce employment or hold it steady for 12 months. Even demand for those once impossible to find Information Technology workers has fallen 44 per cent this year, according to the Information Technology Association. Even for employed workers, hiring freezes are having a sobering effect.

Auto Plants that only a year ago demanded so much overtime that assembly – line workers were splurging on new pickups are now barely producing.

After years of watching companies hire and spend, employees are suffering from flagging morale wrought by the dramatic economic slowdown.
Job insecurity is triggering politicking and competitiveness among co-workers. Employees trust in management is waning. And even in companies unscathed by layoffs, workers are distracted as their financial worth plummets with the stock market. Many organizations are now smaller, with fewer people doing more, feeling much less secure. New technology has added the burden of information overload as well as accelerating the pace of work with demands for a greater immediacy of response (e.g. www, faxes, emails etc.). This 'New Wave' industrial revolution of contingent working, short-term contracts, portfolio careers and ultimately virtual organizations, has spawned a mountain of research in the cognate area of occupational stress.

While stress in human beings is generally occasioned by what may be termed 'personal concerns', there is undoubtedly a correlation between stress and the state of the economy. In fact, these personal concerns are modeled by the whole economic, social, political and cultural system, which creates and nourishes them. Scientifically speaking, there is no difference between one type of stress and another except the factors, which cause the stress – the "stress origin". The stress syndrome – hormone and nervous reactions – is always the same. Following this line of thought, we can assume that there is no fundamental difference between stress experienced in 'boom times' and that experienced in a period of economic depression, except perhaps a difference of degree. Boom – time stress causes positive stimulating reactions, while depressed - economy stress engenders negative reactions due to an enforced lowering of standards and expectations.
Stress caused by economic conditions can exhibit itself in group, as well as individual reactions. Evidence of 'group stress' can be discerned in the media, in political action and in cultural manifestations. Says an employee working in an engineering firm where employees were being laid off due to overstaffing, "When I punch my card at the time office, I don't know whether it is my last day in the organization. I may be told that I may not come tomorrow."

Family-Work Conflict:

Kopelman, Greehaus & Connally (1986)\(^6\) provided a theoretical model for describing the relationship between role conflict at work, in the family and between the two, as well as satisfaction at home, at work and with life in general. They define work conflict as the extent to which an individual experiences incompatible role pressures within the work domain, and family conflict as the extent to which incompatible role pressures are experienced within the family. Report of the studies which tested the theoretical model indicates strong links between domain conflict and domain satisfaction i.e. work conflict and job satisfaction and between domain satisfaction and life satisfaction.

Another theoretical model of role conflict (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985)\(^7\) suggests that pressures from work or family can heighten conflict between work and family roles. They identified three ways that role pressures can be incompatible: (1) time spent in one role may leave little time to devote to other roles. (2) strain within one role domain may "spillover" into another one. (3) behaviour appropriate to one role domain may be dysfunctional in another, i.e. shifting gears from work to family.
Thus, variables that have an impact on time, strain or behaviour, can lighten work – family conflict. The model proposes that any role characteristics that affects a persons’ time involvement, strain or behaviour can produce conflict between that role and another role.

Holahan and Gillbert (1979) demonstrated that career aspirations were positively correlated with role conflict for females in dual career couples but negatively correlated with role conflict in males. They found that when husband’s career salience was high, and there were children present in the home, working women experienced greater role conflict than when their husband’s career salience was low. They also report that when work role was of equally high importance to both husband and wife, role conflict was low relative to those couples with disparate work salience. They suggest that highly career committed couples may have to work out a system of mutual understanding and accommodation (Gupta and Jenkins (1985).

Pleck, Staines and Lang (1980), in an analysis of the 1977 Quality of Employment Survey data reported that 34% of men believed that their job and family lives interfered with each other.

Greenhaus and Kopelaman (1981) studied 229 male alumni of an Eastern US technical college and report that approximately half the sample experienced inter role conflict. They found that conflict between work and family was positively related to work – role salience. Men whose wives were employed in managerial/professional positions experienced significantly more intense work-family conflict than men whose wives were employed in non-managerial/non-professional positions.
Further results indicated that incidence of work-family conflict was higher when children were pre-schoolers rather than when children were older. As expected, men who placed greater importance on work and men whose children were young and living at home were the most likely to experience work-family conflict.

Another factor related significantly to work-family conflict is that of career commitment. Individuals who place high priority on their careers invest more time and energy in their work role, expect more of themselves and undertake more challenging assignments than those who are less career committed.

Some of the main areas of family/work conflict that may lead to overstress are:-

- Feeling guilty about not being at home to look after the children
- Resenting not spending enough time with the family
- Missing out on social life because of working extremely long hours
- The demands of dependent relatives conflicting with work responsibilities
- Not earning enough to meet expenses or to satisfy a preferred life style
- Expecting to fulfill two roles, at home and at work, to perfection.

A study by the Low Pay Unit (1992) discovered that British Male Workers work 4.5 hours longer each week than their European counterparts, with one in eight working longer than the maximum 48 hours a week recommended by EEC.\textsuperscript{8}
The Etiology of Occupational Stress

In surveys which Professor James Spandley and Robert Veningra have undertaken on American workers, it has been found that there are stages of contentment / discontentment that workers have with their jobs. Each of these stages reflects various types of stress that workers are experiencing. It should be recognized that not all workers go through these stages. In addition, the stages are not necessarily sequential for employees who move back and forth between stages and at times, skip stages. Nevertheless, in interviewing workers in a wide variety of occupations, there appears to be a progression in the work dissatisfaction cycle; each of which has implications for productivity and morale.

Stage One: Job contentment. Most workers begin their jobs deeply committed to what they hope to accomplish. Consider Bobby McDonald who remembers the first day after his promotion as vice president of a large firm: "I went to my office for the first time. It was really beautiful. The staff had put a flower pot on my desk wishing me luck. The president came by and shook my hand and told me how much he was looking forward to working with me. He left the office and I felt a big smile come over my face. I thought to my self, all the hard work was worth it."

In this stage workers feel well matched to their jobs and feel that their contributions are valued by the employer.

Their morale is high and their productivity noteworthy. However, two important developments take place in this stage. First, valuable adaptive energy is being utilized and second, habits of dealing with occupational stress are being formed.
If workers take care of themselves and replenish their adaptive energy by taking vacations and breaks from work routines, the job contentment stage can go on for years.

Recent studies however, suggest that Stage One might last only a short period of time. In one study of 1,000 individuals, in their late 20's, half of the young employees will have quit their job within two years. While it is not known why employees terminate their employment with such rapidity, occupational stress is likely to be one of the salient factors.

Stage Two: Job disappointment. In this stage of the work dissatisfaction cycle, employees begin to believe that their employer might not have their best interest in mind. They complain about being “overloaded” and feeling “rushed”. “There is never enough time to do the job adequately,” states an American nurse. “You are always under pressure to do more with fewer resources,” states a secretary. Workers frequently complain about the lack of support they receive from their supervisor. Most of all, they complain about the mental strain associated with their tasks. General fatigue is the body’s first line of defense when under stress. It’s hardly a wonder, therefore, that workers who had been living with constant strain state that they “wake up tired.”

Does productivity decline in this stage? Apparently not, according to self-report information. People continue to be committed to their jobs and continue to put in an honest day’s work.

But a potential problem is developing, for the stress is beginning to take a toll, not so much on productivity but on morale.
Stage Three: Job Disillusionment. There are two factors that differentiate workers from stage two and three. In stage two, workers complain about working conditions. In stage three, anger can be detected. In addition, it is often accompanied by anxiety about their future in the organization.

The anger can be directed at anyone who is perceived to be causing frustration. Often it is the boss. Said one Manager; “My supervisor seemed so friendly when I first started. But now he doesn’t seem to have any time for me.” The other day I asked him to help solve a problem and he looked at me in the eye and said: “That’s why I hired you. You solve the problem”. “I was so angry at his lack of support; I wanted to let him know my frustrations. Instead I meekly left his office. But I was madder than hell.”

In this stage, productivity of workers begins to slip noticeably. Employees tend to treat their work as “a job”. They put in their hours, but their heart and soul isn’t in their work.

Not only does productivity slip, but also in this stage of work dissatisfaction, health erodes. A U.S. Air Force Officer talking about his stressful job said: I become almost physically ill. My body aches like I have a viral illness. I get tension headaches and am nauseated.” It is not uncommon for employees under stress to report exhaustion, more frequent sickness, insomnia and ulcer and migraine headaches.

In stage three, employees begin to understand that work is negatively impacting their health. Some employees take a fatalistic attitude towards their situation as reported by one employee in marketing.
“Sure it is stressful. But that’s what happens when you get into sales.” Other employees look for the light at the end of the tunnel. “This is a difficult period,” said a middle manager, “but once the merger is complete and we will all know our roles and things will get better.” And still others vow to improve their health. “I know my job was taking a toll on my health and I realized that the stressful work conditions weren’t going to change. I decided to look for a different job and although it took several years. I found a better one. Once I made up my mind to protect my health, my stress levels went down and I started to feel better.”

Stage Four: Job despair. One of the most frequent words heard in our interviews with employees in stage four was “trapped.” Workers see no exit from their jobs and they don’t believe that their work environment will improve “Who will hire a 58 years old manager?” asked a manufacturing representative. The lines of tension were deeply etched into his face. When it was suggested that companies exist which would value his expertise, he shook his head in disbelief. “No one would hire anyone as old as me.”

It is in this stage that physical symptoms of ill health become acute. The chronic acid stomach becomes a bleeding ulcer. The tension headaches are accompanied with lower back pain, high blood pressure and sleep disturbances. In addition, employees begin to doubt themselves.

Stage Five: Work Redefined. It is apparent that there is a clear progression in the five stages of job contentment/discontent. In stage one, there is an eagerness to do an outstanding job.
Nevertheless, valuable adaptive energy is used and if the "energy well" is not replenished, the individual becomes disappointed with their career. In stage two, tiredness sets in and chronic complaining can be detected. If not reversed, the individual moves into stage three in which they express anger at their employer. It is in this stage that illness becomes apparent and absenteeism frequently occurs. In stage four, the individual feels trapped in their job without hope that their work environment will improve. In stage five, the job is redefined.

How employees redefine their jobs (and their careers) varies from one person to the other. Some resign their positions out of frustration without any prospect for other employment. Others carefully set a date by which they will resign and make every effort to find alternative employment. Still others have honest conversations with their employer and strive to make changes in work routines that diminish their stress. For example, some cut back on the number of hours worked each week. Others negotiate additional vacation time. Still others request lateral transfers so that their skills can be better utilized in another department. Still other employees change careers altogether.

Job stress can be defined as the harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when the requirement of the job do not meet the capabilities, resources or needs of the worker. Job stress can lead to poor health or injury.

Recent studies of healthy organizations suggest that policies benefiting worker health would also benefit the bottom line. A healthy organization is defined as one that has low rates of illness, injury and disability in its workforce and is also competitive in the market place.
Eustress / Distress:

It needs to be noted that stress is not always bad. It is, in fact a basic ingredient of life. Our system is equipped with certain innate "stress alarms that allow people to function effectively in many situations. Without undergoing any stress there would not be constructive or creative activity. What we need is to reduce the amount of negative stress (distress) and enjoy / appreciate positive stress (eustress). The meaning, mechanisms and management of stress are formed or construed in the socio-cultural context of the people. Societies with their divergent world-views have evolved different conceptualizations of stress, health, roles and responsibilities of a person.

The desire to do well at everything and seen to be doing well is endemic in our modern society. The young executive who isn't ambitious is considered rather odd, and the man who enjoys his job knows that he will be uncomfortable if he rises any higher in his company hierarchy and refuses an unwanted promotion, will be considered irrational and very probably mentally ill rather than sensible and sane. The pressure to achieve begins to affect many of us at an early age and it continues to affect us throughout our lives.

Absolute freedom from stress is death. Contrary to popular opinion, we must not and indeed cannot avoid stress. Stress is the spice of life. Since it is associated with all types of activity, we could avoid it only by never doing anything. But who would enjoy a life of "no runs, no hits, no errors"?

Besides, certain types of activities have a creative effect and actually help to keep the stress mechanism in good shape.
The uninterrupted leisure of enforced retirement or of solitary confinement - even if the food and accommodation are the best in the world - is certainly not a desirable situation.

The Stress Curve

The traditional stress curve identifies under stress, healthy stress and over stress and their relationship with our performance. Because each person is of unique individual capacity, each curve is likely to be different in shape and size.

If we feel too little stress, for us at that time, our effectiveness will reflect our under stimulation and will be reduced. We are all aware of those moments when we feel bored or lethargic, have no enthusiasm for the day or the job, and feel unmotivated or frustrated, represented by (1) – (2) on the curve. Perhaps we do not have enough demands, or the work is too easy. The expressions commonly heard, that ‘I work better under pressure’ OR ‘I give my best when the heart’s on’ encapsulate this under stress. Interestingly, in such circumstances we sometimes generate greater pressure for ourselves by leaving a tight deadline for a project and then having to pull all the stops to complete it - giving an enhanced performance in the process.
As our stress increases, our energy generally rises and our performance grows until we reach our optimum stimulation. In this curve, (2) – (3), we are performing at our peak. We feel stimulated, excited and challenged by the opportunities presented by a demand, appropriately in control, and with the right amount of variety and change for us. This is when we deliver our best work. We are in healthy stress and feel the most satisfied.

However, if this goes on for too long or the pressure increases either in or outside work with inadequate supports – we hit a point when we will begin to be overstretched and over-stimulated, at (3), when our performance will diminish. Then we begin to feel that the demands are too great, that we cannot fulfill our commitments and our feeling becomes reality as we experience overstress. We may begin to behave in ways that in themselves may sabotage our performance. Perhaps we procrastinate, pick arguments, work exceptionally long hours with little to show for it, delegate ineffectively, have difficulties in sleeping, or sleep too much, and fail to view things with our normal clarity. Long term overstress can lead to physical consequences of absence from work and personal suffering, as well as lessened effectiveness in the process. If we fail to heed the warning signs then we can get into areas of personal breakdown and exhaustion near (4) in the diagram. This can bring us to a state of ‘Burnout’. Burnout can be defined as a ‘state of emotional and physical exhaustion brought on by increased demands and pressures at work’. In short, burnout occurs when your expectations for a job exceed the satisfaction it offers. The signs are the same that you’d expect with any type of stress-fatigue, depression, hopelessness, and lack of enthusiasm.
There may also be physical symptoms such as head and muscle aches, insomnia, stomach problems or high blood pressure.

Maslach and Jackson (1986)\textsuperscript{11}, who pioneered the study of burnout defined it as "a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment that can occur in individuals who do some kind of people work." They proposed a burnout inventory with these three components.

Pestonjee has also discussed the recently developed concept of Burnout Stress Syndrome (BOSS) (Paine, 1982)\textsuperscript{12}. BOSS can lead to at least four types of stress related consequences such as, depletion of energy reserves, lowered resistance of illness, increased dissatisfaction and pessimism, and increased absenteeism and inefficiency at work. Veningle and Spradley (1981) have identified five distinct stages of BOSS.

\textit{Honeymoon Stage}

This stage can be described as accounting for the euphoric feeling of encounter with the new job such as excitement, enthusiasm, challenge and pride. Dysfunctional features emerge in two ways: first, the energy reserves are gradually depleted in coping with the demands of a challenging environment. Second, habits and strategies for coping with stress are formed in this stage, which are often not useful in coping with later challenges.

\textit{Fuel Shortage Stage}

This stage can be identified as composed of the feelings of loss, fatigue and confusion arising from the individual’s overdraw on reserves of adaptation energy.
Other symptoms are dissatisfaction, inefficiency, fatigue and sleep disturbances leading to escape activities such as increased eating, drinking and smoking.

**Chronic Symptom Stage**

Fuel shortage stage is followed by physiological symptoms which become more pronounced and demand attention and help at this stage. Common symptoms are chronic exhaustion, physical illness, anger and depression. A sense of fatigue and exhaustion overtakes the individual.

**Crisis Stage**

When these feelings and physiological symptoms persist over a period of time, the individual enters the stage of crisis. At this stage, he develops 'escape mentality' and feels oppressed. Heightened pessimism, self-doubting tendency, peptic ulcers, tension headaches, chronic backaches, high blood pressure and difficulty in sleeping are other characteristics of this stage.

**Hitting the Wall Stage**

This stage of BOSS is characterized by total exhaustion of one's adaptation energy, which may mark the end of one's professional career. While recovery from this stage may elude some, others may be resourceful enough to tide over the crisis.

Contrary to BOSS, Rust Out Stress Syndrome (ROSS) is another phenomenon, which is indicative of the stress due to underload. It occurs when there is a gap between what the executive is capable of doing and what he is required to do.
1.1 Concept of Stress?

The term ‘stress’ has been used variously by scholars of different disciplines. In physics, stress is a force, which acts on a body to produce strain. In physiology, the various changes in the physiological functions in response to evocative agents denote stress. In psychology, stress refers to a state of the organism resulting from some interaction with the environment. In psychophysiology, stress is that stimulus which imposes detectable strain that cannot be easily accommodated by the body and so presents itself as impaired health or behaviour.

Hans Selye’s General Adaptation Syndrome (GAS) (1956)\(^{13}\) 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 a threat, the general physiological response occurs in three stages.

**Alarm Reaction:** The first stage includes an initial ‘shock phase’ in which resistance is lowered, and a counter shock phase in which defensive mechanisms become active. Alarm Reaction is characterized by autonomous excitability; adrenalin discharge, increased heart rate, muscle tone and blood content & gastrointestinal ulceration.

**Stage of resistance:** Maximum adaptation occurs during this stage. The bodily sign characteristic of the alarm reaction disappears. Resistance increases to levels above normal. If the stressor persists or the defensive reaction proves ineffective, the organism deteriorates to the next stage.
Stage of exhaustion: Adaptation energy is exhausted. Signs of the alarm reaction reappear, and the resistance level begins to decline irreversibly. The organism collapses.

However there were many shortcomings as this model had been developed based on researches carried out on infrahuman subjects. Responses of human subjects are always mediated through several layers of cultural and social filters.

In variation of this approach, stress is used to refer to the highly energized psycho-physiological state when an organism is faced with a situation that threatens or places unusual physical or psychological demands on it.

The extremes of this highly energized state are: hyper stress, where there is over-activation or heavy demands in terms of time or responsibilities; and hypo stress, in which the individual suffers from lack of activation, characterized by lassitude or boredom.

Organisational Stress:
Just as individuals and teams will develop habits of responding to pressure, so organizations show characteristics of how they manage and respond to stress. There are two extremes of this organizational relationship with stress. At one end of the scale the stress virus gets passed around, with people who experience it creating, more overstress by their reactions, until there is an epidemic. Anyone who is unable to keep up with the pressure is considered to be a weak link who does not measure up to the standards expected in such a hard environment. This eventually leads to the survival of the fittest and toughest who ensure that new appointees are in their own image.
A great deal of commitment, talent and ability may well be wasted in the process. In this climate, overstress become endemic in the workplace and while this may prove highly effective and productive in the short term, the long terms implications will be lowering of output, growing absenteeism and greater turnover of staff. The dangers here are immense as unhealthy stress leads to inefficiency, loss of morale and reduced performance with its links with illness, physical and mental; it is an occupational hazard. In fact, in the USA, there has been a spate of legal actions against organizations that cause undue workplace stress. US worker’s compensation claims related to stress tripled during the first half of the 1980’s, which suggests that organizations’ role in creating unhealthy stress is being taken seriously.

At the other end of the scale, are the organizations where people are under-stressed. These too are less than effective, perhaps achieving a measure of success but never reaching great heights. They are often vulnerable to rapid changes in the economic, social and political environment in which they operate. They will also be losing out on the potential of their employees who will not have the opportunities to be appropriately challenged and developed. When this occurs there will be frustration and a high turnover of able staff who will be going to other organizations where they can progress.

There is sometimes a stress blockage where overstress is locked in at a certain level in the organization. For instance, managers may all be verging on the stress spiral but their staffs are being under used.
This can be because there is an underestimation of the capacity of the staff or because effective delegation is not part of a manager’s training. This is yet another way of wasting people’s potential.

In company ‘X’ it was discovered that there was overstress in some areas of management but under stress in others where staff were not having work delegated to them that they could easily have done. For instance, only the stores manager had the authority to sign the payment for the unloaded goods. This unloading depended upon the arrival of the goods at any hour of the day. Thus he was under constant pressure to be present for signature apart from his responsibilities as a manager. This situation had arisen despite the fact that there were four clerks present in the stores department who were not ready to take the responsibility. When the stores manager complained he was told to manage with the resources available. This made him stay after work hours, which added to his quantum of responsibilities.

There is a correlation between subjective social support and depression (Caplan et al 1980) and this finding has been interpreted that tendency for low social support increases depression and the tendency for depression causes to produce an underestimation of social support.

“Assert Good Self and Deny Bad self” are two seven-item factors derived by Lillibridge (1970) from Need for Social Approval Scale (Crowne and Marlowe 1964). Theoretically, asserters present themselves in a good light to win social approval and deny their self – concept by under reporting aspects of the self, which are not socially approved.
“Deny bad self” was negatively related to Anxiety, Irritation and Somatic complaints. Probably this is due partly to a conscious tendency to under report socially undesirable effect. If we assume that improved contact with reality is an indicator of better mental health, we then sometimes face the dilemma that an improvement in subjective fit may be counterbalanced by a decrease in contact with reality.

Several writers have developed framework to aid our understanding of work stress.

Cooper and Marshall (1976, 1978a)\textsuperscript{15} offer five clusters of work stressors: those intrinsic to the job, those resulting from one’s role in the organization, career development, relationship with others, and organizational structure and climate.

Lazarus (1980)\textsuperscript{16} has argued that a temporary denial of an objective stress may reduce the level of anxiety so that a person can better cope with the objective situation.

Invancevich and Mattson (1980)\textsuperscript{17} also divide stressors into four categories: physical environment, individual level (a mixture of role and career development variables), group level (primarily relationship based) and organizational level (a mixture of climate, structure, job design and task characteristics).

Schuler (1980)\textsuperscript{18} identifies seven categories of work stressors in organizations: job qualities, relationships, organizational structure, physical qualities, career development, change and role in the organization.
Some authors also include extra-organizational stressors (e.g. family) as well (Cooper & Marshall 1976, 1978a; Ivancevich and Matteson 1980)

Quick and Quick (1984) propose four categories of stressors: task demands, role demands, physical demands (elements in one's physical setting or environment) and interpersonal demands.

Role in the organization: In recent years, there has been an increased interest in the use of role theory, to describe and explain the stresses associated with membership in organization. The concept of "role" is the key concept in understanding the integration of the individual into a system. Every organization is composed of a number of positions and specific roles associated with these positions.

Katz and Kahn (1966) have accordingly extended that an organization is a system of roles. Roles are a relational concept, defining one position in terms of its relationship to others and to the system as a whole.

Role Conflict arises when various members of the role set, hold quite different or conflicting role expectations towards a focal person. They may impose pressures on that focal person toward different kinds of behaviour at a time, when these different role pressures give rise to role forces within the individual, he will experience a psychological conflict depending on the configuration of role pressures actually extended by role senders (members of the role set) on the role occupant. Kahn et al (1964) have described six types of role conflicts, namely sent-role conflict, intra-sender conflict, inter-sender conflict, inter-role conflict, person-role conflict, and role overload.

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Sent-role conflict: It is defined as the simultaneous occurrence of two or more sets of pressures such that compliance with one would make it more difficult to comply with the other. In the extreme form, compliance with one set of pressures makes the compliance with another set completely impossible; the two sets of pressures are mutually contradictory.

Intra-sender conflict: It arises when opposing expectations are held by a single member of the role set; for example: a supervisor instructs his subordinates to work faster and also to improve the quality of product.

Intra-sender conflict: It denotes the role conflict resulting from opposing role expectations from two or more members of role set. Pressures from one role sender are in conflict with the pressures exerted by other role sender.

Role conflict and ambiguity are the most widely examined source variables in managerial stress research (Beehr 1985).

The original study of role conflict conducted by Kahn et al. (1964) and subsequent research efforts, have identified five types of role conflicts in organizations: Inter-sender conflict, intra-sender conflict, inter-role conflict, person – role conflict and role overload (Beehr 1985, Van sele, Brief and Schuler 1981).21

Research on role conflict and ambiguity is extremely homogenous, as anywhere from 50% (Van Sale et al 1981) and 85% (Tack son and Schuler 1985).
Variables like role conflict and role ambiguity have been positively correlated with tension and fatigue (Singh, Agarwala & Mohan 1981, Schuler, Aldag and Brief 1977, absenteeism Breaugh 1980), leaving the job and anxiety (Hamner and Tosi 1974) and both psychological and physical general strain (Orpen 1982).

Jackson and Schuler (1985) also found the following variables to be positively correlated with role conflict: task / skill variety, locus of control, education and propensity to leave the organisation.22

Variables found to be consistently negatively-correlated with role conflict and ambiguity include job satisfaction (Singh et al 1981; Breaugh 1980), physical withdrawal, supervisory satisfaction, performance, job involvement (Schuler et al 1977), decision making, job involvement, organizational commitment (Fisher and Gitelson 1983), tolerance for conflict and group cohesion (Randolph and Posner 1981) and reported influence (Hamner and Tosi 1974). Submitting the literature to meta-analysis techniques, Jackson and Schuler (1985) found significant negative correlations between role conflict and / or ambiguity and the following variables: participation, task identity, feedback, job satisfaction across level, sub level, commitment and involvement. It has been also clearly demonstrated that role conflict and role ambiguity are consistently correlated with each other (Jackson and Schuler 1985).23

Pestonjee (1987a)24 has noted that it is 'natural and healthy to maintain optimal levels of stress' and opined that success, achievement, higher productivity and effectiveness call for stress.
Present-day researchers and practitioners visualize the phenomena of stress in a new perspective. As Kets de Vries (1979) had noted each individual needs a moderate amount of stress to be alert and capable of functioning effectively in an organization. Indian scholars like Pestonjee (1987a) and Mathew (1985)\textsuperscript{25}, in their conceptual papers agreed with their contention.

Mathew has gone to the extent of advocating that particular types of stress are essential for being a creative manager. Mathew (1985) in his conceptual paper on role stress of a creative manager raised queries pertaining to the relationship between creativity and stressors. He noted that such queries are relevant for two reasons: first, creativity and innovation in organizations have become a top priority for organizational practitioners. Therefore, a creative manager can be better equipped to cope with particular stressors, which are identified as associated with creative activities. Second, creativity involves performance of unconventional tasks in the organizational setting by individuals. On the other hand, interaction among various sub systems of organizations such as person, task, role, behaviour setting, physical and social environments are seen as casual factors of stress. It is likely, therefore, that some kinds of stress are associated with creative work. However no empirical work has been done on these lines. An exception is Pestonjee’s & Singh’s study.\textsuperscript{26} While studying stresses and job satisfaction in the case of managers and system analysts, they noted that managers and system analysts in private organization scored higher on both stress and satisfaction as compared to their counterparts in public organizations. They explained their findings in the light of the characteristics of private organizations, which generate greater stress and in turn, lead to higher job satisfaction.
1.2 ORGANISATIONAL ROLE STRESS:

Organisation stress by itself is not an undesirable thing. In fact it can be said that the kind of stress that focuses on achievement and leads to resultant satisfaction and pride can be very positive in organizational terms. Generally speaking, very low performing organization rarely exhibit any stress.

In such organization the atmosphere is one of resignation and indifference. People in such organizations, therefore, carry out their tasks in a totally mechanical fashion since they believe that any incremental effort would be of little value. This belief is based on the assumption that the organization cannot or will not grow or succeed in future. On the other hand, we find a sense of vibrancy in most highly achievement-oriented organization. There is a desire to accomplish a great deal within a limited time – both in personal and organizational terms – often leading to tension and anxiety. It is said about the famous commando unit – the Seabees – which performed near-miracles in the Second World War that they adopted the written motto "if it is very difficult we do it immediately, if it is impossible we do it tomorrow". The Seabees outfit was a stressful organization, but it is said that anybody who served in the Seabees always felt after leaving the organization that he was a supreme achiever, and therefore an elitist in the organizational world.

However, when an individual is persistently in a stressful situation for a long time, his ability to withstand and cope becomes difficult. This persistent stress levels lead to depletion of energy reserves, lowered resistance to illness, increased dissatisfaction and pessimism and increased absenteeism and inefficiency at work.
1.3 Coping

Coping is acknowledged as an important mechanism. There is a need to look after the existing coping literature into a cohesive whole. Various definitions given by Beehr & Bhagat 1985, Lazarus & Folkman 1984 and Schuler 1985 reveal some convergence around the notion that coping is part of a person–environment transaction that occurs when an individual appraises a situation as stressful. Stressful situation can take the form of harm, threat or challenge.

Folkman, Lazarus, Dunkel – Schetter, Delongis & Gruen (1986) define coping as constantly changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage the internal & external demands of transaction that tax or exceed a person’s resources. This broad definition allows for various specific coping targets that are internal (e.g. emotional reactions) or external (e.g. the situation). Further, the definition can subsume more specific dimensions of what individuals find ‘taxing’ (e.g. uncertainty, important consequence). This integrative definition makes three key distinctions important to research on job stress. Coping behaviour or processes are a more appropriate focus than stable coping style, coping is separate from coping effectiveness; and coping applies to challenge as well as harm & threat situations. The focus is on coping behaviours or processes rather than stable coping ‘style’ or personality trait. This focus is important for ultimate application of research findings to managerial interventions & training. If coping were conceptualized as a personality trait relatively stable across situations, coping research would have little practical value for managers.
If, on the other hand coping is amenable to behavioral or structural intervention & training new tools for stress management can be identified.

Definitions that cast coping in terms of what people do in specific situations without reference to whether or not it 'works' i.e. coping in terms of its effects such as preventing, avoiding or controlling emotional distress (Pearlin & Schooler 1978) contain implicit effectiveness criteria; that is coping is effective if it prevents, avoids or controls individual distress.

Coping, (and not coping-effectiveness) is appropriate to our interest in organizational stress because this focus does not bias researchers regarding what constitutes effective coping. Accordingly coping can be examined in terms of influence on a range of dependent variables including effectiveness criteria.

From an organizational point of view, it is valuable to conceptualize coping in a manner that allows for developmental stress or 'eu-stress' that can spur organizational productivity and innovation.

Two forms of coping have been described by Lazarus and his colleagues (Lazarus & Folkman 1984) problem focused strategies & emotional focused strategies. Problem focused strategies are directed towards the management of the problem, whereas emotional focused strategies (including such strategies such as escapism, self-blame and avoidance) are directed towards amelioration of the associated level of emotional distress. Seeking social support is one such strategy to the extent that others can provide emotional and practical or informational support.
In several different studies, problem focused strategies have been reported to have positive associations with measures of psychological well being. A reliance on emotion-focused strategies, on the other hand, tends to be associated with poor mental health (Terry 1991).

It is hardly surprising that in well organized factories where craftsmen are no longer employed and where job satisfaction is limited to the size of the pay packet, strikes are common.

Employees whether they are working on the factory floor or in the offices, are frustrated by their responsibility and the absence of any real sense of satisfaction in the work they do. The only chance they have to obtain some sense of satisfaction is by using their very presence as a weapon and by continually demanding shorter working hours and larger pay packets.

One of the largest ever surveys of its kind, conducted by Harris’ Research looked at levels of stress among over 5000 office workers in 16 countries. The findings showed that over 54 percent of office workers around the world believe that work is the main cause of stress in their lives – ahead of money worries (29 percent) and family and domestic relationship or personal/family ill-health or bereavement (20 percent). The main cause of stress was overwork, with 50 percent of respondents world wide claiming to be either too busy or having too few staffers. This phenomenon was seen to be more prevalent in large companies. Other reasons for work-related stress – 29 percent of workers worldwide lacking confidence in their company’s management, 32 percent feeling unappreciated at work and perceiving work and office environment and physical working conditions as not up to the mark.
In order to cope with stress at work, people showed a clear preference for indulging in ‘products of enjoyment’. 68 percent mentioned taking a tea or coffee break, 50 percent — having a soft drink, 27 per cent — smoking, 27 per cent eating cakes, biscuits or savory snacks, 16 percent eating ice-cream and five per cent — going for a drink of alcohol at lunch time. However, the human factor scored the highest, with 81 percent preferring to talk or joke with colleagues as way of unwinding at work.

1.3 ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

An effective organization is a desired end state in a given context that is determined predominantly by a nexus of interacting forces. Any stabilized, purposive human aggregate working together to create the desired effects is conditioned essentially by the force of time, people and place and of the purpose of its existence, that is, the mission. These forces are always in a state of flux. Building an effective organization requires emphasis on the process, which directs that state of flux towards maintaining or acquiring the effectiveness of the organization over changing time, people and place.

To achieve any objective where efforts of more than one person are involved, certain level of organization is called for. The size and the complexity would depend on the purpose of which the organization is to be created, the external environment to which it has to adapt itself and the internal strength it has to acquire with its measures. Fulfillment of the objective would depend upon the level of effectiveness of the organization. The level varies from organization to organization.
There are a large number of very successful industrial organizations in India. These encompass single industry industries or a cluster of industries under a banner of an industrial house. The growth of industrial production in terms of money generation is the principal criteria of success of these organizations. It is largely because of such effective organizations that we today have a large industrial base, covering basic industries such as mining, metallurgical, manufacturing and other treasury industries.

Yet under a similar environment, and with similar objectives (and sometimes very clearly focused objectives), there are a large number of cases before us where such a success cannot be claimed. Resources have not been effectively utilized. The result has been massive accumulation of losses.

Thus what is needed is a focused effective organization. Effective organization is one, which can optimally and continually, over a time through people, utilize its resources to fulfill its mission and objective. Resources are (a) the inanimate ones, like plant, equipment, process and money etc. on the one hand and (b) the humans in their prime, on the other, to demand to be treated not as mere resources but as what befit the temperament of the 21st century and (c) the ability to manage.

In a situation, which is relatively stable and predictable, a Lassez Faire approach may still work. The need for making our organizations effective in the current scenario has become imperative. Even the 'so far successful' organizations have to start looking inwards to feel the chinks in the armour and smoothen them.
There is a plethora of writing and research on organizational effectiveness but unfortunately no consensus on definition model or methods of assessment is there.

The older, simplistic notions of effectiveness of an organization, which were unidimensional, are now out-dated. Popular measure for effectiveness was profit maximum and goal achievement. But profit is subject to the vagaries of demand and supply. It also excludes non-profit organization from consideration.

An over emphasis on profit making is frequently at the cost of human element of organizations. Goal achievement too is a criterion verifiable with difficulties. First, it is difficult of non-verifiability of intangible goals like satisfaction, moral etc. These might be neglected in favor of hard facts and statistics of the measurable ones. Moreover, each organization has several interest groups. Evaluation of goal achievement differs from one such group to another.

Most of the modern writers now favor a multiple criteria measure for effectiveness; acknowledging that organizations are open systems, which exist in unpredictable environment, and their capacity to adapt, survive, maintain and grow on the whole depends on more than one factor.31

Morale commitment to the organization, personal turnover, and absenteeism, and member satisfactions have also been often considered as indices of effectiveness (Katz & Kahn 1951, Kahn 1956, Jeasore 1955).32
There has been a general tendency among industrial psychologists to accept such ideas as organizational productivity, net profit, the extent to which the organization accomplishes its various missions (McGregor 1960) and the success of the organization in maintaining or expanding itself, as 'ultimate criteria' or organizational effectiveness.

Benis (1966) gives the following three criteria for measuring organizational effectiveness:

1. The ability of the organization to react with flexibility to changing environmental demands.
2. The ability of the organization to search out and correctly interpret those properties of the environment which have a relevance to its functioning.

Katz and Kahn (1966) while defining the concept of organizational effectiveness have contrasted and compared it with the related one of organizational efficiency.

Organization needs energy inputs viz. People and materials to return outputs viz goods and services to the environment. Organizational efficiency is defined as the ratio of energetic output to the energetic input. Efficiency thus tells us how much of the input emerges as output and, how much is lost during transformation in an organization, whereas organizational effectiveness is defined as maximization of returns to the organization by all means. Economic and technological means, which contribute to such maximization are related to efficiency. Maximization by political and non-economic means lead to effectiveness but do not contribute to efficiency.

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Taken in its wider sense, effectiveness includes efficiency as a component. Organizational effectiveness is typically observable as storage of energy, organizational growth, organizational endurance, survival and organizational control of surrounding environment.

Katz and Kahn give the following patterns of individual behavior required for organizational functioning and effectiveness:

1. Joining and staying in the system:
   a. Recruitment
   b. Low Absenteeism
   c. Low Turnover

2. Dependable behavior: role performance in system –
   a. Meeting or exceeding qualitative standards of performance.
   b. Meeting or exceeding qualitative standards

3. Innovative and spontaneous behavior: Performance beyond role requirements for accomplishment of organizational functions:
   a. Cooperative activities with fellow members
   b. Actions protective of system or subsystem
   c. Creative suggestions for organizational improvement
   d. Self-training for additional organizational responsibility.
   e. Creation of favorable climate for organization in the external environment.
Scheim (1969) defines organizational effectiveness in terms of following four criteria:

1. Ability of the organization to take in and communicate information reliably and validly.
2. Internal flexibility and creativity to introduce changes which are demanded by the information obtained.
3. Integration with and commitment to the organizational goals of the members and willingness to change.
4. An internal climate of support and freedom, since being threatened undermines good communication, reduces flexibility and stimulates self protection rather than concern for total system.

The concept of organizational effectiveness is one of the most complex and perhaps least attempted problem. As a traditional concept, it has generally been viewed and operationalised mainly in terms of productivity (Lawless 1972).

Still later, organizational effectiveness has been defined as 'the extent' to which an organization fulfills its objective without incapacitating its means and resources and without placing undue strain upon its members.

Smith (1976) has talked about the general classification i.e. 'hard' and 'soft' criteria of effectiveness. The former are obtainable from official records such as tardiness, production, job levels & promotions etc.

The 'soft' criteria are obtained from ratings and may comprise such factors as common errors rating scales, job satisfaction, job involvement, commitment, attachment etc.
The former maintains the appearance of objectivity, the latter is frankly judgmental.

Steers (1977) defines organizational effectiveness as a construct to develop measures or criteria by which an organization is evaluated. In practice, effectiveness of any organization may be measured against univariate or multivariate criteria. The most widely univariate measures are overall performance, productivity, employee job satisfaction, profit or rate of return on investment. In case of multivariate approach, the organization is considered to be an open system and effectiveness needs to be evaluated against the various sub-systems and their inter-relationship within the sub-systems. The congruence model of organizational effectiveness (Nadler 1983) views organizational effectiveness as a relationship between input transformation process and output.

"Despite the chaotic conceptual situation, the construct of organizational effectiveness is the ultimate dependent variable in organizational research. In fact, the theories of organization are grounded in the notions of effectiveness design, strategies, reward systems and soon; and these are among the factors that form the bases of organizational effectiveness." (Cameron and Whetton 1983). Often other terms like performance success, ability, efficiency, and productivity are taken to be the measures of organizational effectiveness.

The organizational effectiveness scale (OES) by Dr. C.N. Daftuar (1984) measures the soft criteria. The term organizational effectiveness is difficult to define because it is essentially an abstract concept, measuring of which may vary from organization to organization.
There seems to be an intrinsic conflict between stress and organizational effectiveness. Any organization cannot be deemed effective using only stress and effectiveness as criteria; when defining effectiveness as maximizing each criterion in a set of criteria. Even criterion like productivity cannot be maximized if stresses and strains are not managed properly in the organization. There are organizations, which want productivity to be maximized through stress and strains, which ultimately ends in frustration and organization break down.

The relationship between stress and organizational effectiveness based on multivariate criteria analysis should consist priority area of organizational research. Stress is known to be both positively and negatively related to organizational effectiveness. Effects should be made to manage stress thereby adding to overall organizational effectiveness. In this context, the role of organizational strategies by work re-design effort to mitigate stress should be considered as a long term measure for improved organizational effectiveness.

**Domains of Effectiveness**

**Internal Effectiveness**
- Focus: Employee Satisfaction
- Measures:
  - Employee Turnover
  - Employee Attitudes
  - Organisational Climate
  - Employee commitment
  - Interpersonal Relationship

**External Effectiveness**
- Focus: Societal Satisfaction
- Measures:
  - Community Satisfaction
  - Satisfaction with supplier with organization
  - Consumer satisfaction
  - Social Responsibility
  - Quality of Life.
Organizational Effectiveness includes

- Productivity
- Efficiency
- Growth
- Stability
- Turnover
- Quality
- Profitability
- Customer Service
- Adaptiveness to change
- Competitive edge
- Innovation
- Morale

Stress affects an individual in a variety of ways like narrowing the span of attention, bringing about certain cognitive deficits, inducing helplessness and irritability, affecting performance adversely, affecting physical and psychological health and so on. The relationship between stress and its effects is complex. An inverted 'U' type relationship with performance indicates temporary improvement before deterioration begins. Chronic stress has costs which are cumulative in nature and this is most common in relation to physical and mental health.

Wages of Stress: The waves of corporate downsizing that buffeted the U.S. workforce earlier last decade may have subsided, but the stress levels of workers continues to mount, reports a new survey by Aon Consulting, a human resource consultancy in Chicago, Illinois. And with stress raising, employee productivity and commitment are falling. During the first quarter of 1998, Aon interviewed a broad set of 1800 workers from around the country. The survey reveals that 53% of employees feel burned out on the job, up dramatically from 39% in 1995, when Aon conducted a similar survey.
The increase in stress comes at a time when employees are spending more and more time at work. According to the survey, the percentage of workers regularly putting in 50-hours a week nearly doubled since 1995 rising from 13% to 23%. “The American workforce is getting winded”, says David Stum, President of Aon Consulting’s Loyalty Institute. He sees a link between the long hours and the increasing stress. “As employees put in more time at the office or factory, they are having increasing trouble balancing their work life and their personal lives. That’s creating conflicts and, in turn, stress”.

The wages of stress are high, for Companies as well as for employees, because workers tend to take more time as their stress levels increase, the rise in stress means an erosion in productivity. The 1998 survey shows that on the average missed days of work due to stress in the last year was 1.5. More than 80% of the employees who missed time due to stress also missed time to deal with personal matters such as caring for a sick child or parent. Altogether, the average employee missed 11.5 days of work last year to handle personal matters. And when the sick time is included, the number of days lost rises to 15.1, representing almost 6% of annual work days.

The researches found a statistical correlation between increased stress and reduced commitment. Aon survey used the company’s Workforce Commitment Index (WCI) to measure changes in levels of commitment. The WCI is a behavioural index that measures three key dimensions of employee commitment, teamwork behaviour, willingness to recommend the company and its products to others, and intention to keep working for the company.
The measure was first used in 1997, when Aon surveyed 2,020 workers and established a baseline index of 100. In 1998, the index declined by 2.2 points, to 97.8. Commitment declined in virtually every industry, age group, income group, and job classification.

Woes of Middle Managers:
As the ranks of the middle managers from the 1980's era are dwindling, the remaining group is finding their work increasing stressful. At the same time, even the mistrust about their ability to deliver seem to be growing according to Dr. M.S. Vardani, Dr. Deepali Singh and Prof Suchi Priya of Prestige Institute of Management, Gwalior. In the earlier era of managing, the ranks of middle managers swelled as they were used as buffer in the vertical link in the chain of hierarchy that linked the workmen with the top management.

However, with the liberalization and the consequent restructuring of organizations most middle managers are facing the axe. Such downsizing has also increased the work of those middle managers who still remain. The faster the organization grows, greater becomes the responsibility of the managers. This requires rapid adjustment to new technology, cultures and influences.

Shorter time frame, complexities of the operating responsibilities and accelerating technological changes have made it difficult for the managers to keep up. Now competitive reality and shrinking product life cycles pose their own peculiar challenges. Increased reliance on data based information system have replaced people networks with data networks as the means for gathering information, a development which often raises the stress level of middle level managers.
Because of their peculiar status, they may not have the access to the vital quality information, which may affect their decisions.

Middle managers represent a resource that is under utilized and could prove crucial for the firm’s competitiveness. Part of the reason for this, is the senior manager’s insensitivity to the extent of discontent among their junior colleagues.

**Senior managers say:**

“Middle managers themselves do not take initiatives. If they take the initiatives the chances of making mistakes increase.”

“Middle managers do not posses psychological and cognitive capacity of taking decisions.”

“Middle managers are not open; they just presume things without studying them thoroughly.”

It follows, therefore, that:

- Middle managers lack capacity of taking initiatives.
- Middle managers are hesitant to innovate.
- They lose the willingness to take risks.
- They are reluctant to seize the opportunity when senior managers try to delegate decisions to them.
- Middle managers are not prompt and don’t feel the sense of urgency.

Middle managers are seen as a “concrete layers” getting in the way of progress, but efforts have not been made to ascertain whether the organizations are actually utilizing the potential of their middle managers.
There is a general feeling among middle managers that there is not much changes in the nature of their jobs even after reaching the middle management level. The hierarchy of levels is very rigid and the delegation of power is minimal. Even routine decisions are “put up” to the senior managers.

**Middle managers lament:**

“It is our position in the organization which makes us incompetent to take decisions.”

“Senior managers must appreciate achievement rather than criticizing on non-achievement.”

“Real delegation is lacking – it is more of responsibility and less of authority.”

“Top feels we cannot do a job as good as they do.”

“Top managers have implied desire to retain power.”

“Top people impose decisions on us, we do not have any say.”

What transpires is that the senior managers instead of creating a healthy environment and culture for the middle managers to develop and grow, are usually suspicious of their usefulness, their skills and are reluctant to share their powers and responsibilities.

Being seniors in profession the onus is clearly on the senior managers to provide a conducive environment for the middle ones to express themselves to share in the organization’s goal setting and execution. The way to encourage senior managers to do this, is first to make them comfortable and aware of their own responsibilities towards their junior colleagues.
This could be done through selective management development programs, which not only teaches them of their responsibility but also stimulates an intellectual and healthy inquiry within the organization so that mutual trust could grow.

The organization should also draw up a conscious policy of delegating responsibility and fostering team spirit between senior managers and the rest in the organization. The role model aspect of senior managers should be insisted upon and developed.

There should be an essential system of communication between colleagues so as to remove any misunderstanding and doubt. A system of rewards and incentives should be developed to motivate middle manages.

The meeting point:

"There should be participatory style of approach by seniors."

"The working relationship should be cordial".

"A degree of trust and confidence should be built".

"Transparency in decision making".

"Seniors should be good listeners".

This study includes an attempt to explore the problems, which cause stress to middle level managers with suggestions to instigate and ride over their woes for better organizational and personal health and effectiveness.
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