CHAPTER – V

STRESS - AN OVER VIEW

Stress is one of the most gruesome problems which is threatening to assume very grave dimensions with the passing of time. It is such an ubiquitous and dynamic condition that its environmental, organizational and personal dimensions have turned out to be a veritable ambiance for both innovative and explorative researches. What sort of an additive phenomenon it is and how it builds up in stages are sought to be discussed in detail in this chapter.

Generally speaking stress is a force which affects an individual. According to Matteson and Ivancevich (1987)\(^1\), it could be viewed as an adaptive response to circumstances. According to the US National Institute for occupational safety and health, stress is nothing but “the harmful emotional responses that occur when the job environment does not match the capabilities, resources or needs of the work”. It could also be defined as an uncomfortable cognitive state resulting from exposure to a stressor or a state of unpleasant disturbances that occur in response to environmental stressors. In the words of Lazarus R.S. and Folkmans (1984)\(^2\), stress is “a particular relationship between

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the person and the environment which is appraised by the person as taxing or exceeding his or her resources and endangering his or her well being”. Thus, stress is a fact of life. What is unique about it is that it can be both positive and negative and it cannot and should not be avoided.

Stress has two faces. The first one is constructive stress or eustress. It acts in a positive manner. It can indicate a situation where an individual is in balance or within favourable limits. The second face is known as distress. It is not healthy for individuals or for organization. Distress would indicate effects which result in the breakdown of a person’s physical and mental systems. Performance can suffer as people experience illness, brought about by very intense stress. The general rule for what causes psychological stress is that it is an interaction among organizational characteristics that appear threatening to human beings and their reactions to the threat as indicated by their overall job satisfaction. In fact, stress is anything that changes our physical, emotional, behavioural or mental state when we encounter various stimuli in our mind.

Consequences of stress are usually studied under three major heads. They include (a) physical symptoms like head aches, high blood pressure and heart disease. (b) Psychological symptoms which includes anxiety, depression and decrease in job satisfaction. (c) Behavioural symptoms which include growing absenteeism and fall in productivity.
5.1 Types of Stress

Generally speaking stress is purely a psychological problem which can be brought under three major heads.

1. Neustress – stress which is neither helpful nor harmful.

2. Distress – Distress occurs when the arousal is too high or too low. Distress results in poor concentration, short temperedness, trembling hands, churning stomach, tight shoulders, sour lower back, edginess, anxiety, depression, fuzzy thinking, and irritability.

3. Positive Stress – It is the brighter side of stress. Positive stress helps one to respond quickly and forcefully in physical exigencies. IT professionals who are called upon to take to a new technology all of a sudden under an extraordinary situation face this kind of stress.

Positive stress is useful in performing while under pressure. It helps to prepare for dead lines. It adds zest and variety to daily life. It helps us to push our limits. The most prominent trends of positive will include:

5.1.1 Anticipatory Stress

Anticipatory stress is arousal stimulated by an expected stressor. Mind and body prepare in advance for change crisis or challenges. Tension before a test, apprehension about a parent’s response to a case of disobedience, fear of cyclone, retirement etc are very good examples for anticipatory stress.
5.1.2 Current Stress

Current stress is arousal during an experience. This could be explained by means of an example: Mental alertness in the midst of a debate, the surge of energy in the final 100 meters of a running or bike race, the excitement during a first time conversation and the like. Too much of current stress or too little of it can result in debilitating distress.

5.1.3 Residual Stress

Residual stress is the arousal that occurs after the event that caused the stress has ceased to exist. It can be positive or negative. Athletes may have difficulty in sleeping the night after a victory. Over stimulation, whether pleasant or unpleasant, can have the same effect. Earthquakes occur very rarely. But the psychological scar left by them, linger even months after.

5.2 Zones of Stress

A zone of positive stress is the tolerance of stress. The level of tolerance is quite palpable as the stress hit person remains healthy, productive and satisfied. Each of us is endowed with a distinctive zone of positive stress. A common source of job stress is a misfit between the demands of the job and the zone of positive stress of the worker. A key challenge for managers and supervisors is to achieve an optimal job personality fit among employees. Another is to fit employees together with relatively compatible tolerance zone.
According to J.Y. Avani, et al (1978) stress can result from lack of fitness between the needs, goals and ability of the individuals on one hand and the resources and demand of the environment on the other. This statement has been supported by Choudhary et al (1994). Stress will occur when there is no balance between the needs and the ability of individuals. Stress can occur consciously and unconsciously. For people who have low self control, the tendency for stress to occur is higher compared to those who look at the needs of the positive side. Individuals who can use their personal power strategies (personal coping strategy) can offset the pressure experienced at the optimum rate and they are able to work on a satisfactory level. Stress among the staff that gives the negative impact to the organization is given proper attention by welfare workers and especially in achieving the goals and the objectives of the organization in general. For the potential software personnel, they are able to overcome the work stress that contributes to the increment in productivity and quality of work and the achievement of goals in their organization.

In the scientific literature, stress has been defined as a response to something in the environment or as a stimulus that caused the response. A stimulus based model asserts that stress is an aspect of the environment or a stimulus that causes the strain reaction in the individual exposed to the stressful stimulus. Contemporary researchers criticize this model for its inability to

explain and account for the complexities of the stress process. By simply focusing attention on one common end that is the stimulus, other components that make of the stress process become artificially separated. One result of this arbitrary separation is that different situations are being labeled stressful and irrespective of whether they are stressful or not, they are presumed to have some intrinsically stressful properties. In short, stress must be first perceived before it can result in strain in individuals. A more preferred approach to define stress is one that takes into consideration that stress is relational in nature involving some sorts of tractions between the individual and the environment. Lazarus and Folkman’s transactional model (1984)\(^5\) defines stress process as a “particular relationship between the person and the environment that is appraised by the person as taxing or exceeding his or her resources and endangering his or her wellbeing”. According to Byrant, R.A. et al (2000),\(^6\) that a transactional definition differs from a stimulus or response based definition of stress in three main ways.

1. Stress does not reside solely in a situation or in a response.
2. Stress is a process; a transaction between the individual and the environment.
3. Coping and adaptation are explicit parts of that transaction that help shape the stressful experience.

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A transactional approach focuses on the individual’s perception of the demands of the environment and his or her resources to cope as the important factors determining well being. It asserts that individuals constantly appraise their environment and that on an individual level, the perception of a mismatch between perceived demands and the ability to cope with them constitutes stress.

It is predicted that stress occurs when the environment is evaluated as harmful, threatening or challenging. An appraisal of harm means that damage has already occurred, while an appraisal of threat refers to harm that is likely to happen in the future. Challenge refers to a condition of high demand in which the emphasis is on mastering the demands, overcoming obstacles and growing and expanding as an individual. In short, the focus is on protecting against harm. The level of stress to which a person is subjected to could be assessed by the individual’s ability to cope with harm, or challenge. It involves judging what resources to which the individual has an access and what options are available in dealing with the event. The coping response process refers to cognitive or behavioural efforts to deal with, stress problems.

The transactional model is something referred to as the cognitive or phenomenological stress model. The cognitive element assumes that thinking, conscious awareness, memory, meaning and significance of events are “the central mediators and the immediate casual agents in determining stress”. One may say that if an individual does not feel a ‘sense’ of threat in the stimulus situation, then there is no stress. The transactional component emphasizes the
continuous interaction of a person’s cognitive perception or appraisal of the surrounding and constantly changing environment which the individual shares with others. The phenomenological element is suggestive of the personal, individualistic and idiosyncratic dimensions that are involved in perceiving a situation. A person’s reaction to stress is thought to be highly individualistic, that is, two persons can react in completely different ways to the same stress.

According to Quick J.C. and J.D. Quick (1984) the difficulty and the attractiveness of this model is its flexibility. The model allows us to understand stress as the combination of personal issues and concerns, which change over time as well as the resources and responses that a person can call upon in times of stress, which also change over time. These responses in turn affect the initial situation or stressor, and may cause us to appraise it, or think about it differently. Thus, the stress response is a transactional one, where the balance of demands and resources defines stress: if the demands are greater than the resources, stress occurs. The reverse is also indicated: if resources are available to meet the demand, then the appraisal might be one of challenge rather than harm or threat, and thus would be less stressful to the individual. This has been the experience of IT professionals who cling to their jobs a post significant progress year after year.

A limitation of Lazarus and Folkman’s model of stress is that although it can predict individual differences in the experience and reaction to stress, it cannot predict which aspects of the work environment will be stressful. They hold that it is not that useful to identify conditions of work which adversely affect most workers because stress is ultimately an individual phenomenon. Lazarus et al further add that “to describe and understand stress in the work place requires that individual patterns be studied to generate knowledge about the kinds of persons who are more or less vulnerable to divergent sources of stress”. This thesis on stress among IT professionals however, takes the position of Cobber C.L. (1987) who acknowledges that stress essentially occurs at an individual level, but believes it is useful to try to discover working conditions which are likely to adversely affect most workers exposed to them. By searching for those conditions of work likely to adversely affect most workers exposed to them, taxonomy of stressful job conditions may be constructed and interventions to mitigate them can be devised. This according to the investigator is crucial for the splendid growth of the IT companies in general and well being of IT professionals in particular.

In summary, a transactional model proposes that the individual, work stressors, coping resources and strain need to be considered jointly in explaining the stress strain coping process because they are independent. Work

stressors may be defined as the “antecedent conditions within one’s job or the organization which require adaptive responses on the part of the employees”. The negative reaction to stressors is ‘strain’. The response to stressors is also affected by individual differences between employees such as socio-demographic factors and coping resources such as social support.

Role stress is considered to be characteristic of most occupations, especially white collar occupations. It may be viewed as the consequence of disparity between an individual’s perception of the characteristics of a specific role and what is actually being achieved by the individual currently performing the specific role. The concept of role stress, originally advanced by Robbins S.P. (1997) \(^9\) refers to a condition where role obligations are vague, irritating, difficult, conflicting or impossible to meet. Role stress is of three distinct types: They are role conflict, role ambiguity and role overload.

Role conflict occurs for an individual when a person in the work environment communicates an expectation about how he or she should behave and this expectation makes it difficult or impossible to fulfill another behavioural expectation or set of expectations. More simply, stress is caused by the inability to meet the various expectations of behaviour. Role ambiguity results when there is inadequate, unclear, or confusing information about expected role behaviour. Role overload is a final form of role conflict,

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analogous to work overload. Most studies fail to differentiate between work overload and role overload. Gabinsky E. et al. (2001)\textsuperscript{10} however suggest that role overload can be distinguished from work overload in that workload is based on actual tasks, whereas role overload is based on the behaviours that are expected of the individual. Role overload occurs when too much is expected of an individual or the behaviour expected is too complicated or difficult for the individual to execute.

5.3 Burnout – An outcome of Job Stress

Stress and burnout are generally conceptualized as the product of a complex transaction between individual needs and resources and the various demands within an individual’s immediate environment. Furthermore, both are generally conceptualized as highly subjective phenomena in which perceived stressors are more important than actual environmental conditions. It would appear that models of occupational stress and burnout are concerned with the stressed individual within the workplace, however models of occupational stress predominantly analyse causes of stress whereas models of burnout predominantly investigate the individual’s response to occupational stress. As Chowdhry W. and S. Menon (1997) argued, burnout is, in fact, a type of stress – specifically a chronic affective response pattern to stressful work conditions that feature high levels on interpersonal contact.

In addition, burnout can be distinguished from occupational stress with respect to time. Burnout can be considered as a response to prolonged job stress, that is, when the demands at the workplace exceed an individual’s resources. This long time perspective is also implied in its terminology. Thus, burnout is a long term process. A remarkable parallel exists with the work of Royce. Royce W.W. (1970)\textsuperscript{11} suggested that after prolonged exposure to stress, the physiological resources are depleted and irreversible damage is caused to the organism. Referring to Seyle’s adaptation syndrome, Etzion argued that burnout is a latent process of psychological erosion resulting from prolonged exposure to stress. Typically, exhaustion is reached before the individual consciously has noticed both the preliminary stages: comprising alarm and resistance. Freuden Berger (1974)\textsuperscript{12} has also conceptualized burnout as the result of long term exposure to job stress. According to Brill, stress refers to an adaptation process that is temporary and is accompanied by mental and physical symptoms, whereas burnout refers to a breakdown in adaptation accompanied by chronic malfunctioning. It would appear that burnout is response based on poor mental health and work outcomes of extended job stress.

Specifically, stress is a generic term that refers to the temporary adaptation process that is accompanied by mental and physical symptoms. In

\textsuperscript{12} Freuden Berger (1974), Staff Burnout, Journal of Social Issues, 30, pp. 159-165.
contrast, burnout can be considered as a final stage in a breakdown of adaptation that results from the long term imbalance of demands and resources. Moreover, burnout includes the development of dysfunctional attitudes and behaviour towards recipients, the job, and the organization, whereas job stress is not necessarily accompanied by such attitudes and behaviours. This assertion is empirically supported by Peterson and Michael (1997) who showed in a sample of IT Professionals burnout can be distinguished from job related distress, despite emotional exhaustion sharing about 30% of its variance with distress. The fact that depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment however are less substantively related to distress implies that burnout is a unique, multidimensional, chronic stress reaction that goes beyond the experience of mere exhaustion. Finally, it has been argued that everybody can experience stress, while burnout can only be experienced by those who entered their careers enthusiastically with high goals and expectations. Pines, et al (1981) proposed that individuals who expect to derive a sense of significance from their work are susceptible to burnout, whereas those without such expectations would experience job stress instead of burnout.

In summary, stress and burnout may not be distinguished on the basis of symptoms, but only on the basis of process. While job stress and burnout are clearly linked, they are not identical constructs. Researchers agree that burnout

is a pattern of response that develops as a result of prolonged exposure to stressors at work. The sequencing of the three components of burnout or the process of burnout has been conceptualized differently among researchers of burnout. There are at least three competing models of burnout. In the section below, the development of the three burnout components are considered.

In the chapters which ensure efforts are made to show how the SW professionals live in the midst of stress and the consequent burnout problems. It can not be denied that stress cannot be opted out when they work under taken is result oriented.

An alternative model of the burnout process is a sequence that was advanced by Pines et al (1981). Although Golembiewski and Munsenrider agree with the three dimensional nature of burnout as proposed by Maslach, they provide a rather more strongly modified process of burnout. Golembiewski and Munsenrider suggest that in human services settings, depersonalization comes first, which leads to reduced personal accomplishment and subsequent emotional exhaustion. They maintain that depersonalization is first experienced because a certain degree of professional detachment is often functional in dealing with others in a more ‘objective’ manner and is often reinforced by one’s peers and superiors. Beyond a certain degree, however, detachment becomes depersonalization; thus impairing the ability to form necessary relationships with others and undermining performance. As
depersonalization deepens and one’s sense of accomplishment diminishes, work stress may surpass one’s ability to cope, leading to emotional exhaustion.

Golembiewski and Munzenrider’s model however has been criticized by researchers for not articulating a detailed or compelling theoretical rationale for their sequence model. According to Berna E. (1964)\(^\text{15}\) model, depersonalization is argued to be a means of stanching the flow of emotional energy, of coping with growing exhaustion. Golembiewski and Munzenrider do not make it clear how and why depersonalization develops, indeed human service professionals are often socialized to assume a stance of detached concern toward their clients, and bureaucratic structure and cultures may reinforce detached concern. However, it is not apparent why this detachment would slide into outright depersonalization for service providers in the absence of at least some strain. Second, Maslach argues that emotional exhaustion often stems from unrealistic desires to solve the frequently intractable problems of clients. Indeed, the more idealistic the service provider the greater the risk of burnout.

In Sauter S. and L.R. Murphey (1995)\(^\text{16}\) models the provider is already retreating from a commitment to his or her client’s through depersonalization and low personal accomplishment. It is not clear why emotional exhaustion

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\(^{15}\) Berna E. (1964), Transactional Analysis in Psycho Therapy, New York, Grove Press.

would develop at this point rather than earlier. Furthermore, on the empirical
front, research consistently indicates that emotional exhaustion and
depersonalisation are far more strongly correlated than is personal
accomplishment with emotional exhaustion or depersonalization. For instance,
Lee and Ash forth conducted a meta analysis of 61 studies and found that
emotional exhaustion was strongly positively related to depersonalization
whereas both dimensions were moderately negatively related to personal
accomplishment. Cordes, Dougherty and Blum reported similar findings.
Emotional exhaustion was more strongly correlated with depersonalization than
was personal accomplishment with either emotional exhaustion or
depersonalization. These association cast doubt on Goelmbiewski and
Munzenrider’s argument that personal accomplishment in effect mediates the
association between depersonalization and emotional exhaustion. Recent
evidence suggests that the three factor sequential model as conceived by
Maslach is slightly superior to Golembiewski and Munenrider’s model of
burnout.

These relatively weak associations between emotional exhaustion and
depersonalization with personal accomplishment prompted Jamal H. (1984)\textsuperscript{17}
to speculate that personal accomplishment follows an independent but parallel
process to emotional exhaustion and depersonalization. Leiter conducted a

\textsuperscript{17} Jamal H. (1984), Job Stress and “Job Performance Controversy, An Empirical Assessment”,
series of studies in which he distinguished between quantitative job demands, qualitative job demands and lack of resources. Demands were expected to be related to emotional exhaustion, whereas resources were expected to be related to depersonalization and lack of personal accomplishment. Leiter proposed that demanding aspects of the work environment aggravate exhaustion, which in turn contributes to increased depersonalization, while the presence of resources influences personal accomplishment. The result largely confirmed this hypothesized model, although the model was based on cross sectional data. Contrary to Maslach’s model, however, personal accomplishment seemed to develop rather independently from emotional exhaustion and depersonalization.

Leiter described reduced personal accomplishments as developing in parallel with the other to burnout dimensions, provided that resources were lacking. Giordans D.A. et al (1979) concluded from their meta-analysis that their results were largely consistent with Leiter’s mixed sequential and parallel development model of burnout. They found that emotional exhaustion is particularly related to job demands whereas poor personal accomplishment is related to lack of resources. Depersonalization appears to be related to both job demands as well as lack of resources.

In contrast to the original Maslach model, which proposed an entirely internal model in which emotional exhaustion triggered the whole burnout

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syndrome in response to environmental stressors, Leiter suggest the relationship between emotional exhaustion and personal accomplishment exists external to individuals. It exists within their social context, in the provision of organizational resources, in the personal conflict among colleagues and service recipients, and in the pressure of emotional demands. From this perspective, the mild but persistent correlation between emotional exhaustion and personal accomplishment arises because of consistent relationship among aspects of work environments; work setting characterized by excessive work loads and personal conflicts are often experience by their participants as lacking in organizational supports necessary for effective professional functioning. According to Leiter work settings that persistently deplete the motional energy of its personnel are likely to provide inadequate resources in terms of social support or opportunities for professional development.

At this point in time, it cannot be confirmed or disconfirmed whether Leiter’s revised sequencing model is an accurate model of burnout. Further studies need to be replicated with similar samples to ensure that the obtained efforts are in fact significant and that they are not due to chance. While the revised model appears to better explain the data than the original Maslach model, other possible model could fit the data equally well. Any inference about the casual relations at this stage among the burnout variables would be premature. It may be that there is no strict order in which the three burnout dimensions affect each other. What is known, however, is that burnout is a
process and the three components of burnout influence one another overtime. Furthermore, the three burnout components have distinct relationship with environmental conditions.

Stress can be divided into two opposite polarity which are able to drive to positive and negative effects. The positive stress or eustress is a moderate stress that can stimulate and increase body’s activities and mid to give relaxation and pleasure. Contrarily, negative stress may become harmful to physical and mental if not controlled immediately or it can cause chronic illness like heart problem and various types of cancer. The main challenge is to control the organization with declining productivity will cause the decline of organisation’s competitive advantages. People who are not able to overcome the stress often associate with deterioration of performance that led to the decline of productivity. As the software personnel are assigned very challenging and servicing responsibilities to do the exposure in how to overcome the stress in their daily work and routine activities.

According to Lenin A. (1973) stress can result from lack of fitness between the needs, goals and ability of the individuals on one hand and the resources of demand of the environment on the other. The statement ahs been supported by Karasek et al (1990). According to him stress will occur when there is no balance between the needs and the ability of individuals. Stress can

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occur in consciously and unconsciously. For people who have low self control, the tendency for stress to occur is higher compared to those who look at the needs of the positive side. Individuals who can use their personnel power strategies can offset the pressure experienced at the optimum rate and they are able to work on a satisfactory level. Stress among the staff who give the negative impact to the organization is given proper attention by welfare workers and especially in achieving of goals and the objectives of the organization in general. For the potential software personnel, they are able to overcome the work stress that contributes to the increment in productivity and quality of work and the achievement of goals in their organization.

Besides all the factors that have been mentioned above a negative work culture, non systematic work, individuals who are not competent, weak in mind and spiritual level also will cause confusion, conflict and excessive load on their role and duties. In addition, attitude and sense of responsibility of the subordinate, relationship and communication among colleagues in the implementation of work in groups will be affected which will led to the existence of a negative environment and conflict. Lack of knowledge, skills, experience and mental strength will cause the soldiers to face problems and hold a critical appointment, their role and responsibilities will be increase. In this situation inefficiency and less skilled work will lead to pressure which could affect performance and productivity of a person who directly affect the organization. International Labour Organisation conventions in 2000 was presented with the report estimates that one of the every ten workers suffers a
result of depression, anxiety, stress of excessive workload. Apart from these factors such as age, experience, skills and personal qualifications can also lead to the occurrence of work stress that impact negatively to individuals and organization. This phenomenon includes all jobs categories and it is now increasing. The occurrence of chronic work stress will give the negative impact to the organization and may cause accidents work loss of productivity that will affect the performance and work quality of the organization.