

Stress, Stressor and Stress Management

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the topic of stress, stressor and stress management. Their search is theoretically based using the secondary sources of data to accomplish the search objective. Effort was made to differentiate between stress and stressor. While stress according to the authors is the feeling we have about a situation, condition, environment, work, and humans we have encountered; those things which causes stress, is the stressor. Theories relating to stress were discussed which are the environmental stress perspective, the psychological stress perspective, and the biological stress perspective. The theories were propounded by Cohen, *et al.*, in 1995. Stress is the most undesirable condition of life which everyone detests or abhorred and would do all that is humanly possible to avoid it. Some push factors of stress were enumerated and what organization could do to reduce stress amongst its employees was also discussed by the authors. Their search reveals that enough hours of sleep is important to all humans to control stress and in order to recreate the stressed body. One should not be too busy to deny himself of the needed relaxation and exercising for health promotion. Those at the position of higher level of authority should learn to reduce stress on their subordinates in workplace with a view to creating friendly atmosphere and increase in productivity of the organization.

Keywords: management, environment, experience, organization, stress, stressor, workplace

INTRODUCTION

Every day one experiences stress resulting from pressure of life. Sometimes, it is from the work and people we are in contact with. But can stress be a necessary evil likely to wake some of us from what may appear to be psychological slumber and to be alert to certain demands? How one cope with

stress must be considered and is very crucial in order to avoid its adverse effect on us. The term stress is something everyone detests and possibly to be avoided, yet we sometimes face the reality of it all. It does not matter where we experienced stress because stress is stress and can emanate from source. However, more attention is now being directed towards solving stress problem than ever before.

This paper focuses on the topic of stress, stressor and stress management. It discusses some sources of stress and how stress can be reduced if not completely eliminated.

Concept of Stress

Cohen, *et al.*, (1995) cited in Desiree Despues (1999) defines stress as a process in which environmental demands strain an organisms adaptive capacity, resulting in both psychological as well as biological changes that could place a person at risk for illness. What this means is that environment can cause certain stress on the individual. According to North Idaho College Counselling Service (21014) stress is an automatic physical reaction to a danger or demand (whether real or perceived). Stress can be real or imagined under certain condition. Aibieyi (2010) defines stress as pressure or worry caused by the problems in employee's work in an organization. Cole (2002) say stress is the adverse psychological and physical reactions that occurred to an individual as a result of their being unable to cope with the demands being made on them. Most people cope with a variety of pressures in life; some even seem to thrive on 'pressure', especially at work. It is to be noted that once an individual fails to deal adequately with pressure, then the symptoms of stress appear. Ejiogu and Aderoumu, (1991) in Aibieyi (2010) opined that stress is an unhealthy reaction of the individual to various factors affecting him at any particular time. To Rodgers and Cobb (1974) in Aibieyi (2010) stress is a lack of fit between the needs and abilities of the individual on the one hand and the supplies or demands of the environment on the other. Mitchel (1983) as cited in Aibieyi (2010) thinks of stress as an adaptive response in reaction to external events or situations that place extreme psychological and physical demands on the individual. Littlebee (2014) sees stress as a mentally or emotional disruptive condition occurring in response to external influences. Our response to stress is not only emotional but can also be mentally involved. Hence stress disturbs mental equilibrium.

Stress is viewed as a situation of pressure causing hardship, disquietness, tension, anxiety, threat, perturbation, etc. It is a time of trouble or danger brought about by difficulty, the more powerful or one occupying a position of higher authority. Stress results from various activities. It can emanate from work pressure; that is, when one has more than enough to cope within time frame. There is no one particular place to experience stress. Sometimes it is from workplace and at another time it can be at the family level, particularly from trouble children at home, a harsh husband or activities of a brawling wife at home, etc. Anything capable of causing threat or tension setting the mind in perturbation is as a result of stress; therefore stress cannot be experienced under one situation.

Stress initially will cause arousal propelling resistance and finally exhortation and frustration, self-withdrawal and antagonism. The amount of stress experienced by the individuals under a particular set of personal and environmental factors will vary according to individual genetic constitution and heredity.

Concept of Stressor

According to Littlebee (2014) stressor is an agent, condition or other stimulus that causes stress to an organism. If you are around someone that increases or induces your stress levels, then you have come across a stressor. That individual is considered a stressor. This indicates that humans be a stressor and not only other factors such as work, disaster, illness, etc. Rubin, Paplau, and Salovey (1993) in their study reveal that things that cause stress are called stressor. Rubin, et al (1993) identified the following as stressor:

- (a) Disasters,
- (b) Life crises,
- (c) Life changes;
- (d) Daily hassles,
- (e) hurricanes;
- (f) Earthquakes,
- (g) Disease,
- (h) Divorce;
- (i) Unemployment;
- (j) Marriage;
- (k) And traffic jams.

It is noteworthy that the more important the goal is, the more stress a person will feel when that goal is threatened (Rubin, *et al.*, 1993).

Stress therefore is an unexpressed worry, anxiety, fear and burden on an individual be it at the workplace, family circle or an environmental. Any condition, work, or situation that causes worry, fear, anxiety or burden on an individual is a stressor. An unmet demand(s) that leads to worry or create an anxiety is a stressor. An unfavourable condition or an environment is a stressor. A harsh environment, whether at the home-front or work place, causes stress to the individual. Uncontrollable noise causes stress to the individual in that condition. Anything that is unpleasant to an individual can eventually lead to stress. Stress is not restricted to a particular thing, condition or an environment as has been stated. An unclear instruction from a superior to subordinate without further opportunity for clarification or explanation is capable of stressing up an individual; it does not matter where such an instruction is issued.

The end result of stress may be melancholy and this is not good for anyone because it can lead to death eventually. It is pertinent to assert that managers who failed to delegate are likely to experience stress in the long run. This means that he has seen himself as a "Mr. Know all" in the business of administration and management, especially when he fears that his subordinate would always get it wrong or make misstate in the performance of the assigned duties. Rather than stress up, why not allow room for mistakes and correction? It is better to make mistake than not attempting at all to delegate.

Stress and Stressor Relationship

Going by the account of North Idaho College Counselling Service (2014) with respect to stress and stressor, the relationship between stress and stressor is not one rather on the average the more stressors we experience in life, the more stressed we feel. But what one regard as stress may not even be stress to the other person because of mental disposition. What we feel as stress may only be the result of how we interpreted the condition causing the stress.

Stress Theories

In the discourse of stress theories, Cohen, *et al.*, (1995 and Desiree Después (1999) have enunciated and identified three sets of stress theories in the following perspectives:

- (a) The environmental stress perspective
- (b) The psychological stress perspective; and the
- (c) Biological stress perspective.

The environmental stress perspective emphasizes assessment of environmental situations or experiences that are objectively related to substantial adaptive demands. According to them the psychological stress perspective emphasizes people's subjective evaluations of their ability to cope with the demands presented to them by certain situations and experiences while the biological stress perspective emphasizes the activation of certain physiological systems in the body that have been shown time and time again to be regulated by both psychological and physically demanding conditions.

These theories are experiences within the human domain and are unavoidable. Again and again one experiences the conditions as emphasized in the theories by Cohen, et al (1995).

STRESS PUSH FACTORS

Several push factors have been identified in the discourse of stress and its management in the organisation. They include the following as enumerated below:

External Environment

This is the nature and/or pace of work as affected by frequent changes in external conditions, e.g. economic competitive or technological, individuals who are less happy with constant change and its attendant uncertainties are likely to become stressed.

Organization Structure/Culture

Here, the job-holder's place in the job hierarchy and the extent to which individual autonomy is encouraged or restricted are key factors in producing or avoiding stress; the dominant culture may emphasize long hours, maximum effort, etc., and may not tolerate mistakes; team leaders may not always be supportive.

Job Character

The way a job is put together can often cause stress, e.g. where conflicting tasks are present or where too much is asked of the individual; jobs that allows little personal discretion tend to increase the potential for stress.

Work Relationship

The quality of working relationships with ones superior and colleagues can have a great influence in the relative levels of stress in a job; harassment is a frequent cause of stress at work. Harassment has to do with an individual's entitlement to respect for their personal dignity at work. If workmates, colleagues or superiors bring excessive pressure to bear on an individual who is clearly stressful to that person, then prima facie this could constitute harassment.

Personal Factors

Every individual's ability to cope adequately with pressure is greatly influenced by a personal attributes, such as temperament, level commitment to the job particular skills and talents, etc.

INDICATORS OF STRESS IN THE ORGANIZATION

When an organization's employees suffer from stress, the results are some of the following:

- (a) High levels of sickness and absenteeism;
- (b) Reduced productivity and failure to meet targets;
- (c) Increased accident and error rates;
- (d) Increased number of internal conflicts between individuals;
- (e) Undesirable high rate of staff turnover.

FATIGUE AT WORK

Fatigue is "a reduction in the energy available to perform a task" (Graham et al, 1990). Fatigue is used to explain physical changes in the body as a result of work effort. It is the subjective feeling of tiredness which results in reduced output during a working period. Physical fatigue also shows itself in other ways other than tiredness and reduced output. Change in the chemical composition of the body fluids and the accumulation of wastes products of

muscular exertion, particularly lactic acid can also cause fatigue of the entire body.

STRESS AVOIDANCE BY ORGANIZATION

To avoid stress, the organization needs to do the following:

- (a) Design jobs to permit maximum use of skill and discretion by job-holder; and incorporate sufficient task variety and challenge to maintain employee interest.
- (b) Design work so as to permit exercise of responsibility by job-holder, giving sufficient authority, and allowing job-holder to share in decisions that affect his or her work and ensuring work goals that do not conflict with those of others.
- (c) Encourage team-spirit – where team-member support each other and individuals are valued for their role.
- (d) Encourage superiors to develop participative management styles, paying attention to individual needs as well as those of the task and the group.
- (e) Encourage communication between departments/sections as well as vertically through the management chain, and provide constructive feedback to individuals (by job results, staff appraisal, etc.).
- (f) Ensure that decision-making is delegated so that people at every level are able to share in decisions affecting their work and future prospects.
- (g) Develop an organization culture in which attitudes towards employees are positive and where attention to product/service quality is reflected in respect of employees' knowledge, skills and contribution, and where mistakes are seen as learning opportunities rather than grounds for criticism.

STRESS REDUCTION MEASURES

It is generally agreeable that problems are surmountable, but where not possible to completely eliminate them, they can be reduced. The following measures are considered as antidote to stress:

- (i) Reduce the number of changes expected of any one individual or team.
- (ii) Limit the procedural and other complexities associated with the execution of tasks;
- (iii) Permit individuals to express their feelings and anxieties to someone else – boss, colleagues and trained counsellors;

- (iv) Provide sports and social facilities; and
- (v) Provide adequate canteen and rest-room facilities (Aibieyi, 2010).

Finally, it is advisable that one should spend his twenty-four (24) hour-day judiciously. Apart from planning one's work schedule (daily, weekly, monthly, periodically), it is necessary that one should have a clear design of how one spends each day. According to Mr. Ebisike, (an ex-Roman Catholic Priest) in his book "Be Great", as cited in Ejiogu and Aderounmu (1999) normally adults should "spend eight hours for sleep, eight hours for work and eight hours for rest each day." The eight hours for sleep he describes as a block of time for one to "unwind in bed; form positive subconscious self; promote good health; and promote longevity." The eight (8) hours work should be timed to "perform the tasks of your occupation, vocation or profession; make (earn) money; make helpful friends; gain wisdom and self-fulfilment; and improve your standard of living." He also observes that the working life of a worker is the valuable period for acquiring most of the values and factors that make life worth living at all. The other eight (8) hours for rest should be specifically used for "eating, toileting, romancing, exercising/recreation, enjoying sex life, relaxation (in the home/at pubs), reading novels, journals, newspapers, watching movies/films and meditating, that is prayers."

With such an arrangement of one's day, one feels to be really in control of his time. The degree of fatigue and stress will be considerably reduced. But how many Nigerian top executives can devote such time to rest and relaxation? They are very few because an average Nigerian is always busy.

CONCLUSION

We have made conscious effort to discuss stress, stressors and stress management and to differentiate between stress and stressor. While stress is our feeling about a situation, the condition, environment, work, humans etc that causes us stress, is the stressor. Stress is the most undesirable condition of life which every one detests or abhorred and would do all that is possible to avoid it. Some causes of stress have been stressed and what to be done by organization to reduce stress were also discussed by the authors. It has been explained by experts that one needs enough hours of sleep to control stress and in order to recreate the stressed body. One should not be too busy to deny himself of the needed relaxation and exercising for health promotion. Those at

the position of higher level of authority should learn to reduce stress on their subordinates in workplace with a view to creating friendly atmosphere and increase in productivity of the organization.

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Reference to this paper should be made as follows: Alika, I. J.; Oyedeji, M. & Aibieyi, S. (2017), Stress, Stressor and Stress Management. *Intl J. of Social Sciences and Conflict Management*, Vol. 2, No. 4, 2017, Pp 76-84
