

Stress management

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ABSTRACT

Stress is conceived as pressure from the environment, then as strain within the person. The generally accepted definition today is one of interaction between the situation and the individual. It is the psychological and physical state that results when the resources of the individual are not sufficient to cope with the demands and pressures of the situation. Thus, stress is more likely in some situations than others and in some individuals than others. Stress can undermine the achievement of goals, both for individuals and for organisations. Dealing with stress-related claims also consumes vast amounts of management time. So, there are clearly strong economic and financial reasons for organisations to manage and reduce stress at work, aside from the obvious humanitarian and ethical considerations. Stress can undermine the achievement of goals, both for individuals and for organisations.

Introduction

Stress management defines stress precisely as a person's physiological response to an external stimulus that triggers the "fight-or-flight" reaction. Stress management refers to the wide spectrum of techniques and psychotherapies aimed at controlling a person's levels of stress, especially chronic stress, usually for the purpose of improving everyday functioning. In this context, the term 'stress' refers only to a stress with significant negative consequences, or distress in the terminology advocated by Hans Selye, rather than what he calls eustress, a stress whose consequences are helpful or otherwise positive.

Stress has been defined in different ways over the years. Originally, it was conceived of as pressure from the environment, then as strain within the person. The generally accepted definition today is one of interaction between the situation and the individual. It is the psychological and physical state that results when the resources of the

individual are not sufficient to cope with the demands and pressures of the situation. Thus, stress is more likely in some situations than others and in some individuals than others. Stress can undermine the achievement of goals, both for individuals and for organisations.

Stress produces numerous physical and mental symptoms which vary according to each individual's situational factors. These can include physical health decline as well as depression. The process of stress management is named as one of the keys to a happy and successful life in modern society. Although life provides numerous demands that can prove difficult to handle, stress management provides a number of ways to manage anxiety and maintain overall well-being. Stress management encompasses techniques intended to equip a person with effective coping mechanisms for dealing with psychological stress. Many things can trigger the stress reaction, including danger, threat, news, illness, as well as

significant changes in one's life such as the death of a loved one.

Employers should provide a stress-free work environment, recognise where stress is becoming a problem for staff, and take action to reduce stress. Stress in the workplace reduces productivity, increases management pressures, and makes people ill in many ways, evidence of which is still increasing. Workplace stress affects the performance of the brain, including functions of work performance; memory, concentration, and learning. In the UK over 13 million working days are lost every year because of stress. Stress is believed to trigger 70% of visits to doctors, and 85% of serious illnesses. Stress at work also provides a serious risk of litigation for all employers and organisations, carrying significant liabilities for damages, bad publicity and loss of reputation. Dealing with stress-related claims also consumes vast amounts of management time. So, there are clearly strong economic and financial reasons for organisations to manage and reduce stress at work, aside from the obvious humanitarian and ethical considerations..

Types of Stress

The body does not distinguish between negative and positive stress: both excitement and anxiety strain the body's resources and depress the immune system. Stress varies in intensity and duration.

- ✓ **Acute stress**, intense stress that lasts a short period of time, can rapidly exhaust you, even to the point of triggering anxiety attacks or states of shock.
- ✓ **Chronic stress**, that extends over time, is a subtle condition. You may become accustomed to some level of continual tension, but this stress will nevertheless damage you. Chronic stress is often ignored until obvious physical symptoms appear.

Causes of stress in an organization

Problems caused by stress have become a major concern to both employers and employees. Symptoms of stress can manifest both physiologically and psychologically.

Work-related stress is typically caused by demands and pressure from either within or outside of the workplace; it can be derived from uncertainty over where the job will take the employee, inconsistent or difficult expectations, interpersonal issues, or physical demands.

- ✓ **Power and Stress**:-A person's status in the workplace can also affect levels of stress. Stress in the workplace has the potential to affect employees of all categories, and managers as well as other kinds of workers are vulnerable to work overload. However, less powerful employees (those who have less control over their jobs) are more likely to experience stress than employees with more power. This indicates that authority is an important factor complicating the work stress environment
- ✓ **Economics and Stress**:-Economic factors that employees are facing in the 21st century have been linked to increased stress levels as well. Researchers and social commentators have pointed out that advances in technology and communications have made companies more efficient and more productive than ever before. This increase in productivity has resulted in higher expectations and greater competition, which in turn place more stress on employees. The following economic factors can contribute to workplace stress:
 - Pressure from investors who can quickly withdraw their money from company stocks
 - Lack of trade and professional unions in the workplace
 - Inter-company rivalries caused by global competition
 - The willingness of companies to swiftly lay off workers to cope with changing business environments
- ✓ **Social Interactions and Stress**:-Bullying in the workplace can also contribute to stress. Workplace bullying can involve threats to an employee's professional or personal image or status, deliberate isolation, or giving an employee excess work.
- ✓ **Destabilisation**:-Another type of workplace bullying is known as "destabilization." Destabilization can occur when an employee is not given credit for their work or is assigned meaningless tasks. In effect,

destabilization can create a hostile work environment for employees, negatively affecting their work ethic and therefore their contributions to the organization.

- ✓ Concerns about **job security**, lack of career opportunities, or level of pay.
- ✓ **Bullying or harassment.**
- ✓ A **blame culture** within your business where people are afraid to get things wrong or to admit to making mistakes.
- ✓ **Weak or ineffective management** which leaves employees feeling they don't have a sense of direction, or **over-management**, which can leave employees feeling undervalued and affect their self-esteem.
- ✓ Multiple reporting lines for employees, with each manager asking for their work to be prioritised.
- ✓ Failure to keep employees informed about significant changes to the business, causing them uncertainty about their future.
- ✓ A **poor physical working environment**, eg excessive heat, cold or noise, inadequate lighting, uncomfortable seating, malfunctioning equipment, etc.
- ✓ **Stress Outside of the Workplace**:-Non-work demands can create stress both inside and outside of work. Stress is inherently cumulative, and it can be difficult to separate our personal and professional stress inducers. Examples of non-work stress that can be carried into the workplace include:
 - Home demands: Relationships, children, and family responsibilities can add stress that is hard to leave behind when entering the workplace. The Academy of Management Journal states that this constitutes "an individual's lack of personal resources needed to fulfil commitments, obligations, or requirements."
 - Personal demands: Personal demands are brought on by the person when he or she takes on too many responsibilities, either inside or outside of work.

- ✓ **Overload**:-This is the extent to which individuals feel that the demands of their workload and the associated time pressures are a source of pressure, for example:

- unrealistic deadlines and expectations, often as a result of super achievement by the most talented
- technology overload
- unmanageable workloads
- under recruitment of staff for work already timetabled

- ✓ **Control**The experience of pressure is strongly linked to perceptions of control. Lack of influence and consultation in the way in which work is organized and performed can be a potential source of pressure, for example:

- lack of control over aspects of the job
- lack of involvement in decision making
- account not taken of staff ideas/suggestions about the job
- lack of influence over performance targets
- lack of time

- ✓ **Work relationships**:-Many jobs demand regular contact with other people at work. Poor or unsupportive relationships with colleagues and/or supervisors can be a potential source of pressure. In addition, pressure can occur if individuals feel isolated or unfairly treated.

Poor work relationships can be a result of:

- aggressive management style
- lack of support from others
- isolation at work
- aversive behaviour, e.g. bullying and harassment
- lack of understanding and leadership
- manager forever finding fault
- others not pulling their weight
- others take credit for personal achievements
- poor relationships with colleagues

✓ **Job security:**-This is the extent to which lack of job security and job changes are a source of pressure, for example:

- job insecurity
- lack of job permanence, e.g. temporary/fixed term contracts
- future job change
- fear of skill redundancy

✓ **Work-life balance:**-The demands of work have the potential to spill over and affect personal and home life and so put a strain on relationships outside work, for example:

- long hours: being expected to or having to work additional hours at home to the detriment of personal, partner and family relationships
- over-demanding and inflexible work schedules
- unsocial hours
- excessive travel time
- work interfering with home/personal life

✓ **Resources and communication:**-To perform a job effectively, individuals need to feel that they have appropriate training, equipment and resources. They also need to feel that they are adequately informed and that they are valued. Stress may result from lack of:

- ✓ information about what is going on in the organisation
- ✓ feedback on performance
- ✓ adequate training to do the job
- ✓ equipment/resources to do the job
- ✓ **Pays and benefits:**-The financial rewards associated with a job are important in terms of lifestyle. They are also often perceived to be an indication of an individual's worth and value to the organisation. Although financial reward may not be a prime motivator, it could become a factor if there are other negative aspects of the job.
- ✓ **Attitudes and perceptions:**- How you view the world or a particular situation can determine whether it causes stress. For example, if your television set is stolen and you

take the attitude, "It's OK, my insurance company will pay for a new one," you'll be far less stressed than if you think, "My TV is gone and I'll never get it back! What if the thieves come back to my house to steal again?" Similarly, people who feel like they're doing a good job at work will be less stressed out by a big upcoming project than those who worry that they are incompetent

✓ **Aspects of the job:**-These are potential sources of stress that relate to the fundamental nature of the job itself. Factors such as the physical working conditions, type of tasks and the amount of satisfaction derived from the job.

- job is unlikely to change in the next 5–10 years
- poor physical working conditions
- fear of physical violence
- work performance closely monitored
- organisation changes for change's sake
- dull and repetitive work
- dealing with difficult customers/clients
- lack of enjoyment of job

Consequences of stress

✓ **Psychological Disorders:**-Psychosomatic disorders are a type of psychological disorder. They are physical problems with a psychological cause. For example, a person who is extremely anxious about public speaking might feel extremely nauseated or may find themselves unable to speak at all when faced with the prospect of presenting in front of a group. Since stress of this type is often difficult to notice, managers would benefit from carefully monitoring employee behaviour for indications of discomfort or stress.

✓ **Medical Illnesses:**-Physiological reactions to stress can have a long-term impact on physical health. In fact, stress is one of the leading precursors to long-term health issues. Backaches, stroke, heart disease, and peptic ulcers are just a few physical ailments

that can arise when a person is under too much stress.

- ✓ **Behavioural Problems:**-A person can also exhibit behavioural problems when under stress, such as aggression, substance abuse, absenteeism, poor decision making, lack of creativity, or even sabotage. A stressed worker may neglect their duties, impeding workflows and processes so that the broader organization slows down and loses time and money. Managers should keep an eye out for such behaviours as possible indicators of workplace stress.
- ✓ **Organizational Effects of Stress:**-Stress in the workplace can be, so to speak, "contagious"—low job satisfaction is often something employees will discuss with one another. If stress is not noted and addressed by management early on, team dynamics can erode, hurting the social and cultural synergies present in the organization. Ultimately, the aggressive mentality will be difficult to remedy. Managers are in a unique position when it comes to workplace stress. As they are responsible for setting the pace, assigning tasks, and fostering the social customs that govern the work group, management must be aware of the repercussions of mismanaging and inducing stress. Managers should consistently discuss job satisfaction and professional and personal health with each of their subordinates one on one.
- ✓ **Health Effects:**-Stress causes a variety of health problems, including high blood pressure, upset stomach, ulcers, headaches, palpitations, fatigue, sweating, weight changes, diarrhea, nausea, dizziness, dry mouth, appetite changes, sexual problems, stiff neck, muscle aches and back pain. If you are stressed, you might feel tired all the time, no matter how much you sleep, or you might have trouble sleeping at night. Poor emotional health can weaken your body's immune system, making you more likely to contract colds and other infections. These health problems can increase work absenteeism, usage of health insurance and work-related accidents.
- ✓ **Poor Performance:**-Stress also can affect your ability to perform your job well. Stress can make it difficult to concentrate on complex problems or issues, and it might affect memory. You might neglect to complete certain important tasks or forget to perform a key part of a procedure. If you don't feel as if management supports or empowers you, you might feel that no reason exists to do your best work. Stress can lead to feelings of negativity, lack of enthusiasm and apathy. When you experience these feelings, you might no longer care about doing a good job.
- ✓ **Unmet Expectations and Deadlines:**-If you feel overwhelmed and exhausted, then meeting expectations or deadlines can be difficult. The effects of stress on your cognitive abilities can affect your ability to prioritize, and it can be difficult to decide which project should take priority. Feeling that you have no control or input into your work also can affect your ability to complete tasks in a timely manner. Workers are less likely to experience work stress when they have more control over their work, have more control over the way they do their work and participate more in decisions that concern their jobs.
- ✓ **Turnover:**-When stress makes working for a company an unpleasant experience, employees begin to look for new jobs or consider retirement. The loss of experienced employees can cause decreases in production and increases in costs associated with recruiting, hiring and training new workers. A high turnover rate also can make replacing stressed employees difficult for a company. Recruiting new employees can be challenging if prospective employees hear

that the company's working environment is stressful.

Coping strategies for stress

Two different coping strategies

✓ **Problem-focused strategy**

This strategy relies on using active ways to directly tackle the situation that caused the stress: you must concentrate on the problem. Here are some examples:

1. Analyze the situation
e.g. Pay attention, avoid taking on more responsibility than you can manage.
2. Work harder
e.g. Stay up all night to study for an exam
3. Apply what you have already learned to your daily life.
e.g. You lose your job for the second time - you now know the steps to apply for a new job
4. Talk to a person that has a direct impact on the situation
e.g. Talk directly to your boss to ask for an extension to the project that is due in one week.

✓ **Emotion-focused strategy**

Emotion-focused coping strategies are used to handle feelings of distress, rather than the actual problem situation. You focus on your emotions:

1. Brood
e.g. you accept new tasks instead of saying "no", but you keep complaining and saying it is unfair.
2. Imagine/Magic thinking
e.g. You dream about a better financial situation.
3. Avoid/Deny
e.g. You avoid everything that is related to this situation or you take drugs and/or alcohol to escape from this situation.
4. Blame
e.g. You blame yourself or others for the situation.

5. Social support
e.g. You talk to your best friend about your concerns.

Stress management strategy at individual level

- ✓ **Get moving:-**Physical activity plays a key role in reducing and preventing the effects of stress, but you don't have to be an athlete or spend hours in a gym to experience the benefits. Just about any form of physical activity can help relieve stress and burn away anger, tension, and frustration. Exercise releases endorphins that boost your mood and make you feel good, and it can also serve as a valuable distraction to your daily worries. While the maximum benefit comes from exercising for 30 minutes or more, you can start small and build up your fitness level gradually. Short, 10-minute bursts of activity that elevate your heart rate and make you break out into a sweat can help to relieve stress and give you more energy and optimism. Even very small activities can add up over the course of a day. The first step is to get yourself up and moving. Here are a few easy ways:

- Put on some music and dance around
 - Take your dog for a walk
 - Walk or cycle to the grocery store
 - Use the stairs at home or work rather than an elevator
 - Park your car in the farthest spot in the lot and walk the rest of the way
 - Pair up with an exercise partner and encourage each other as you workout
- ✓ Play ping-pong or an activity-based video game with your kids

Managing stress with regular exercise:-Once you're in the habit of being physically active, try to incorporate regular exercise into your daily schedule. Activities that are continuous and rhythmic—and require moving both your arms and your legs—are especially effective at relieving stress. Walking, running, swimming, dancing, cycling, tai chi, and aerobic classes are good choices. Pick an activity you enjoy,

so you're more likely to stick with it. Instead of continuing to focus on your thoughts while you exercise, make a conscious effort to focus on your body and the physical (and sometimes emotional) sensations you experience as you're moving. Adding this mindfulness element to your exercise routine will help you break out of the cycle of negative thoughts that often accompanies overwhelming stress. Focus on coordinating your breathing with your movements, for example, or notice how the air or sunlight feels on your skin. Getting out of your head and paying attention to how your body feels is also the surest way to avoid picking up an injury. When you've exercised, you'll likely find it easier to put other stress management techniques to use, including reaching out to others and engaging socially

✓ **Engage socially:**- Social engagement is the quickest, most efficient way to rein in stress and avoid overreacting to internal or external events that you perceive as threatening. There is nothing more calming to your nervous system than communicating with another human being who makes you feel safe and understood. This experience of safety—as perceived by your nervous system—results from nonverbal cues that you hear, see and feel. The inner ear, face, heart, and stomach are wired together in the brain, so socially interacting with another person face-to-face—making eye contact, listening in an attentive way, talking—can quickly calm you down and put the brakes on defensive stress responses like “fight-or-flight.” It can also release hormones that reduce stress, even if you're unable to alter the stressful situation itself. Of course, it's not always realistic to have a pal close by to lean on when you feel overwhelmed by stress, but by building and maintaining a network of close friends you can improve your resiliency to life's stressors. On the flip side, the more lonely and isolated you are, the greater your vulnerability to stress. Reach out to family and friends and connect regularly in person. The people you talk to don't have to be able to fix your stress; they just need to be good listeners. Opening up is not a sign of weakness and it won't make you a burden to others. In fact, most friends will be flattered that you trust them enough to confide in them, and it will only strengthen your bond. And remember, it's never too late to build new friendships and improve your support network.

Reach out and build relationships

- Reach out to a colleague at work
- Help someone else by volunteering
- Have lunch or coffee with a friend
- Ask a loved one to check in with you regularly

- Accompany someone to the movies or a concert
 - Call or email an old friend
 - Go for a walk with a workout buddy
 - Schedule a weekly dinner date
 - Meet new people by taking a class or joining a club
 - Confide in a clergy member, teacher, or sports coach
- ✓ **Avoid unnecessary stress:**-While stress is an automatic response from your nervous system, some stressors arise at predictable times—your commute to work, a meeting with your boss, or family gatherings, for example. When handling such predictable stressors, you can either change the situation or change your reaction. When deciding which option to choose in any given scenario, it's helpful to think of the four A's: avoid, alter, adapt, or accept.
- ✓ **Avoid the stressor:**-It's not healthy to avoid a stressful situation that needs to be addressed, but you may be surprised by the number of stressors in your life that you can eliminate.
- Learn how to say “no” – Know your limits and stick to them. Whether in your personal or professional life, taking on more than you can handle is a sure-fire recipe for stress. Distinguish between the “shoulds” and the “musts” and, when possible, say “no” to taking on too much.
 - Avoid people who stress you out – If someone consistently causes stress in your life, limit the amount of time you spend with that person, or end the relationship.
 - Take control of your environment – If the evening news makes you anxious, turn off the TV. If traffic makes you tense, take a longer but less-travelled route. If going to the market is an unpleasant chore, do your grocery shopping online.
- ✓ **Alter the situation:**-If you can't avoid a stressful situation, try to alter it. Often, this involves changing the way you communicate and operate in your daily life.
- Express your feelings instead of bottling them up. If something or someone is bothering you, be more assertive and communicate your concerns in an open and respectful way. If you've got an exam to study for and your chatty roommate just got home, say up front that you only have five minutes to talk. If you don't voice your feelings, resentment will build and the stress will increase.
- Be willing to compromise. When you ask someone to change their behaviour, be willing to do the same. If you both are willing to bend at least a little, you'll have a good chance of finding a happy middle ground.
 - Manage your time better. Poor time management can cause a lot of stress. But if you plan ahead and make sure you don't overextend yourself, you'll find it easier to stay calm and focused.
- ✓ **Adapt to the stressor:**-How you think can have a profound effect on your stress levels. Each time you think a negative thought about yourself, your body reacts as if it were in the throes of a tension-filled situation. Regain your sense of control by changing your expectations and attitude to stressful situations.
- Reframe problems. Try to view stressful situations from a more positive perspective. Rather than fuming about a traffic jam, look at it as an opportunity to pause and regroup, listen to your favorite radio station, or enjoy some alone time.
 - Look at the big picture. Take perspective of the stressful situation. Ask yourself how important it will be in the long run. Will it matter in a month? A year? Is it really worth getting upset over? If the answer is no, focus your time and energy elsewhere.
 - Adjust your standards. Perfectionism is a major source of avoidable stress. Stop setting yourself up for failure by demanding perfection. Set reasonable standards for yourself and others, and learn to be okay with “good enough.”
- ✓ **Accept the things you can't change:**-Many sources of stress are unavoidable. You can't prevent or change stressors, such as the death of a loved one, a serious illness, or a

national recession. In such cases, the best way to cope with stress is to accept things as they are. Acceptance may be difficult, but in the long run, it's easier than railing against a situation you can't change.

- Don't try to control the uncontrollable. Many things in life are beyond our control—particularly the behavior of other people. Rather than stressing out over them, focus on the things you can control such as the way you choose to react to problems.
 - Look for the upside. When facing major challenges, try to look at them as opportunities for personal growth. If your own poor choices contributed to a stressful situation, reflect on them and learn from your mistakes.
 - Learn to forgive. Accept the fact that we live in an imperfect world and that people make mistakes. Let go of anger and resentments. Free yourself from negative energy by forgiving and moving on.
- ✓ **Make time for fun and relaxation:-** Beyond a take-charge approach and a positive attitude, you can reduce stress in your life by nurturing yourself. If you regularly make time for fun and relaxation, you'll be in a better place to handle life's stressors.
- ✓ **Adopt a healthy lifestyle :-**In addition to regular exercise, there are other healthy lifestyle choices that can increase your resistance to stress.
- Eat a healthy diet. Well-nourished bodies are better prepared to cope with stress, so be mindful of what you eat. Start your day right with breakfast, and keep your energy up and your mind clear with balanced, nutritious meals throughout the day.
 - Reduce caffeine and sugar. The temporary "highs" caffeine and sugar provide often end in with a crash in mood and energy. By reducing the amount of coffee, soft drinks, chocolate, and sugar snacks in your diet, you'll feel more relaxed and you'll sleep better.
 - Avoid alcohol, cigarettes, and drugs. Self-medicating with alcohol or drugs may provide an easy escape from stress, but the relief is only

temporary. Don't avoid or mask the issue at hand; deal with problems head on and with a clear mind.

- Get enough sleep. Adequate sleep fuels your mind, as well as your body. Feeling tired will increase your stress because it may cause you to think irrationally.
- Humour. Pointing out the amusing aspects of the problem at hand, or "positive reframing," is thought to help deal with small failures.
- Seeking support. Asking for help, or finding emotional support from family members or friends, can be an effective way of maintaining emotional health during a stressful period.
- Problem-solving. As described above, problem solving is an instrumental coping mechanism that aims to locate the source of the problem and determine solutions. This coping mechanism is often helpful in work situations.
- Relaxation. Engaging in relaxing activities, or practicing calming techniques, can help to manage stress and improve overall coping.
- Physical recreation. Regular exercise, such as running, or team sports, is a good way to handle the stress of given situation. This may involve yoga, meditating, progressive muscle relaxation, among other techniques of relaxation.
- Adjusting expectations. Anticipating various outcomes to scenarios in life may assist in preparing for the stress associated with any given change or event.
- Denial. Avoidance of the issue altogether may lead to denying that a problem even exists. Denial is usually maintained by distractions, such as excessive alcohol consumption, overworking, or sleeping more than usual.
- Self-blame. Internalizing the issue, and blaming oneself (beyond just taking responsibility for one's actions), leads to low-self esteem and sometimes depression.
- Venting. An externalizing coping technique, venting is the outward expression of emotions, usually in the company of friends or family. In moderation it can be healthy; however, ruminating on the negative can lead to strained relationships over time.

Managing stress at organizational level

Managers of organizations have a dual perspective of stress. They need to be aware of their own stress levels, as well as those of their subordinates. Most of the literature focuses on ways of reducing stress.

1. Uncertainty can lead to distress, but so can certainty or over control.
2. Pressure can lead to distress, but so can limbo or lack of contact.
3. Responsibility can lead to distress, but so can lack of responsibility or insignificance.
4. Performance evaluation can lead to distress, but so can lack of feedback concerning performance.
5. Role ambiguity can lead to distress, but so can job descriptions that constrain individuality.

- ✓ **The role of management** becomes one of maintaining an appropriate level of stress by providing an optimal environment, and "by doing a good job in areas such as performance planning, role analysis, work redesign/job enrichment, continuing feedback, ecological considerations, and interpersonal skills training." (p. 709)

There are **essentially three strategies** for dealing with stress in organizations (Jick and Payne, 1980): 1) treat the symptoms, 2) change the person, and 3) remove the cause of the stress. When a person is already suffering from the effects of stress, the first priority is to treat the symptoms. This includes both the identification of those suffering from excessive stress, as well as providing health-care and psychological counseling services. The second approach is to help individuals build stress management skills to make them less vulnerable to its effects. Examples would be teaching employees time management and relaxation techniques, or suggesting changes to one's diet or exercise. The third approach is to eliminate or reduce the environmental

situation that is creating the stress. This would involve reducing environmental stressors such as noise and pollution, or modifying production schedules and workloads.

- ✓ Many modern organizations view the management of stress as a personal matter. An effort to monitor employee stress levels would be considered an invasion of privacy. However, Lawless (1991) found that nine out of ten employees felt that it was the employers responsibility to reduce worker stress and provide a health plan that covers stress illnesses. She emphasized that "employees have no doubt that stress-related illnesses and disability should be taken seriously. Employees expect substantive action by their employer and hold their employer financially responsible for the consequences of job stress
- ✓ Lawless (1991) reported that four **different employer programs** were effective in reducing job burn out, where the percent of people reporting burn out was reduced by half. Furthermore, when these programs were offered, there were also half as many stress related illnesses. They are: 1) supportive work and family policies, 2) effective management communication, 3) health insurance coverage for mental illness and chemical dependency, and 4) flexible scheduling of work hours. This study also reported that the success rate for treating stress related disabilities was considerably less than the average for all disabilities, and that the average cost to treat stress related conditions was \$1,925 (both successful and unsuccessful).
- ✓ Managers can take active steps to minimize undesirable stress in themselves and their subordinates. Williams and Huber (1986) suggest five managerial actions that can be used to reduce stress in workers.
 1. Clarifying task assignments, responsibility, authority, and criteria for performance evaluation.
 2. Introducing consideration for people into one's leadership style.

3. Delegating more effectively and increasing individual autonomy where the situation warrants it.
4. Clarifying goals and decision criteria.
5. Setting and enforcing policies for mandatory vacations and reasonable working hours.
- ✓ **Establishing one's priorities** (i.e., value clarification) is an important step in the reduction of stress. The demands of many managerial positions cause the neglect of other areas of one's life, such as family, friends, recreation, and religion. This neglect creates stress, which in turn affects job performance and health. Value clarification is linked to time management, since we generally allocate our time according to our priorities. By setting personal priorities, managers and subordinates can reduce this source of stress. It is typically the first step in any stress reduction program.
 - ✓ Many sources of stress in organizations cannot be changed. These might include situations like a prolonged recessionary period, new competitors, or an unanticipated crisis. Organizational members generally have little control over these kinds of stressors, and they can create extended periods of high-stress situations. People who adjust to these stressors generally use a form of perceptual adaptation, where they modify the way in which they perceive the situation.
 - ✓ Other sources of stress in organizations can be changed. One particularly effective way for managers to minimize employee stress is to clarify ambiguities, such as job assignments and responsibilities. (Arnold and Feldman, 1986) Employee stress is directly related to the amount of uncertainty in their tasks, expectations, and roles. Managers can encourage employees to search for more information when they are given unfamiliar tasks, or when they are uncertain of their roles. Another way to reduce employee stress is to incorporate time management techniques, as well as setting realistic time schedules for the completion of projects.
 - ✓ There are many other successful ways of dealing with stress. These include stress reduction workshops, tranquilizers, biofeedback, meditation, self-hypnosis, and a variety of other techniques designed to relax an individual. Programs that teach tolerance for ambiguity often report positive effects. One of the most promising is a health maintenance program that stresses the necessity of proper diet, exercise and sleep.
 - ✓ Social support systems seem to be extremely effective in preventing or relieving the deleterious effects of stress. Friends and family can provide a nurturing environment that builds self-esteem, and makes one less susceptible to stress. One study found that government white-collar workers who received support from their supervisors, peers, and subordinates experienced fewer physical symptoms of stress. (Katz and Kahn, 1978) Managers can create nurturing and supportive environments to help minimize job-related stress.
 - ✓ Albrecht (1979) hypothesized that there are eight relatively "universal" factors that come into play when evaluating the balance between stress and reward (job satisfaction) in organizations. These are: 1) workload, 2) physical variables, 3) job status, 4) accountability, 5) task variety, 6) human contact, 7) physical challenge, and 8) mental challenge. Each individual has a "comfort zone" for the eight factors. The goal of management is to find the "comfort zone" for each employee that results in optimal performance without producing undesirable side effects. Albrecht's taxonomy is important because it recognizes the necessity of balance. For example, Taylorism stresses the ideas of maximum output, minimal task variety, and continuous supervision. The predicted effect of these imbalances would be stress and a reduction in job satisfaction. Perhaps many of today's organizational problems with worker stress are the result of the effective application of Taylorism.
 - ✓ **Job engineering and job redesign** are recent concepts that attempt to minimize job-related stress. Job engineering takes into account the values and needs of the worker, as well as the production objectives of the

organization. (Albrecht, 1979) It involves a six-step cyclical process, beginning with defining the job objectives. This initial step makes statements about "accomplishing something of recognized value." (p. 159) The second step is to define the job conditions. This step specifies the physical, social, and psychological characteristics of the job. The third step is to define the job processes, equipment, and materials. Processes are often presented in a flow chart to show the sequence of operations. The fourth step is to re-evaluate the design from the perspective of the worker, the goal being to achieve a balance between job satisfaction and performance. The fifth step is to test the job design. Employees often experience problems not anticipated by job engineers. The evaluation should look at the "total combination of person, equipment, materials, processes, and surroundings as an integrated whole, and you must measure both productivity and employee satisfaction before you can say the job is well designed. The sixth step involves the ongoing re-evaluation and redesign of the job. Employee attitudes and values change, and new technology provides alternatives to the status quo. Job engineering attempts to be sensitive to these changes, and to modify job descriptions as necessary.

- ✓ Sevelius (1986) describes his experience **implementing a wellness education program** at a large manufacturing plant. Several successful techniques were used. Booklets on specific health subjects were placed in "Take one" bins conveniently located around the plant. The booklets were positively received and increased employees' awareness and knowledge. Campaigns were undertaken to highlight the specific themes in the booklets. Group lectures were tried and found to be ineffective because less than ten percent of the employees attended them. In addition, the lectures were video taped, but employees did not take the time to view them. Medical examinations generally did not reveal hidden illnesses, however, they were found to be of considerable value because they gave employees the opportunity of individual medical counseling. Sevelius suggests that peer

support systems might also be successful in the workplace.

- ✓ **Track your stressors.** Keep a journal for a week or two to identify which situations create the most stress and how you respond to them. Record your thoughts, feelings and information about the environment, including the people and circumstances involved, the physical setting and how you reacted. Did you raise your voice? Get a snack from the vending machine? Go for a walk? Taking notes can help you find patterns among your stressors and your reactions to them.
- ✓ **Develop healthy responses.** Instead of attempting to fight stress with fast food or alcohol, do your best to make healthy choices when you feel the tension rise. Exercise is a great stress-buster. Yoga can be an excellent choice, but any form of physical activity is beneficial. Also make time for hobbies and favorite activities. Whether it's reading a novel, going to concerts or playing games with your family, make sure to set aside time for the things that bring you pleasure. Getting enough good-quality sleep is also important for effective stress management. Build healthy sleep habits by limiting your caffeine intake late in the day and minimizing stimulating activities, such as computer and television use, at night.
- ✓ **Establish boundaries.** In today's digital world, it's easy to feel pressure to be available 24 hours a day. Establish some work-life boundaries for yourself. That might mean making a rule not to check email from home in the evening, or not answering the phone during dinner. Although people have different preferences when it comes to how much they blend their work and home life, creating some clear boundaries between these realms can reduce the potential for work-life conflict and the stress that goes with it.
- ✓ **Take time to recharge.** To avoid the negative effects of chronic stress and burnout, we need time to replenish and return to our pre-stress level of functioning. This recovery process requires "switching off" from work by having periods of time when you are neither engaging in work-

related activities, nor thinking about work. That's why it's critical that you disconnect from time to time, in a way that fits your needs and preferences. Don't let your vacation days go to waste. When possible, take time off to relax and unwind, so you come back to work feeling reinvigorated and ready to perform at your best. When you're not able to take time off, get a quick boost by turning off your smartphone and focusing your attention on non-work activities for a while.

- ✓ **Learn how to relax.** Techniques such as meditation, deep breathing exercises and mindfulness (a state in which you actively observe present experiences and thoughts without judging them) can help melt away stress. Start by taking a few minutes each day to focus on a simple activity like breathing, walking or enjoying a meal. The skill of being able to focus purposefully on a single activity without distraction will get stronger with practice and you'll find that you can apply it to many different aspects of your life.
- ✓ **Talk to your supervisor.** Healthy employees are typically more productive, so your boss has an incentive to create a work environment that promotes employee well-being. Start by having an open conversation with your supervisor. The purpose of this isn't to lay out a list of complaints, but rather to come up with an effective plan for managing the stressors you've identified, so you can perform at your best on the job. While some parts of the plan may be designed to help you improve your skills in areas such as time management, other elements might include identifying employer-sponsored wellness resources you can tap into, clarifying what's expected of you, getting necessary resources or support from colleagues, enriching your job to include more challenging or meaningful tasks, or making changes to your physical workspace to make it more comfortable and reduce strain.
- ✓ **Get some support.** Accepting help from trusted friends and family members can improve your ability to manage stress. Your employer may also have stress management resources available through an employee

assistance program (EAP), including online information, available counselling and referral to mental health professionals, if needed. If you continue to feel overwhelmed by work stress, you may want to talk to a psychologist, who can help you better manage stress and change unhealthy behaviour

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