



Stressors and Indicators for Measuring Professional Stress in Organizations

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Abstract: The article discusses the diagnosis of stressors and indicators affecting organizational behaviors of employees. Attention is focused on describing the various types of stressors and their effects on the physical and psychological condition of staff. The article also gives an overview of the main research work on measuring professional stress in organizations.

Keywords: stressors, professional stress, management.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Stressors are external influences (of the environment) that have negative effects on the behavior of individuals. This happens when during a particular situation (called stressful) individuals react to external influences (within the organization). On their work place employees suffer from constant stress which affects their health and mental state. This requires determining the types of stressors and the indicators for the measurement of professional stress in organizations.

II. THESIS

In organizations it is possible to identify the following stressors affecting people's behavior [10,12].

1. *Conditional stressors.* They refer to the physiological conditions of individuals and the negative impact of the work environment. People feel physically exhausted from their work and this often leads to negative situations and accidents. This is due to lack of adequate physical fitness necessary for the fulfillment of certain tasks. The stress symptoms, affecting individuals are noise, vibrations, heat, chemical or toxic substances, etc.

2. *Job stressors.* These are stressors occurring as a result of employees' attitudes to performing high-responsibility jobs requiring adequate reactions to work-related situations. These stressors affect the emotional state of individuals since they call for quick reactions to problem situations. They cause psychological stress because the job implies moral and professional responsibility for performing assigned tasks.

The symptoms include exhaustion, frustration, insomnia, etc.

3. *Role stressors* appear when there is no clear understanding about the roles, rights and responsibilities of the employees. These stressors may cause conflicts which will increase the work tension between managers and their associates (especially in team work). In addition, role stressors affect productivity and may lead to decreased staff motivation for participation in various projects and programs. This creates chaos which reveals the lack of adequate evaluation as of employees' roles within organizations. The symptoms of these stressors are annoyance, anger, etc.

4. *Social stressors* are based on the interpersonal relations occurring during performing job-related tasks. They lead to tensions among the different participants in the management process (managers and associates). These stressors are negative since they create opportunities for personal attacks and quarrels which affect the personal and professional productivity of employees. When there are such stressors individuals do not feel satisfied with their work, do not want to communicate with co-workers and avoid them (when this is possible). The symptoms associated with these stressors are guilt, self – criticism, anxiety caused by colleagues' opinion, etc.

5. *Responsibility-related stressors.* They affect staff's behavior when job responsibilities have been changed or when new programs, projects or technologies are being implemented by the organization. They are negative because individuals have to adapt to the new requirements of the working process but do not want to do so or the adaptation process is problematic for individuals. The symptoms involve fear, hatred, malice and others.

6. *Blocked-career stressors.* These stressors are related to the above mentioned ones but unlike them affect the career prospects of staff. They are negative for employees especially when they feel their career development is blocked. If these individuals are not satisfied with their status in the organization, this will make them feel subdued and low-spirited. The symptoms of these stressors are lack of willingness for work, melancholy, desperation, etc.

In research literature it is possible to find some indicators *for measuring stress effects*. They are used for analyzing the relationship between theoretical research and their practical implications. They also determine the analysis of the empirical data showing the levels of organizational stress and their effects on *human behavior*. A considerable part of the approaches for

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measuring the organizational stress indicators are based on modern concepts of the “*tension – environment*” model where the analysis is focused on assessment of stressors and who they are perceived by the human factor (the effects of stress). Credits for the development of this model have to be paid to *R. Lazarus, S. Folkman, J. McGrath, J. French, D. Caplan, R van Harrison, W. Rodgers, S. Cobb, R. Kahn, T. Cox, C. Mackay, among others.*

The indicators for measuring stress are important both for ignoring the conditions causing job dissatisfaction and identifying the stress situations determining employees’ reactions.

During the 1980s *W. Gmelch and B. Swent* [3,4] developed an “*index for measuring the effect of administrative stress*” (ASI). They determined four interrelated categories for measuring the stressors of organizational environments:

- Related to roles;
- Related to work and determining the boundaries of stress;
- Related to conflicts in the organization;
- The methods for their overcoming (through persuasion and negotiations).

Later, during the 1990s *Gmelch and Swent*, determined four cyclical stages for measuring stress effects:

- Stress reasons;
- Stress perception by administrators/managers;
- Choice of actions to be undertaken by administrators/managers;
- Stress consequences.

To measure professional stress, *S. Osipow and A. Spokane* [7] offer an indicator which encompasses the negative factors of the environment, the psychological reactions of individuals and the directions for eliminating stress. They called it “*an indicator for diagnosing professional stress*” (OSI) and according to them, stress occurs on the following levels[8]:

- professional;
- psychological;
- interpersonal;
- physiological.

The specific thing about this indicator is the fact that stressors are grouped into different categories so that organizational stress is measured. Three of these categories have a priority importance:

- the gap between the perceptions of individuals and stress effects;
- the possibilities for climbing the corporate ladder in the organization;
- the responsibilities employees take on the work place.

These categories are an important component of *Osipow and Spokane* indicator because they reveal the level of stress and the strain on the work place. People are afraid that they would not react adequately to stressors caused by their external (work) environment.

The second dimension shows that career development may depend on employees’ reaction to

stressors. The idea is that talent and personal qualities are not constant but have to be developed and improved continuously. People could possess the necessary competences but unless they are mentally unstable and cannot react adequately to stress situations, these competences are useless. They would not be able to show their potential and cope with assigned tasks.

The third aspect is connected with responsibilities and professional activities. People who are susceptible to stress and could not manage workloads find it difficult to take responsibilities. They even avoid or try to free themselves from them. Later *Osipow* [9] developed further the indicator pointing out that its elements are instrumental for the successful measurement of the organizational stress. The key indicator for determining stressor effects is the differentiation between the psychological moment of expected and actually experienced stress.

Studying a number of publications, *S. Jackson and R. Schuler* [5] measure the level of organizational stress by using the so called “*indicator of conflict situations and dissatisfaction*” (ICA). The relations which determine the stress levels are formed on the basis of research done by other authors and are grouped in the following manner [5]:

1. organizational context;
2. human factor;
3. emotional reactions;
4. behavioral reactions.

The main conclusions reached are that stress has negative effects on individuals and their reactions with reference to the above mentioned factors. This, in turn, influences organizations and their performance since stressed people cannot fulfill effectively professional tasks.

An interesting approach for analyzing and assessment of organizational stress is offered by *C. Cooper, S. Sloan and S. Williams* [1]. They develop the so called “*indicator for measuring organizational stress*” (OSI). Its distinctive feature is the fact that it allows the measurement of those components which occur and are revealed in stressful situations. The indicator is based on numerous empirical studies. It is developed after surveying many companies and its authors used their research findings to make conclusions and suggestions about the indicator’s use. The researchers also outline different research techniques for studying organizational stress such as questionnaires, interviews, etc. In fact, they developed several types of questionnaires grouped in six categories. These instruments use the Likert scale for marking the included items. They have been administered in Great Britain with more than one thousand respondents – mainly male representatives of the middle and high levels of management. After the study the collected data has been summarized and the factors causing organizational stress have been analyzed.

In *Cooper, Sloan and Williams* approach the focus of attention are the different aspects of measuring organizational stress. The indicator encompasses three categories with their separate components which,



according to the authors are *universal*. The categories are presented in the following order [1]:

- stressors (level of environment stress);
- personal perceptions (affect towards environmental stressors);
- ultimate results (effects of stress influences).

These aspects are grouped in *six categories with various scales for measuring organizational stress*. The latter are very broad in scope and this is a prerequisite for complex diagnosing stress - causing components. These categories are as [1]:

1. Job satisfaction;
2. Health condition;
3. Type A behavior;
4. Control of events;
5. Negative influences;
6. Suggestions for coping with stress.

The *Cooper, Sloan u Williams* indicator is often used by organizations to measure stress. Although it is often referred to in various publications, there are many criticisms too. The majority of them are connected with its broad scope which created difficulties to researchers. In addition, the indicator implies many calculations and is time-consuming. Some authors compare it to “...*an over exposed approach for measuring organizational stress which involves very broad spheres in the organization, which requires investments in the use of other more narrowly-focused instruments afterwards*” [6].

According to *P. Dewe* [2], when organizational stress is measured it is necessary to develop a scale which involves the following requirements:

- To be applied in practice;
- To reflect the trends in the social and economic changes;
- To be accurately developed;
- To secure a correspondence among the positive, negative and neutral results (relationships);
- To show the actual state of the conducted experiments;
- To allow for easy and reliable calculation of gathered data.

These requirements are structured by *Dewe* as a thorough study of related research. His ideas underline a significant part of modern concepts for diagnosing stress situations and stress-caused behaviors in company environments.

III. CONCLUSION

Harmful stress is an inevitable factor of work and has negative effects on people's mental and physical state. Ignoring stressors is an act that has a personal meaning for every individual and will depend on their attitude to the environment. Thus, a diagnosis of stress situations should be carried out so that individuals can acquire effective strategies for coping with them.

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