

Stress And Stress Management In Recession**Gaurav Bhargava**Assistant Professor,
Lovely Professional University, Punjab**Neelam Saraswat**Lecturer,
Delhi School of Professional Studies and Research, New Delhi**Aakanksha Singh**Student,
Delhi School of Professional Studies and Research, New Delhi***Abstract***

Stress is very known term for all the human being all over the world. All of us pass through phase of stress in our life. Stress can be caused by many factors such as job insecurity, conflict at workplace, workload, pressure from the boss, family issues, financial problem, etc. Cause can be anything but the consequences of stress can be very harmful if stress is not managed properly.

In this era when we all are facing the phase of global economic meltdown, stress is becoming part of everyone's life. Individuals and organizations are loosing on the front of stress. People are rushing for the help of psychologist. So this paper basically deals with stress in the scenario of global economic meltdown. In this paper, I have tried to develop some strategies to manage stress which can be adopted by individuals and organizations to kill stress before it kills them.

Key Words: *Stress, Global Meltdown, Stress Management, Eustress, Distress.*

We live longer than our forefathers; but we suffer more from a thousand artificial anxieties and cares. They fatigued only the muscles; we exhaust the finer strength of the nerves.

~Edward George Bulwer-Lytton

Corporates all over the world are passing through the most severe economic meltdown of the history. In this period Job insecurity, demand to cut the cost, expectations to increase productivity, pressure to work late hours, sleepless nights, restless days etc.

are common phenomenon related to workplace. And this is giving a way to stress to enter at workplace and to spread its wings on all the levels in organizational hierarchy. In May '08, the Apollo Hospitals Group & the Apollo DKV Insurance company along with the CII conducted survey named The Apollo- CII Corporate Wellness Survey that covered 581 Corporate Organizations touching the lives of 229,494 employees from over 32 cities and towns .The survey covered both the manufacturing and Services Sector. Tata Steel, SAIL, Hindustan Motors, L & T, Pepsico

etc were amongst the 200 Companies that participated from the Manufacturing sector. HCL, NTPC, Tata Consultancy, Tata Tele services, several banks, Wipro, Infosys etc formed a part of the 300 plus services group. This survey identified that physical health and fitness of employees have been improved but economic meltdown has resulted in increased stress at workplace.

Table 1: Stress level in year 2008-09 as comparison to year 1998-99

Item	1998-99 (data in %)	2008-09 (data in %)
Overall stress	39.00	50.52
Home stress	3.40	20.19
Work stress	1.62	19.33
Daily pressures	8.84	16.71

Source: Apollo- CII Corporate Wellness Survey

This table clearly shows that stress at workplace has increased tremendously in the time when the whole world was suffering due to economic slowdown. Also the same survey shows that increased stress resulted in increased alcohol consumption and smoking. Economic slowdown is causing stress and unhealthy life choice. That is why stress is again becoming a buzzword in corporate.

What is Stress

There is no universally accepted definition of stress because all react to stress differently. The term "stress", as it is currently used was coined by Hans

Selye in 1936, who defined it as "the non-specific response of the body to any demand for change". (Hans Selye (1955), "Stress and disease Science") Selye's theories attracted considerable attention and stress soon became a popular area of research. Stress is generally considered as being synonymous with distress and dictionaries defined it as "physical, mental, or emotional strain or tension" or "a condition or feeling experienced when a person perceives that demands exceed the personal and social resources the individual is able to mobilize." Thus, stress was put in a negative light and its positive effects ignored. However, stress can be helpful and good when it motivates people to accomplish more.

For this paper we will consider stress as a dynamic condition in which an individual is confronted with an opportunity, demand, or resources related to what the individual desires or what other's expects from individual and for which the outcome is perceived to be both uncertain and important.

Sources of Stress

"Situations, circumstances or any stimulus that is perceived to be a threat is referred to as a stressor, or that which causes or promotes stress."

-Brian Luke Seaward

Stress in humans results from interactions between persons and their environment that are perceived as straining or exceeding their adaptive capacities and threatening their well-being. The causes of stress are known as stressors and there are literally hundreds of different types of stressors. So here we will consider only workplace stressors in context of current



Figure 1: Sources of Stress (Compiled by Author)

economic slowdown.

Workplace Stressors: These are the factors related to workplace that cause stressful situations for individuals working in organization. These stressors can be classified in to three categories:

Source: Stephen P. Robbins and Timothy A. Judge, (2007), "Organizational Behavior"

These above mentioned three factors are correlated with each other. In combination, these factors cause chronic stress at workplace.

1. Environmental Factors: Environmental uncertainty influences an organization's structure, design, policies and strategies. Thus it influences stress levels among employees of an organization. These factors are:

- **Economical Uncertainty:** Due to this factor, employees become anxious about their job security. In current economic slowdown organizations are fighting for survival and that had caused survival problems for employees within organization.
 - **Technological changes:** Currently organizations are changing their work processes and adopting cost effective technologies. This is pressurizing employees to upgrade their skills and learn at faster pace.
- 2. Organizational Factors:** There are many factors at organizational level that cause stress at workplace. Some of those factors are:
- **Task Demands:** This aspect is related to individual's job. Jobs are becoming more complicated and demanding rigorous work

from employee's side as a result of layoff due to economic slowdown. Thus creating stressful situation for employees.

- **Role demands:** Role demands are related to pressures placed on a person as a function of the particular role he or she plays in the organization. Role overload is experienced when the employee is expected to more than time permits. In current situation middle managers are the employees who are suffering a lot due to role demand aspects. They have pressure to fulfill expectations of top management to fulfill and also they have moral responsibility of employees working under them. So they find them sandwiched between two levels of hierarchy. And thus entangle them in the trap of stress.
 - **Interpersonal Demand:** These are pressures created by other employees. Specially when employee has high need for affiliation and high social need and does not get support from colleagues. In that case poor interpersonal relations can cause stress at workplace. Job insecurity in difficult time creates conflict between colleagues and leads to stress in relations.
- 3. Individual Factors:** Lay off, salary cut are common trend now a days. This is creating financial problems for individuals. Also due to workload, employees need to work long hours and till late night. Thus they are facing work life balance issues. Thus increasing the burden of

stress. (Stephen P. Robbins and Timothy A. Judge, (2007), "Organizational Behavior)

Impact of Stress

Stress is poison. ~Agave Powers

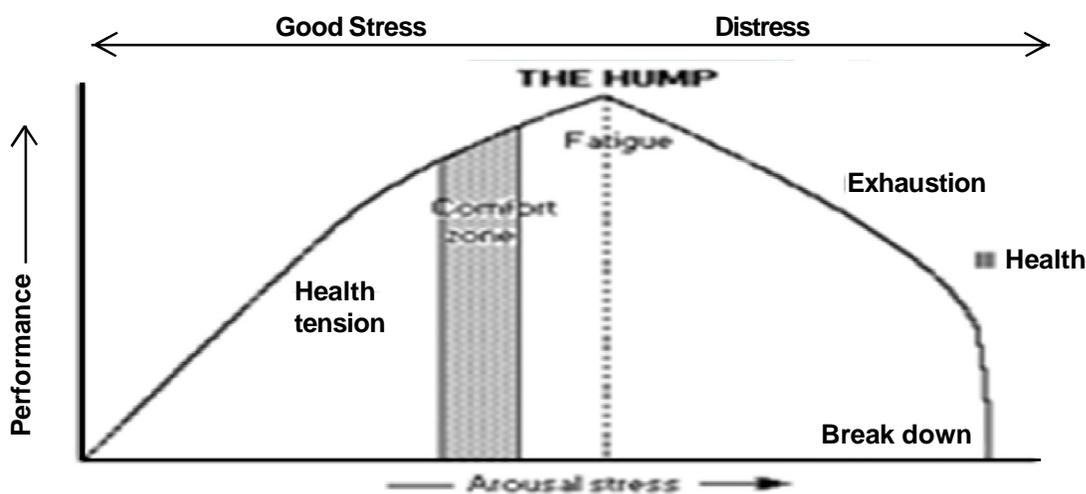
Stress is a mental and physical condition, which affects an individual's productivity, effectiveness, personal health and quality of work. Job stress victims experience lowered quality of work life and job dissatisfaction. The harmful and costly consequences of stress demonstrate the need for strategies to limit stressors within the organization. Organizations that do not adopt strategies to alleviate stress may find their employees looking elsewhere for better opportunities. The impact of stress from overwork, long hours at work and work intensification has had a major and often devastating effect on organizations of developed nations. Japan, where Karoshi - death by overwork, is officially recognized as a fatal illness. America is a country where job stress alone costs American business an estimated \$200 billion annually, the UK £63 billion and Australia \$15 billion. This is the cost for compensation claims, reduced productivity, absenteeism, added health insurance costs and direct medical expenses for stress related illnesses (Savery and Luks, 2001).

Stress can have both positive and negative impact on individuals. Stress, which has good results attached to it, is called Eustress (Positive stress) and stress which is negative in nature is known as Distress (Negative stress). Negative impacts of stress are severe in impact so this study will mainly focus upon negative stress (distress).

Hans Selye (1907-1982), developed a model called the **General Adaptive Syndrome Model** to explain the stress phenomenon and the stress level. This model is very much relevant in today's context as well. This model has four stages. The first stage is the alarm reaction stage, which involves the body's response to or familiarizing itself with the new situation or stressor. The second stage is the resistance stage, which

involves resisting and reacting to the situation, and the third stage is the exhaustion stage, which is the aftermath of resistance. If the resistance stage goes on for a long period, then the person becomes distressed. Fourth stage is Termination-if there is no relief from arousal, then the stress on the physiological system can lead to death.

THE HUMAN FUNCTION CURVE



Adopted from Nioon, P:Practitioner, 1979.

Figure 2: General Adaptive Syndrome Model developed by Hans Selye

Source: <http://www.science.jrank.org/pages/6544/Stress-General-adaptation-syndrome.html>

Stress can attack on an individual from four fronts: Emotional, Mental, and Physical and Social. Stress slowly-slowly weakens individual on every front. Intensity of impact increases as stress increases.

Emotional and Social Impact

Common emotional effects of stress are irritability, impatience, anger, frustration, fear, anxiety, self-doubt, panic, and despondency, feelings of inadequacy,

insecurity, hopelessness, unhappiness, emotional withdrawal and depression. These Stress related emotional aspect can change people's behavior towards one another. Individuals may become less sociable, less caring, more hostile and insensitive towards others. When stress is accompanied by anger they may become less tolerant, fly off the handle easily and provoke rows.

Mental & Physical Impact : Stress tend to raise the level of adrenaline and cortical in the body, which leads to increase in the blood pressure, heart rate, respiration and puts more physical stress on our organs. Blood flow to the muscles, lungs, and brain may increase by 300-400%. In chronic stress, the organ systems of the body do not have the opportunity to return fully to normal levels. Different organs become under or over activated on a long-term basis. In time, these abnormal levels of activity can damage an organ or organ system. Stress has negative effects on the Cardiovascular system, the Gastrointestinal system, the Reproductive system and the Musculoskeletal system.

The physical effects of stress on the brain also include interference with memory and learning. Acute stress interferes with short-term memory, although this effect goes away after the stress is resolved. People who are under severe stress become unable to concentrate; they may become physically inefficient, clumsy, and accident-prone. In the tough situation of global slowdown, impact of stress is increasing the difficulty for the organization. Already many organizations have cut down headcount through lay off. And remaining

employees are going through stress which is having negative impact on their productivity. So it becomes apparent for organizations to kill the stress before it kills the workplace.

Objective of the Paper

There are two basic objective of this paper. They are:

1. To find out the impact of Recession on employees in the form of stress level.
2. To develop measurement of manage stress.

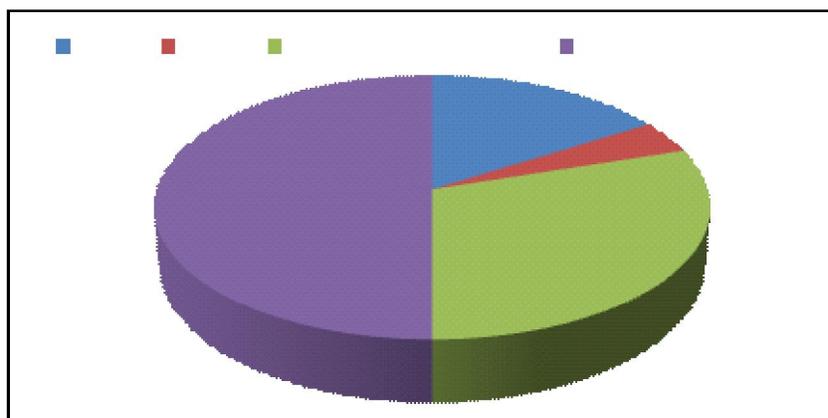
Methodology

Data has been collected with a survey which was done with the help of Questionnaire which consists of 50 questions.

Sample units are the people who were working in the organization during global meltdown. Sampling technique used is Random sampling and Judgmental sampling. Sample size is 50.

Analysis

Q1. Which situation did you experience the most during Recession?

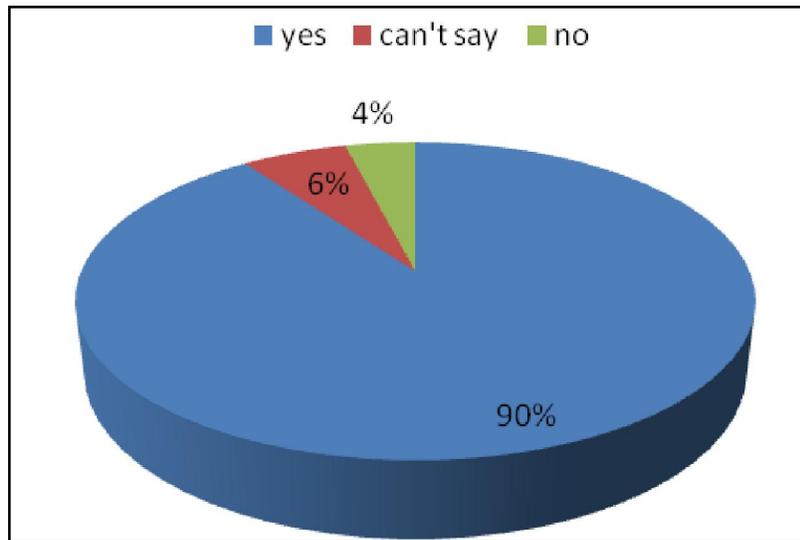


Stress And Stress Management In Recession

This chart indicates that people have experiences increased workload, increased working hours, pay cuts and layoffs during recession. Almost 50% of sample size was overburdened during recession. .

Q2. Did you experience stress because of above mentioned situation?

Situations experienced by people during recession have increased their stress level.



Q3. What kinds of emotions were commonly experienced by you during global meltdown?

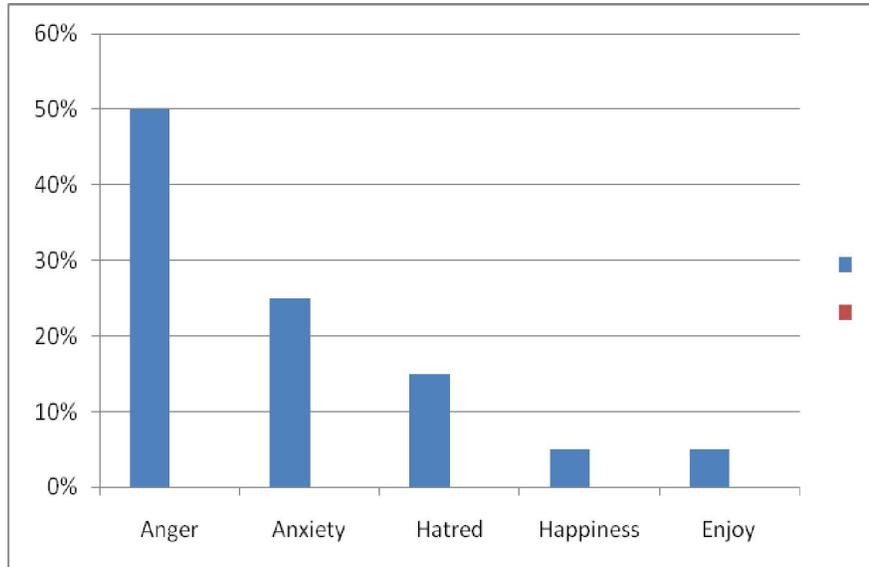


Figure 5

Emotions experienced by people during global meltdown are anger, anxiety, hatred, etc. Only 10%

of sample size was able to enjoy and be happy during recession.

Q4. Did you experience some health issues because of stress?

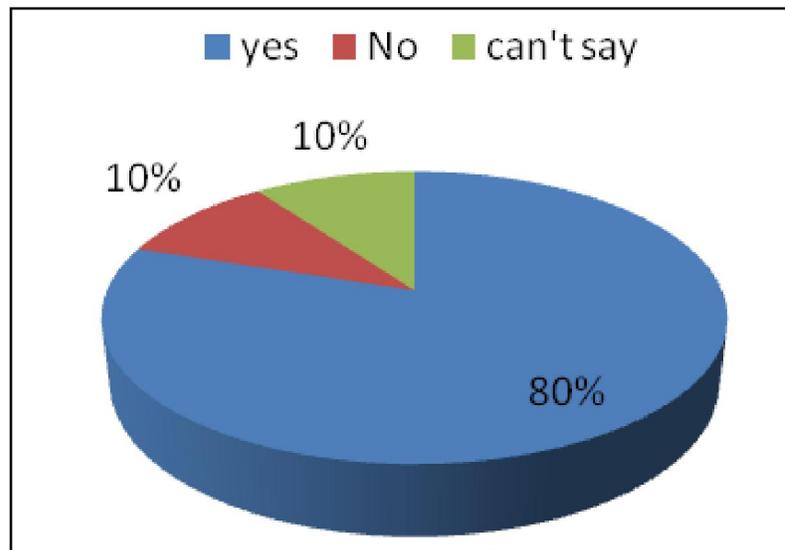


Figure 5

People have faced some health issues because of increases stress during global meltdown.

Q5. Did you have to visit any psychologist because of stress related problems?

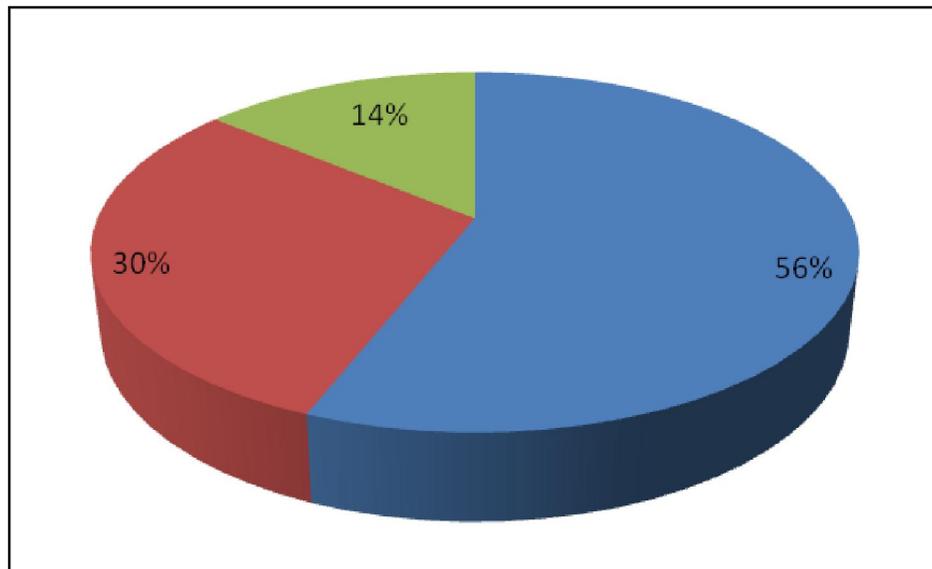


Figure 7

Even people have to take help of shrinks during recession to come out the stress.

Findings

This paper shows that people experienced increased work load during recession and this is the common

Stress And Stress Management In Recession

problem faced by most of the people during recession. Recession has caused increased stress for employees. This paper also identifies that stress had a bad impact on the relationship with the family members and colleagues also. People accepted that they felt negative emotions during Global meltdown. Those negative emotions including anger led on to hot argument with family members. People have faced some health issues also because of increased stress such as hypertension, increased blood pressure, headache, etc. During recession people started restricting social interaction because of stress. Stress had negatively affected their personal life. And all these problems have made them to take help of shrink. The employer had also realized the stress problems caused to employees during recession but they did not take any productive steps to help employees. Findings of this paper also include measures which can be taken up by the employees and employers for management of stress.

Manage the Stress

Give your stress wings and let it fly away.

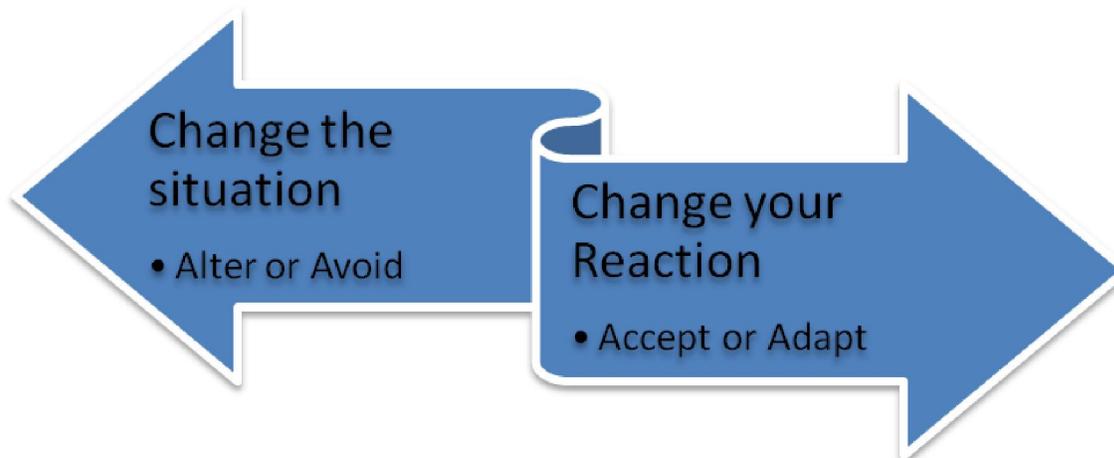
~Carin Hartness

Though stress can't be removed from life permanently, it can be managed with a little effort from our part. Especially in current time when stress keeps on attacking from all the sides it becomes difficult to control it. So it is better to know the ways to manage it. Organizations and employees both the party should take steps to deal with stress.

Efforts From Employee Side

Individual employees must keep on trying on their level to fight against stress. Since everyone has a unique response to stress, there is no "one size fits all" solution to managing it. No single method works for everyone or in every situation, so one need to experiment with different techniques and strategies. Individual should focus upon ways to feel calm and in control.

There are many healthy ways to manage and cope with stress, but they all require change. One can either change the situation or change own reactions. When deciding which option to choose, it's helpful to think of the four A's: avoid, alter, adapt, or accept.



Strategies to Change the Situation

Avoid or Alter Unnecessary Stress: Many attempts can be made on individual level to avoid or accept unnecessary stress at workplace. Some of those are:

Don't be YES man

You should not say yes for extra responsibilities which do not form part of your job responsibilities. You should learn to say no.

Avoid people gives you stress

People who are pessimistic and complaining nature can increase your stress. Avoid company of such people.

Avoid unnecessary issues which does not make you happy

If you get upset over some topic and which is not relevant for you then just avoid that.

Decide your priorities

Analyze your schedule, responsibilities, and daily tasks and prepare priority list

Open your heart and express your feelings

You should not suppress your emotions and feelings. Communicate openly and express your feelings freely. Don't be hard-headed Be ready to compromise and be willing to bend at least a little. Find middle path for things.

Practice assertiveness not aggressiveness

Be assertive and firm in your behavior but do not be too rigid that you seem aggressive in your behavior and invite unnecessary stress for yourself.

Practice time-management

Most of the time people complain about lack of time. This happens because of poor time management. Learn to manage your time to reduce your stress.

Strategiesto Change Your Reaction

Accept or adapt to the situation: You can adapt or accept to stressful situations and regain your sense of control.

Be positive

Instead of crying for the things which cannot be changed by you, you should be optimistic and should try to find opportunities.

Adjust your standards.

Adjust your standard according to the situation for example you can adjust your expectation regarding pay package.

Focus on personal development

In tough times as well, you should keep focusing upon your personal growth. Try to find learning opportunities for yourself.

Understand your limitations

Mnay things are beyond our control. So you should identify your limitations.

Efforts from Employer Side

Human resource is the valuable asset for any organization. Organizations success largely depends upon its employee's capabilities and competencies. So in tough time organization should also take lead to manage stress at workplace. If any organization wants

Stress And Stress Management In Recession

motivated and high-energy employees in their business, then they should create an environment that reduces workplace stress.

Here are some cost effective strategies to minimize stress on the job and give employees opportunities to reduce the effects of unavoidable stress.

1. Employer should provide an attractive and comfortable work environment whenever possible. Pleasant surroundings can do wonders for a person's attitude.
2. Organizations should create a less formal atmosphere. Employees should be given chance to talk among themselves and help each other in tuff time.
3. Let employees share responsibility: Employer should allow employees to mutually share their responsibilities. So that they can reduce each other's unnecessary burden.
4. Give more decision making authority to employees. Create opportunities for employees to make decisions that will directly affect their job performance. Participation gives employees a sense of personal power and reduces stress because "the boss" is not "giving orders."
5. Thank your employees for work accomplished by recognizing them for exemplary performance. Give employees credit for their work.
6. Create opportunities for the employees to meet, socialize, and build working relationships. For example, set up a bowling team, softball team, book club, or other social activity for employees only.
7. Help employees to balance their work and personal life. Give them proper time to manage

their urgent family issues. It will relax employees on one aspect: Family related tensions. As mentioned in table one home stress has increased in year 2008-2009. Home stress has direct relation with work stress. So employer should let employees remove their home stress.

8. Organizations should have a quiet break room for your employees. They should make this area separate from the normal "hustle and bustle" of the workplace. This should be the place where employees can breathe without tension and can refresh themselves to get back to work.

Conclusion

So as it is apparent that stress has got its negative and positive consequences. To utilize the positive aspect of stress and neutralize the negative aspect of stress, one needs to know techniques to manage the stress. Tough time like recession, over work, family issues, and work related issues will remain the same in future as well. We as human being cannot control unpredictable events like stress. But one thing which is in our hand is to manage things and issues. And that can be the mantra to live happy and stress less life.

References

- Stephen P. Robbins and Timothy A. Judge, (2007), "Organizational Behavior", New Delhi, Prentice Hall of India Private Limited
- Hans Selye (1955), "Stress and disease Science". <http://www.science.jrank.org/pages/6544/Stress-General-adaptation-syndrome.html>, October, 2009
- www.ewellnessrx.com/WellnessStatus.pdf, October, 2009

[www.helpguide.org/mental/stress_ management_ relief_coping.htm](http://www.helpguide.org/mental/stress_management_relief_coping.htm), October, 2009

Lawson K. Savery, J. Alan Luks "The relationship between empowerment, job satisfaction and reported stress levels: some Australian evidence" *Leadership & Organization Development Journal*, 2001 Volume: 22 Issue: 3 ISSN: 0143-7739, Publisher: MCB UP Ltd