

Impact of Functional Areas on Stress Level of Executives: A New Perspective

Dr. Payal Sarupria*

The purpose of this research is to study the executive stress at different functional departments in selected service and manufacturing industrial units of Southern Rajasthan. Twenty seven stress variables are identified through a literature search and interviews with managers of the different functional areas as well as with academicians as being "functionally dependent". Data are obtained from questionnaires completed by 100 executives. Also, statistical population of this research includes executives at different functional departments from all hierarchical positions. The results indicate that executive stress is not functional specific.

Keywords: Executive Stress Level, Functional Department, Southern Rajasthan

Introduction

The word "stress" is one of the most frequently used words today. We live in a world which is developing fast and which requires constant adaptation. Technology is changing and so are social habits, values, structures, and people. Everybody has to cope with these changes and it applies not only to individuals but also to organizations. Stress is not necessarily negative for our performance. Some level of stress is desirable to generate enthusiasm, creativity, and productivity. However, excessive levels of stress could become counterproductive if a situation does not require this elevated level of stamina. "It is important that a business organization takes serious interest in ensuring that their employees develop the ability to control the level of stress. This monitoring of stress level will yield higher levels of productivity in a business organization" (Rojas and Kleiner: 2000:86). Ivanchevich and Matteson (1993:384) define stress simply as "an interaction of the individual with his or her environment". They also define this term in detail as: "adopted response of a person as a reflection of their diversity and/or psychological processes to activities, states, or events in the environment creating exaggerated psychological and physical needs".

Job-stress can be defined as the inability to cope with the pressures in a job. Occupational stress is as any characteristic of the job environment which poses a threat to the individual, either excessive demands or insufficient supplies to meet his needs" (French et al.: 1976: 2). Individuals can experience stress in different ways. These are shown by factors such as external environment, nature of the individual's job, organization's structure and culture, quality of personal relationships in the workplace, impact of the individual's domestic situation, as well as personal factors such as the individual's personality type and the nature of his/her motivation. These factors represent potential sources of stress,

depending largely on (a) how individuals perceive their problems, (b) their level of self-confidence, and (c) the relative uncertainty and perceived importance of the outcome of their work activities (Cole: 1997:67).

In certain functional areas, managers work under extreme pressure for performance. In such situations managers feel they are being asked to do more than time or ability permits. Working under time-pressure is especially stressful. In the workplace, stress can affect performance. Individuals under very little stress may not make enough effort to perform at their best levels, while those under high level of stress often are unable to concentrate or perform effectively and efficiently. The relationship between stress and performance is complex. Employers, however, have primarily been concerned about the rising costs of overstressed employees. People are anxious when they have a lot to do before a deadline; as time runs out, a feeling of impending disaster increases (Albrecht: 1979: 134). In another study, overload was significantly related to a number of indicators of stress reactions: excessive drinking, low motivation to work, low self-esteem, and absenteeism (Margolis et al.: 1974: 654). Conflict between departments can result from pressures to expand one's work activities beyond the normal working day (Beutell and Greenhaus: 1983:43).

The Impact of stress on the organization:

According to Gallie (1993: 2), at the organizational level, research has found that work-related stresses may be responsible for organizational outcomes such as decline in performance, dissatisfaction, lack of motivation and commitment, and an increase in absenteeism and turnover. Dessler (2000: 586) depicted a variety of external environmental factors could lead to job stress as work-schedules, place of work, job insecurity, and the number and nature of client. Even noise, include people talking and

*National College Of Commerce, (Affiliated By Gujarat University), Opp Boys Hostel, Navarangpura, Ahmedabad-Gujarat

telephones ringing, contributed to stress.

Literature Review

Rees W. David (1997) emphasized on “Managerial stress-dealing with the cause, not the symptoms”. He explained why managerial stress is likely to be on the increase. He noted the increased attention to managerial stress, e.g. attempts to measure stress and relaxation techniques; warned about the dangers of concentrating just on the symptoms, which may be counterproductive; and emphasized the need to identify and deal with basic causes. . Elangovan A and Xie J (2000) examined the relationships between perceptions of supervisor power and subordinate work attitudes. Results showed that perceived legitimate power and coercive power of the supervisor were major predictors of subordinate stress, while perceived legitimate power and reward power were important predictors of employee motivation. Further, perceived coercive, reward and legitimate powers were all significant predictors of subordinate commitment. Also, perceived coercive power was negatively associated with subordinate satisfaction, while expert and referent powers were positively related to satisfaction. Rees W. David (1997) worked on “Work-related stress in health service employees”. The six occupational groups (administrative and clerical staff, ancillary personnel, professionals allied to medicine, doctors, and ward- and community-based nurses) were compared and the results were used as a basis for suggesting opportunities for management to initiate a range of stress management interventions. While stress was found to be a significant problem across all occupational groups in the study and their experience of stress has many similarities, the stress management solutions need to be tailored to the needs of each occupational group.

Objective of the study

- To assess the different kinds of stress being experienced by executives at different functional levels in the organization.
- To assess the avoidably and unavailability of the stress variables at all functional levels.

Hypotheses

- Variance in stress is not function specific.
- There is no significant association between functional departments and stress variables originating from avoidable and unavoidable reasons.

Method

Sample

Data are collected from the executive at different functional departments in selected service and manufacturing industries of Southern Rajasthan. The sizes of the industries were large and medium. Stratified deliberate sampling technique is being

used to locate executives after considering parameters as functional departments, hierarchical positions, age, educational qualification, and work experience. A total of 100 respondents are taken.

On the basis of department, five major categories have been used. These are Production, Marketing, Finance, Human Resource and General Management. 28 respondents are from production department. 24 respondents are from marketing department, while 18, 12 and 18 respondents are from finance, human resource and general management respectively. 77 executives are male and 23 of them are female. 66 of them are married and 24 are unmarried. None of the executive is divorced/widow.

Measures

A questionnaire is developed for the present study based on the previous literature in the area of the work. Twenty seven job stressors are identified through (i) a literature search and (ii) interviews with managers of the different functional areas as well as with academicians as being “functionally dependent”. Data is obtained from questionnaires completed by 100 executives.

Initially, questionnaire is piloted with a group of 10 executives from various functional departments. Based on the responses from the pilot study, the current questionnaire is developed. Information regarding impact of stress variables at various departments was collected through Likert-type scale items. The respondents are asked to rate the job related stress variables according to its input to stress on a scale ranging as -5: Causes heavy stress leading to the loss of performance potential; -3: Creates some stress; 0: Nonexistent; +3: No influence; +5: Acting as an Inspiring factor. Also, respondents are needed to tick the variable as it is avoidable or unavoidable variable. Mean and standard deviation is calculated and for testing the hypotheses, one way ANOVA and chi square test is used.

Results and Discussion

Top stress variables at various functional departments:

Francis M. supported that a paradox of work life is that one person can see a situation as a devastating threat, but another can preserve it as an invigorating challenge. Job-related stress among managers has been described as a far-reaching epidemic. There is converging evidence that most managers report experiencing job-related stress. Recently there has been increasing recognition of the potential positive outcome associated with job-related stress. Some managers perceive stress as leading to positive outcome. It is important to note that not all stress is bad; stress can also result in a competitive edge, and it can force positive changes. Job-related stress is associated with both positive and negative work outcome. Stress is associated with two kinds of job demands or work circumstances, described as challenges and hindrances.

Everybody suffers from stress. Relationship demands, physical as well as mental health problems, and pressure at workplaces, traffic snarls, meeting deadlines, and growing-up tensions-all these lead to stress. The mean score, standard deviation and rank of the job-related stress-causing variables felt by

executives at different functional departments are calculated for all 27 variables. As we can see from the table 1.1, at all departments low pay, poor incentive schemes, office politics and poor grievance handling are the top stress variables.

Table 1.1 Department wise top 10 stress variables

Department 1 (Production)

S. No.	Statement	Mean	SD
1	Low pay	-3.250	1.46
2	Poor incentive schemes	-2.071	2.02
3	Unreasonable performance demands	-1.815	2.65
4	Poor grievance handling	-1.750	2.38
5	Unequal distribution of work	-1.714	2.34
6	Long working hours	-1.679	3.10
7	Conflict between domestic life and work life	-1.571	2.32
8	Lack of requisite authority and autonomy	-1.571	2.32
9	Surpassed by juniors in promotion	-1.571	2.66
10	Stagnation in the present job	-1.481	2.28

Department 2 (Marketing)

S. No.	Statement	Mean	SD
1	Poor incentive schemes	-2.583	1.53
2	Sense of being under-valued	-2.500	1.14
3	Poor grievance handling	-2.292	1.83
4	Office politics	-2.125	2.52
5	Low pay	-2.125	2.36
6	Lack of requisite authority and autonomy	-1.917	2.64
7	Conflict between domestic life and work life	-1.875	1.48
8	Unequal distribution of work	-1.875	2.44
9	Unreasonable performance demands	-1.870	2.65
10	Lack of participation in decision making	-1.750	1.96

Department 3 (Finance)

S. No.	Statement	Mean	SD
1	Office politics	-2.778	2.26
2	Low pay	-2.333	2.35
3	Unequal distribution of work	-2.167	1.72
4	Feeling of isolation	-2.000	1.46
5	Lack of inter department co-ordination	-2.000	2.66
6	Stagnation in the present job	-2.000	2.22
7	Sense of being under-valued	-1.944	1.66
8	Show cause notices	-1.889	2.11
9	Lack of resources to fulfil the assignment	-1.833	2.71
10	Lack of requisite authority and autonomy	-1.778	2.67

Department 4 (Human Resource)

S. No.	Statement	Mean	SD
1	Low pay	-3.333	0.78
2	Poor incentive schemes	-3.083	1.24
3	Poor grievance handling	-2.833	1.53
4	Lack of requisite authority and autonomy	-2.667	2.50
5	Lack of inter department co-ordination	-2.583	3.00
6	Conflict between domestic life and work life	-2.417	1.56
7	Long working hours	-2.417	2.02
8	Job insecurity	-2.417	1.56
9	Lack of resources to fulfil the assignment	-2.417	2.02
10	Lack of support from supervisors	-2.333	2.31

Department 5 (General Management)

S. No.	Statement	Mean	SD
1	Low pay	-3.722	1.36
2	Poor incentive schemes	-3.000	2.14
3	Office politics	-2.722	2.42
4	Poor grievance handling	-2.722	1.41
5	Unreasonable performance demands	-2.389	1.94
6	Surpassed by juniors in promotion	-2.333	2.35
7	Long working hours	-1.944	3.40
8	Stagnation in the present job	-1.833	2.26
9	Lack of requisite authority and autonomy	-1.778	2.46
10	Lack of participation in decision making	-1.722	2.76

Functionally dependent stress-causing variables

The analysis consisted of testing for differences in stressor scores between the five functional areas i.e. Production, Marketing, Finance, Human Resource and General Management. This is done by using F-test between the stressor

scores of the five functional groups.

Null hypothesis (H₀): There is no significant difference between stress variables and various departments/functions.

Alternative hypothesis (H_a): There is a significant difference between stress variables and various departments/functions.

Table 1.2: Results of F test for the study of stress on various departments/functions

Department	Mean	S. D.	S. E.	F	Result @ 5 percent
Production	-0.92	1.12	0.21	1.753	Non Significant
Marketing	-1.19	1.02	0.21		
Finance	-1.32	1.07	0.25		
Human Resource	-1.82	0.69	0.20		
General Mgt.	-1.39	1.03	0.24		

From the results of table 1.2, the null hypothesis is valid at a 5 percent level of significance. It indicates that stress is not function-specific.

Prevalence of Avoidable/Unavoidable Job-related stress variables

The analysis consisted of testing for avoidable/unavoidable

stress variables at the functional departments. In the questionnaire, the respondents are requested to tick the stress variable, as avoidable or unavoidable. The results revealed that the avoidable variables as "Stagnation in present job", "Conflict between domestic life and work life", "Poor interpersonal relations at workplace" are top avoidable reasons. But for unavoidable stress variables, executives' at all

functional departments considered “Office politics” and “Lack of inter-department coordination” as unavoidable stress variables. “Low Pay” and “Lack of requisite authority and autonomy” are also among top unavoidable reasons.

Association of Managerial level and job-related stress variables originating from avoidable and unavoidable variables

Table 1.3 shows the result of association of functional

departments and stress variables originating from avoidable and unavoidable variables.

Null hypothesis (H₀): There is no significant association between functional departments and stress variables originating from avoidable and unavoidable reasons.

Alternative hypothesis (H_a): There is significant association between functional departments and stress variables originating from avoidable and unavoidable reasons.

Table 1.3: Results of χ^2 test for the study of association between functional departments and stress variables originating from avoidable and unavoidable reasons

S. No.	Stress Variables	Chi Square value	df	Result
1	Lack of support from supervisors	6.798	4	NS
2	Poor interpersonal relations at workplace	0.432	4	NS
3	Conflict between domestic life and work life	1.339	4	NS
4	Problems in handling subordinates	9.263	4	NS
5	Excessive workload	4.808	4	NS
6	Long working hours	5.707	4	NS
7	Lack of participation in decision making	7.533	4	NS
8	Sense of being under-valued	1.274	4	NS
9	Feeling of isolation	1.705	4	NS
10	Office politics	6.133	4	NS
11	Frequent assignment change	4.887	4	NS
12	Unreasonable performance demands	3.406	4	NS
13	Travelling associated with the work	3.675	4	NS
14	Low pay	8.891	4	NS
15	Poor incentive schemes	9.517	4	*
16	Lack of requisite training	2.659	4	NS
17	Lack of inter department co-ordination	11.893	4	*
18	Lack of requisite authority and autonomy	2.903	4	NS
19	Unequal distribution of work	4.336	4	NS
20	Job insecurity	1.040	4	NS
21	Cultural mal-adjustment in the organization	4.402	4	NS
22	Stagnation in the present job	5.272	4	NS
23	Show cause notices	1.585	4	NS
24	Surpassed by juniors in promotion	4.307	4	NS
25	Competition between colleagues	3.908	4	NS
26	Lack of resources to fulfil the assignment	2.665	4	NS
27	Poor grievance handling	0.415	4	NS

Conclusion

This paper is an insightful addition to the current literature regarding executive stress at different functional departments. At all functional departments' low pay, poor incentive schemes, office politics and poor grievance handling are the top stress variables. It is revealed that the stress is not function specific. Also, found that the executives have the nearest common approach to avoid and not to avoid the stress variables.

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