



STRESS MANAGEMENT MEASURES AMONG THE EMPLOYEES DURING THE PANDEMIC COVID 19 IN VARIOUS ORGANIZATIONS IN KERALA.

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Abstract

The pandemic covid 19 (Corona virus Disease 2019) has upended the life style of the Kerala economy in various aspects. The sudden changes like lockdown, loss of job, loss of income, closing down of schools, closing down of place of worship, quarantines, isolation of deceased patients, unawareness of medicines, shortage of vaccination for children's, unawareness of symptoms of covid 19, restrictions on travelling, loss of freedom in travelling by aged persons, online education all creates unpredictable problems all around the economy. These all have a great impact on all sectors of the economy and the employees working in various sectors of organization are facing a great challenge on account of the above-mentioned changes. Academics and researchers are of the view that stress is the outcome of excessive pressure which seems difficult to manage. The heavy workload and the deadline during the pandemic covid 19 are often causing stressful situation in employees but once when that achieve the targets it seems to be a satisfaction and quality enhance booster among the employees in the organisation. A single open window to overcome all these unforeseen situations all of a sudden is a burden to the higher authorities and human beings are adaptable to changes they gradually accept changes and practices the same in their daily life. But it takes time to accept these changes which give rise to stress among the employees and the article is a bird view through the stress management techniques that can be implemented to overcome such situations effectively by the employee and the organization in Kerala.

Keywords: *Stress Management, Organizational culture, working remotely, Returning to the office, Pandemic, Covid 19, Quarantines, Work life balance, and Work life conflict.*

Introduction

Creating an environment through less work life conflict increases feelings of meaningfulness and purpose in employees mind and helps to achieve greater engagement within the organization itself (Nair and Vohra, 2009). The organizational scholars have contributed a concept called "reflected best-self" focusing employees to think about what they were "personal best" in order to explore their strength and less focusing on their limitations effectively. Thus, it helps the organizations to explore through a new lens and pushes to exploit it on employees' strength rather than dwell on their limitations in future for the future progress in life and organization (Roberts, et.al., 2005). Companies that promote a strong ethical mission, encourage the employees to behave with integrity, and provide strong ethical leadership can influence employee's decision making to behave ethically in the organizational functioning in future progress (Mayer, et.al., 2009). "Interesting jobs that provides training, variety, independence, and control satisfy most employees' in the organization effectively and efficiently to succeed in future. (Barling, et.al., 2003). There is also a strong correspondence relationship between how well people enjoy the social context of their workplace and how satisfied they are overall interdependence, feedback, social support, and interaction with co-workers outside the workplace are strongly related to the job satisfaction even after accounting for the characteristics of the work itself of the employees helps to reduce stress among the employees in the organization. (Humphrey, et.al., 2007).



Literature Review

The organizational culture refers to a system of shared meaning held by employees that distinguishes the organization from that of other organizations (Schein,1996). The organizational culture represents a common perception the organizations members used to hold. Individuals with different background or at different levels in the organization used to describe its culture in a similar term (Meyerson and Martin, 1987). Organizational climate refers to the shared perceptions that organizational employees have about their organization and their work environment (Denison 1996 and Jamesearl., 2008). The term stress was first introduced by Hans Selye in 1936 to define stress in biological terms as a non-specific response of the body to any demand or change occurred suddenly which is unpredictable. His study led to the study of stress in brain functions. He quoted that definition of ‘stressors’ as the events that triggers a psychological and physiological response from the organisms. Stress is a dynamic factor in which an individual is confronted with an opportunity, demand, or resource related to what the individual desires and for which the outcome is perceived to be both uncertain and important in oneself (Schuler, 1980).

Today’s world is competitive and progressive where change seems to be an inevitable factor in the organisation. Adapting to change is a stressful job. Mainly stress is self-inflicted. Some faces it, adjust it, react positively and will be motivated to benefit from. The stress, others used to reject and behave negatively they face high stress. Hence “Train your mind to change your brain” A new science that explains if you train your mind (thoughts) your brain will work accordingly due to its neuroplasticity. It means that those who train their thoughts positively will accept stress creatively and do not suffer the consequences of stress badly (Mathew, 2018). If you think positive and peacefully every task arises in the organisation, it is good stress. When you interpret it negatively it results in bad stress so what we conceive is relevant. Brain accepts whatever thoughts you put in and your body responds with peace or stress consequently. Even though people do emotionally take their work home with them, however, by the next day the effect is usually gone. Attitude of the employees has a strong impact on the organization it reflects the fundamental values, self-interest or identification with individuals or groups we value. These attitudes tend to show a strong relationship to our behaviour.

“The overall job satisfaction of employees’ would better predict a general behaviour, such as whether the individual was engaged in his/her work or motivated to contribute to his/her organization (Harrison, et.al 2006) A great deal of research demonstrates that conflict between the work and family roles is one of the most significant sources of stress for most of the employees working in the organization (Amsted, et.al.2011). An organization fit explains that people are attracted to those organizations that are offering or matching with their personal values and used to quit the organizations that are opposed to their values and personalities (Schneider,et.al., 1995).

Stress management

Stress is motivational too much stress is detrimental to our health and to the workplace. An effective stress management technique can reduce the impact of stress like absenteeism, disability, poor communication skills, poor relationship at work, and lack of productivity. Stress has an evolutionary purpose, the need to protect ourselves through the innate ‘fight or flight’ aspect of our nervous system. When we were battling for survival, stress is what released the adrenaline that let us fight. Not all sources of stress are negative stimuli some stress like getting promotion to new position is a happy event even though it adds pressure to increase your work hours or quality of your work, resulting in additional stress.



There are mainly two types of stress.

1. Eustress
2. Distress

1. Eustress

Eustress is a positive type of stress we experience. The sources of eustress could become distress if you don't handle the accompanying stress. The way to tackle this problem is only by managing our self positively to avoid the negative source of stress. Eustress might be caused by getting a new job, adding new responsibilities to your position, becoming a supervisor of others, leading a new project.

2. Distress

Distress implies an external and usually temporary cause of great physical or mental strain and it results in various health problems and has a serious impact on employees' life and organizational functioning. It is caused by layoffs, cutbacks impact on employment, salary or benefits, peer pressure, unhealthy working environment. It appears that employees who have a stronger affective commitment to their organisation can transfer psychological stress into greater focus and higher sales performance, whereas employees with low levels of commitment perform worse under stress.

When stress increases employees having high levels of organizational support have higher role-based performance than those with low levels of organizational support. Stress is related with demands and resources. Demands mean responsibilities, obligations, uncertainties individual face, pressures in the organizational workplace. Resources are those within the control of individuals that resolve.

Potential sources of stress

The sources of stress are of great importance now a days in the organization where the employees find difficult to attain targets affects their family life and cause mental strain and health problems which leads to imbalance in their work and family life. The root causes have to be tackled in order to attain balance between work and family life. There are various sources of stress to employees. The following is the detailed explanation of factors affecting the potential sources of stress.

1. Environmental factors

The environmental uncertainty affects the organizational structure design which affects the stress levels among the employees in the organization. Indeed, uncertainty is the biggest reason where people have troubling to cope up with organizational changes (Rafferty and Griffin 2007).

The environmental uncertainty consists of three main types of classification they are:

1. Economic uncertainties
2. Potential uncertainties
3. Technological uncertainties factors are as follows:

1. Economic Uncertainties

Fluctuations in the business cycle are the cause of economic uncertainties. The repetitive expansions and contractions of business activity affect the employment opportunities and the overall productivity of organization. The contraction causes stress to employees regarding unemployment due to reduced revenue of the organization and even leads to layoffs their employees. Even if the business is not at the stage of decrease in revenue after analysing its future projects may show a decline in the revenue thus, they may be forced to layoffs employees pre-emptively or at least they halt all hiring process for the



time being. Covid 19 pandemic resulted in the employees anxious about their future career and their life demands too.

2. Political uncertainty

The political uncertainty is also known as regime uncertainty is caused due to the change in the leading political parties, the entrepreneurs and CEOs face stress in the smooth running of organization due to the new rules and policies formulations regarding various aspects on business. The political uncertainty leads to economic risk in the future path of government policies which is uncertain, raising risk premia, leading business and individuals to lag in spending and making productive investments as a whole in the economy (BareMetal., 2011). It makes uncertainty in monetary or fiscal policy the tax or regulatory regime. It leads to change in the business priorities. Threats of terrorism in developed and developing nations, or the difficulties of East Germany reintegrating with West Germany, lead to political uncertainty that becomes stressful to people in these countries (Gast, et.al., 2000). The Kerala government measures like break the chain has impacted the organizational culture effectively to overcome covid19 pandemic.

3. Technological uncertainty

The technological uncertainty results from unknown regarding the new technological methods which increases stress of the employees since it acts as a threat to their professional existence in the near future. The innovation of new robotics, automations, methods, equipment's leads to obsolete the employee's skills and experience in the future. The IT companies faces these challenges more seriously since it is much prone to up gradation every moment in the world with most modern software's. It is beneficial to the organizations and as well as a threat to the employees in the organization. Hence, they have to come up with the changes every now and then in order to survive in the world. It causes stress among many people who are more subject to technology-based professions. The covid 19 has broken out a technological change among all sectors seriously their working methods, time, task accomplishing and many other functions which increases stress among the employees and organization.

Stress management strategies to overcome the impact of pandemic covid 19 among the employees in various organizations

The management must consider being a positive stimulus that keeps the adrenaline running is very likely to be seen as excessive pressure by the employees in the organization (Ivancevich, et.al 1990). It has been explained in two heads as follows:

1. Individual Approaches

An effective management of stress is to be done by the employee itself which include various strategies like increased physical exercise, relaxation training, and expanded social support networks. "An understanding and utilization of basic time-management principles can help individuals to better cope up with the tensions created by job demands among the employees' in the organization (Macan 1994).

These time-management skills can help minimize procrastination by focusing efforts on immediate goals and boosting motivation in employees' even in the face of tasks that are less desirable to achieve by them (Renetta 2011).

1. Routine Fitness programs`

Fitness programs can reduce stress to a great extent which includes aerobics, walking, jogging, swimming, and riding a bicycle, get plenty of sleep, meditation, stretch, deep breath, avoid the use of



excessive alcohol, tobacco and substance use, go for routine check-up and take preventive measures like vaccination in order to reduce excessive stress in oneself. These activities can increase the lung capacity, lower the heart rate, and provide a mental diversion from work pressures, effectively reducing work-related levels of stress among the employees in organization. (Salmon 2001) Relaxed mind can only reduce stressful situations effectively which intern results in work accomplishment with well dieted health and wise decisions. Covid 19 pandemic has a great impact on oneself health, thus taking care of oneself is of great importance, no one other than oneself is interested in caring of oneself.

2. Relaxation Techniques.

Relaxation consisting of meditation, hypnosis, and deep breathing. It has been done to reach a state of deep physical relaxation, in which you focus all your energy on release of muscle tension as a whole (Richardson, et.al 2008). A deep relaxation for 15 to 20 minutes a day releases strain and provides a pronounced sense of peacefulness, as well as significant changes in heart rate, blood pressure, and other physiological factors. A growing body of research shows that simply taking breaks from work at routine intervals can facilitate physiological, and these effects are even greater if relaxation techniques are employed in the organisations for better result (Hahn, et.al 2011). In this panic covid 19 situation one should anticipate its adverse effects and set mind accordingly to cope up the situation stress freely other than fight-flight response. Aware of the pandemic can help oneself to get rid of anger and fear. Such practices help to take wise decisions aptly and gradually it becomes a habit in ours to control the stress and conflicts arising unpredictably successfully. Thus, the employees' character itself changes to adapt such situations patiently.

3. Social support

A healthy support is an essential factor that can reduce the impact of adverse stress in oneself. It means that if someone is there to hear your problem is good but if he provides suggestions or talks pleasantly to your problems helps immensely to change your attitude towards that stressful situation and find new ways to tackle it properly. Different people handle stressful situation differently thus it provides wise thinking and happy mind to the pressing stress problem. It is the attitude and peace of mind determining the depth of stress in oneself. Even the presence of someone dear to you can heal the stressful situations effectively. The networks generally consist of family, friends, or work colleagues.

4. Always go for a positive self-talk

Negative and destructive thoughts shatter your life. So always have a positive thought and think of success in life. Even from organizations or family life stress arises train your mind to believe that such situations are not permanent it will vanish and prosperity will come soon.

5. Social distancing

Public health actions like social distancing have a great impact to reduce the wide spread of covid 19, but it makes feeling of isolation and feel lonely which can be reduced by having connection with community or faith-based organization through which one can reach dear one by digital platforms like video call, mail, social media and so on.

6. Practice SMS

Social distancing, use of mask, sanitizing helps to reduce the stress caused by covid19 in organization and the whole economy. Practice the same in daily life to remain healthy and safe.



7. Say 'No' to what you don't like.

Its advisable to say 'No' to what you don't like otherwise it results in stress and conflict. Here, the mind act as a powerful indicator to your acts so keep your mind stress-free and conflict free. Think you are precious than anything in this world to you since your mind dominates your every action. In this covid19 pandemic very crucial decisions in work as well as family hinders, thus they have to be successfully managed by proper mind decision capability.

2.Organizational Approaches

Every employee is facing the stress due to their task and role demands, the management has to take better strategies to reduce the stress among the employees in order to increase their productivity. It includes strategies like improved employee selection, job placement, training, realistic goal-setting, redesign of jobs, increased employee involvement, improved organizational communication, employee sabbaticals, and corporate wellness programs.

1. Selection and placement

The organization should hire employee with experience and fresher's and help them to cope up with the stressful situations effectively by providing necessary facilities thus they adapt better to high stress jobs and perform those jobs more effectively.

2. Training

Effective training programs can help the employees to reduce the indepthness of stress and improve the employee's self-efficacy and thus lessen job strain.

3. Goal setting

The employees having high commitment to job finds less stress because of their insight to job and see the stressors are challenges rather than hindrances. Organizational goals can reduce stress as well as provide motivation among the employees' (Greenglass and Nisenbaum 2009). Individuals used to perform well when the job is specific and well defined and receiving proper feedback on their progress in work. Thus, the employees feel less stress, role ambiguity, frustration when goal feedback is received on their job performance.

4. Redesigning Job

It gives employees more responsibility, more meaningful work, more autonomy, and increased feedback can reduce stress because these factors give employees greater control over work activities and lessen dependence on others. If employees prefer not much enriched jobs, they will be then having less responsibility and increased specialization. If they prefer structured and routine job in lifestyle then it reduces skill variety, uncertainties, stress levels (Robbins, et.al.,2013).

5. Employee Involvement

Involvement of employees in the job can reduce the stress level by participating them in decision making. Evidence clearly shows that increase in employee empowerment reduce psychological strain in them as a whole(Butts, et.al 2009).

6. Organizational communication

Better formal organizational communication can help the management to reduce role ambiguity, role conflict among the employees which is necessary for bringing up healthy productive employees to the organization. What employee categorize as demands, threats, or opportunities at work is an



interpretation and that interpretation can be affected by the symbols and actions communicated by the management to its employees’.

7. Sabbaticals

Companies such as Adobe, Infosys, Tata consultancy services (TCS) and Microsoft as well as government services such as the IAS and the IPS allow their employees to take extended voluntary leaves without prejudice as a relief against stressful situation (Roy 2010). The sabbaticals range from a week to several months which allows the employees to do personal projects, travel, relax, which all consumes time beyond the normal vacations. Thus, it helps to reduce the burnout ratio among the employees in the organization.

8. Wellness programs

The organizations provide workshops to help people quit smoking, control alcohol use, lose weight, eat better, and develop a regular exercise program, they focus on the employees total physical and mental conditions (Blue 2009). It helps to increase the psychological health of the employees. A meta-analysis of 360 programs designed to reduce stress (including wellness programs) showed that interventions to help employees reframe stressful situations and use active coping strategies appreciably reduced stress levels among the employees in organization (Richardson and Rothstein 2008). Every wellness program aims on physical and mental health of the employee’s personal responsibility and the organizations are only a merely means to that end.

Employee’s perception towards handling stressful situations.

The attitude of the employees has a great impact on handling the stress. The ability to handle stressful situation is a talent which everyone needs to have in the organization as well as in the personal life. It varies from one person to another. The individual variables moderate the relationship between potential stressors and experienced stress. It has been classified into four they are:

1. Perception
2. Job experience
3. Social support

1. Perception

Perception will moderate the relationship between a potential stress condition and an employee’s reaction to it. Layoffs may cause one person out of fear of loss of job another may find it as an opportunity to get a new job with better increments or to start a new own business. Thus, it is revealed that stress is actually the perception which one has on it rather than the objective conditions lying on it. How the stress is interpreted is an important phenomenon to be taken into consideration.

2. Job experience

The Experience on the job tends to be negatively related to work stress. It is based on two explanations. First is selective withdrawal. Voluntary turnover is more probable among people who experience more stress. Therefore, people who remain with an organization longer are those with more stress-resistant traits or those more resistant to the stress characteristics of their organization. Second, people who eventually develop coping mechanisms to deal with stressful situations. Because this takes time, senior members of the organization are more likely to be fully adapted and should experience less stress among them in the organization (Motowidlo, Packard and Manning, 1987).



3. Social support

Collegial relationships with co-workers or supervisors can buffer the impact of stress among the employees (Halbesleben, 2006). Social support from the organization acts as a palliative, mitigating the negative effects of even high-strain jobs.

4. Personality

It is a trait in stress is neuroticism. Neurotic individuals are much more prone to experiencing psychological strain in their life than others (Middle drop, et.al., 2008). Evidence suggests that neurotic individuals are more prone to believe that there are stressors in their work environments, so part of the problem is that they believe their environments are more threatening to themselves. These people also tend to select less adaptive coping mechanisms, relying on avoidance as a way of dealing with problems rather than attempting to resolve them successfully and effectively (Kammeyer, et.al., 2009). The work holism is a process which leads to stress among the employees in the organization. Workaholics are a person who puts enormous time on work, thinking of the work every time, undertaking additional responsibilities to satisfy their own inner compulsion of work. The workaholics are not necessarily more productive than other employees, despite their extreme efforts. The strain of putting in such a high level of work effort eventually begins to wear on the workaholic, leading them to higher levels of work-life conflict and psychological burnout (Burke, et.al., 2004).

Impact of covid 19 among employees in various organizations in Kerala

The covid 19 pandemic has a great impact on the Kerala economy and its evils like overwhelming, stressful situations, mental tension, strong emotions, in young, adults, children bring the Kerala economy in troubles. At present the government comes up with certain measures that helps the organizations also to implement in their organizational culture so that to overcome such stressful situations by patiently observing the pandemic behavior and its characters among the people in Kerala,

With many unforeseen challenges that affects the economy since December 2019, it has affected adversely in different angles in several areas like health, finance, industries, agriculture, employment and unemployment, prices, production and output, travel, emigration and remittance, fiscal situation of government, various organizational functioning, education, daily wage earners, etc. The IMF noted that this lockdown brings worst recession since Great Depression and far worried situation than the great financial crisis.

The lockdown causes shortage of food, lack of vaccination medicines for children resulting in changes of months and years in immunization scheduling of children resulting in various other diseases, loss of job creates a mental stress and panic financial crises in family. Daily wage earners affected adversely to have one day meal since they lost job all of a sudden pushed the family in trouble, employees having deceased parents and children's find difficult in working in organizations, since the employees are working from home and their children's undergo online education their brings work life conflict among working parents.

As employees concern, going to organization for work or work from home, the way of work has drastically changed due to covid 19 pandemic. It creates tension, fear, anxiety about the risk involved in exposed to virus at work and the new changes in lifestyle and other strong emotions can be overwhelming and work place stress and conflict which results to burnout.

Suggestions

In this pandemic covid 19 situation, Kerala economy facing challenges can be tackled by getting two dose vaccination, proper mask usage, sanitizing when the organization have realized that the two critical changes affecting covid 19 such as working remotely and returning to the office. The great uptake



comes in technology in usage of digital platforms like zoom, teams, WebEx etc has entrusted that social distancing does not disrupt working of organizations. When returning back to office creates a panic stress in employees regarding how to create social distancing effectively, here the various organizations have to take decisions regarding their employee's safe environment based on their organizational culture it differs in various sectors. The decision board of Kerala has to come with stable and flexible decisions concerning health, medicine, private and public organizational functioning in detail after considering the impact of the affected people in each sector wise organizations. Employees having sickbed persons at home, small children have to primarily consider while making policy decisions regarding working of organizations. Educational institutions are to be engaged in online classes by availing the free digital facility to all children's so that the young upcoming generations are safe at home since vaccinations are not availed to them. An employee is accountable to the organization, responsible to family, loyal to the society, which can be attained only by having an effective stress management strategy to attain success.

Conclusion

The impact of covid 19 pandemic has challenged the Kerala economy greatly among various others crisis. The health of the employees is of immense importance than anything, the underlying values, beliefs of many organizations are to be changed with the current situation of covid 19 to ensure a healthy and safety organizational stress-free safe environment for employees to enjoy their work with fulfilling all responsibility of family and society equally which ultimately results in successful functioning of Kerala economy to its boom with educational and industrial development.

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