

NATURE OF STRESS

1. Stress may be the result of individual's interaction with environmental stimuli. Such stimuli may be in any form, interpersonal interaction event and so on. The impact of the stimuli produces deviation in the individual.
2. Stress may result in any kind of deviation-physical, psychological or behavioral in the person. The deviation is from the usual state of affairs. From this point of view, stress is different from anxiety which operates solely in the emotional and psychological sphere.
3. Stress can be either temporary or long term, mild or severe, depending mostly on how long its causes continue, how powerful they are and how strong the individual's powers are.
4. Two conditions are necessary for potential stress to become actual stress. There must be-
 - a. Uncertainty over the outcome
 - b. Outcome must be important.

Stress is usually very high when there is uncertainty over the outcome and the outcome is very significant.

5. The term "burnout" is also closely associated with stress. Some researchers contend that burnout is a type of stress, but others treat it differently. Burnout is closely associated with helping professions like nursing, education and social work, is characterized by emotional exhaustion, technically, burnout is different from stress, these are generally used interchangeably.

TYPICAL SYMPTOMS OF STRESS

Symptoms of Stress

- (1) High blood pressure
- (2) Nervousness and tension
- (3) Chronic worry
- (4) Inability to relax
- (5) Excessive use of alcohol, drugs and/or smoking
- (6) Problems with sleep
- (7) Uncooperative attitudes
- (8) Feeling of inability to cope.

(9) Emotional instability

(10) Digestion problems

When stress becomes excessive, employees develop various symptoms of stress that can harm their job performance and health, and even threaten their ability to cope with the environment. People, who are stressed, may become nervous and may develop chronic worry. They may be uncooperative or use alcohol or drugs excessively. Although these conditions also occur from other causes, they are common symptoms of stress.

Stress also leads to physical disorders, because the internal body system changes to try to cope up with stress. Some physical disorders are short range such as an upset stomach, others are longer range, such as stomach ulcer.

Stress over prolonged time also leads to degenerative disease of the heart, kidneys, blood vessels, and other parts of the body. Therefore, it is important that stress, both on and off the job, be kept at a low level enough for most people to tolerate without disorders.

Stress is not necessarily bad in and of itself. While stress is typically discussed in negative context, it also has positive value. It is an opportunity when it offers potential gains, for example, the superior performance that an athlete or stage performer gives in such situations. Such individuals often use stress positively to rise to the occasion and perform at or near their maximum.

More typically stress is associated with constraints and demands. The constraints prevent us from doing what we desire, the demands refer to the loss of something desired.

Sources of stress

Stress is reality of our everyday life. There are both Eustresses and distresses that come from our work and non-work lives. It is pointed out by Near, Rice and Hunt in 1980, by Sekaran in 1986 and by many others, that work and non-work domains of one's life are closely interrelated. Thus, if one experiences much distress at work, that stress will be carried over to the home, which will increase the sense of awareness of even small distresses experienced in a family sphere. Likewise, stresses experienced at home or with friends or from

other non-work situations can be carried over to the work place which might heighten and multiply the stresses experienced at work.

There may be numerous conditions in which people may feel stress. Conditions that tend to cause stress are called stressors. Although even a single stressor may cause major stress, like death or near one, usually stressors combine to press an individual in a variety of ways until stress develops. The stress generates from following sources-

1. Individual Stressors

There are many stressors at the level of the individual which may be generated in the context of organizational life or his personal life. There are several such events which may work as stressors. There are life and career changes, personality type, and role characteristics.

- **Job concerns:** One of the major job concerns is lack of the job security which can lead to concern, anxiety of frustration to the individual. The prospect of losing a job especially when you have a family and social obligations is always very stressful.
- **Career changes:** When an employee has to relocate geographically because of a transfer or promotion, it disrupts the routine of his daily life causing concern and stress. The relocation can lead to the following problems:
 - (a) The fear of working in a new location.
 - (b) Unpredictability about new work environment.
 - (c) Anxiety about creating new relationships.

Uncertainty about getting a new job at the new location creates some degree and stress.

- **Changes in life structure:** The life structure of a person changes as he grows older. As a person grows older, his responsibilities to himself as well as others change and increase. The higher the responsibility, the greater the stress.

- **Economic problems:** Some people are very poor money managers or they have wants and desires that always seem to exceed their earning capacity. When individuals overextend their financial resources, or in simple words, if they spend more than they earn, it will always cause stress and distract the employees from their work.

- **Personality type:** People with personality A profile experience considerable stress. They are ones who
 - (a) Work long hours under constant deadline pressures and conditions for overload.
 - (b) Often take work at home at night or weekends and are unable to relax.
 - (c) Constantly compete with themselves, setting high standards of productivity that they seem driven to maintain.
 - (d) Tend to become frustrated by the work situation, to be irritated with the work efforts of others, and to be misunderstood by superiors.

- **Role characteristics:** There may be role stress either because of role conflict or role ambiguity. When people become members of several systems like family, club, voluntary organization, work organization, etc., they are expected to fulfill certain obligations to each system and to fit into defined places in that system. In many situations, the various roles may have conflicting demands and people experience stress as they are not able to fulfill the conflicting role requirements. In organizational context, role conflict arises because of incompatibility between job tasks, resources, rules and policies, and other people.

2. Group Stressors

Group interaction affects human behavior. Therefore, there may be some factors in group processes which act as stressors. Groups have a lot of influence on the employees' behavior, performance and job satisfaction. On the other hand, the group can also be a potential source of stress. Group stressors can be categorized into the following factors:

- **Lack of group cohesiveness:** Group cohesiveness is important for the satisfaction of individuals: in group interaction. When they are denied the opportunity for this cohesiveness, it becomes very stressing for them as they get negative reaction from group members.
- **Lack of social support:** When individual get social support from members of the group, they are able to satisfy their social needs and they are better off. When this social support does not come, it becomes stressing for them.
- **Conflict:** Any conflict arising out of group interaction may become stressing for the individuals, be it interpersonal conflict among the group members or intergroup conflict. Whenever conflict dysfunctional consequences, it will lead to stress in all the concerned parties.
- **Organizational climate:** Much of the group or interpersonal relationships depend upon the organizational climate. All the employees of such organization will be continuously tense, if the climate in general is unfriendly, hostile or totally task oriented.

3. Organizational Stressors

- **Organizational process:** Organizational processes also affect individual behavior at work. Faulty organizational processes like poor communication, poor and inadequate feedback of work performance, ambiguous and conflicting roles, unfair control systems, inadequate information flow, etc., cause stress for people in the organization.
- **Organizational policies:** Organizational policies provide guidelines for action Unfavorable and ambiguous policies may affect the functioning of the individuals adversely and they may experience stress. Thus, unfair and arbitrary performance evaluation, unrealistic job

description, frequent reallocation of activities, rotating work shifts, ambiguous procedures, inflexible rules, inequality of incentives, etc. work as stressors.

- **Organization structure:** Organizational structure provides formal relationships among individuals in an organization. Any defect in organization structure like lack of opportunity of participation decision making, lack of opportunity for advancement, high degree of specialization, excessive interdependence of various departments, line and staff conflict, etc. works as stressors as relationships among individual and groups do not work effectively.
- **Physical conditions:** Organizational physical conditions affect work performance. Thus, poor physical conditions like crowding and lack of privacy, excessive noise, excessive heat or cold, pressure of toxic chemicals and radiation, air pollution, safety hazards, poor lightening, etc. produce stress on people.
- **Organizational life cycle:** Organizations go through a cycle. They are established, they grow become mature and eventually decline. An organization's life cycle creates different problems and pressures for the employees. The first and the last stage are stressful. The establishment involves a lot of excitement and uncertainty, while the decline typically requires cutback, layoffs and a different set of uncertainties. When the organization is in the maturity stage, stress tends to be the least because uncertainties are lowest at this point of time.

4. Extra organizational Stressors

- **Political factors:** Political factors are likely to cause stress in countries which suffer from political uncertainties.
- **Economic factors:** Changes in business cycles create economic uncertainties. When the economy contracts, people get worried about their own security. Minor recessions also cause stress in the work force as downward swings in the economy are often accomplished by permanent reductions in the work force, temporary layoff or reduction in pay.
- **Technological factors:** Technological uncertainty is the third type of environmental factor that can cause stress. In today's era of

technological development new innovations make an employee's skills and experience obsolete in a very short span of time. Computers, automation are other forms of technological innovations, which are threat to many people and cause them stress.