**CHAPTER SIX**

**STRESS MANAGEMENT**

6.1. **What is stress?**

**Stress** *is a dynamic condition in which an individual is confronted with an opportunity, constraint, or demand related to what he or she desires and for which the outcome is perceived to be both uncertain and important*.

Stress is not necessarily bad in and of itself. While stress is typically discussed in a negative context, it also has a positive value. It is an opportunity when it offers potential gain. Consider, for example, the superior performance that an athlete or stage performer gives in “clutch” 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 former prevent you from doing what you desire. The latter refers to the loss of something desired. So when you take a test at school or you undergo your annual performance review at work, you feel stress because you confront opportunities, constraints, and demands. A good performance review may lead to a promotion, greater responsibilities, and a higher salary. But a poor review may prevent you from getting the promotion. An extremely poor review might even result in your being fired.

Two conditions are necessary for potential stress to become actual stress. There must be uncertainty over the outcome and the outcome must be important. Regardless of the conditions, it is only when there is doubt or uncertainty regarding whether the opportunity will be seized, the constraint removed, or the loss avoided that there is stress. That is, stress is highest for those individuals who perceive that they are uncertain as to whether they will win or lose and lowest for those individuals who think that winning or losing is a certainty. But importance is also critical. If winning or losing is an unimportant outcome, there is no stress. If keeping your job or earning a promotion doesn’t hold any importance to you, you have no reason to feel stress over having to undergo a performance review.

Stress carries a negative connotation for some people, as though it were something to be avoided. This is unfortunate, because stress is important in managing legitimate emergencies and achieving peak performance. ***Stress***, or the stress response, is the unconscious preparation to fight or flee a person experiences when faced with any demand. A ***stressor or demand*** is the person or event that triggers the stress response. ***Distress or strain*** refers to the adverse psychological, physical, behavioral and organizational consequences that may occur as a result of stressful events.

Stress is the pattern of emotional states and physiological reactions acquiring in situations where individuals perceive threats to their important goals because they may be valuable to meet. In short, stress occurs where individuals feel, rightly or wrongly, that they may soon be overwhelmed by events or circumstances that exceed their personal resources

6.2. **Causes (Sources) Of Stresses at Work**

* **Environmental Factors**
  + Economic uncertainties of the business cycle
  + Political uncertainties of political systems
  + Technological uncertainties of technical innovations
  + Terrorism in threats to physical safety and security
* **Organizational Factors**
  + Task demands related to the job
  + Role demands of functioning in an organization
  + Interpersonal demands created by other employees
* **Individual Factors**
  + Family and personal relationships
  + Economic problems from exceeding earning capacity
  + Personality problems arising from basic disposition
* **Individual Differences**
  + Perceptual variations of how reality will affect the individual’s future
  + Greater job experience moderates stress effects
  + Social support buffers job stress
  + Internal locus of control lowers perceived job stress
  + Strong feelings of self-efficacy reduce reactions to job stress

**6.3. Effects of Stress**

## Major Consequences (Effects) of Stresses

Stress can influence physical and psychological well-being, performance on many tasks and even the course of individual careers. We will see several of these effects as follows.

1. ***Performance and Normal (Healthy) Stress*** – stress leads to improved performance up to an optimum point. Beyond the optimum point, further stress and arousal have detrimental effect on performance. Therefore healthy amount of stress (normal stress) are desirable to improve performance by arousing a person to action. Specific stressful activities, including aerobic exercise, weight training, and flexibility training, improve health and enhance a person’s ability to manage stressful demands or situations.
2. ***Individual Distress*** – work-related psychological disorders are among the leading health disorders and diseases. The most common types of psychological distress are ***depression, burnout, and psychogenic disorders***. In the early stages, depression and burnout result in a decline in efficiency; diminished interest in work; fatigue; and an exhausted, run-down feeling. Psychogenic disorders are physical disorders with a genesis, or beginning, in the mind. A number of medical illnesses have a stress-related component. The most significant are heart diseases and stroke. Behavioral problems are also the other form of individual distress. This problem includes violence (physical and interpersonal), substance abuse of various kinds, and accidents.
3. ***Organizational Distress*** – in relation to organizational distress the identified indirect costs of mismanaged stress for the organization are:
   * ***Performance Decrement –*** are the cost resulting from poor quality or low quality of production, grievances, and unscheduled machine down time and repair.
   * ***Participation problems –*** are the costs associated with absenteeism, tardiness, strikes and work stoppages, and turnover.
   * ***Compensation awards –*** are organizational cost resulting from court awards for job distress.

**6.4. Stress management strategies**

Stress is an inevitable future of work and personal life. It is neither inherently bad nor distractive. Stress can be managed. Several strategies exist to manage stress. We will consider these under two major headings: ***individual (personal), and organizational stress management techniques.***

***I)* Organizational Stress Management**

Organizational stress prevention focuses on people’s work demands and ways to reduce distress at work. Organizations can play a key role in stress management. They can adopt changes in their internal structure and procedures, or alter the nature of jobs to reduce stress among employees as indicated below.

* ***Changes in Organizational Structure and Function*** – several changes in organizational policy and function are useful in reducing job related stress. First, such benefits can sometimes be gained by decentralization – a process in which authority is spread more widely throughout an organization. This reduces feelings of helplessness among employees and so reduces their overall level of stress. Second, employees can be afforded greater participation in decisions, especially ones involving their jobs. The lack of opportunities for such input can be a major source of stress. Third, steps can be taken to assure that performance appraisals and the distribution of organizational rewards are as fair as possible.
* ***Changes in the Nature of Specific Jobs*** – stress can also be reduced through careful attention to the nature of specific jobs. For example, the stress resulting from boring, repetitive task can be lessened through job ***enlargement*** – efforts to broaden the scope of the activities they involve. Second, stress deriving from feelings of lack of control can be reduced by job ***enrichment*** - procedures in which employees are provided with more responsibility for planning and directing their own work. Third, the stressfulness of specific jobs can be reduced through such steps as ***limiting unnecessary travel or geographic relocations***. Finally, important causes of stress can be removed trough eliminating ***hazardous or unpleasant working conditions.***
* ***Employee Fitness Programs*** – these are programs, run and founded by organizations, to improve the physical fitness of their employees. Improved physical fitness increases individuals’ resistance to the adverse effect of stress. It enhances productivity and contributes to commitment and other positive attitudes among employees by reducing absenteeism.

A programmable management intervention at the work place, usually at the level of the individual employees, using behavioral science knowledge and methods for recognition of certain work and non-work related programs (notably alcoholism, drug abuse and mental health) which adversely affects job performance, with the objective of enabling the individual to return to making his or her full work contribution and to attaining full function in personal life.

***II)* Individual Stress Management**

Individuals can improve their physical fitness through change in ***diet or physical exercise***. Alternatively, they can adopt techniques designed to help them relax following exposure to stress (***relaxation training, meditation***). ***Social support, professional help, leisure time activities and time management*** are also helpful.

To sum up, stress is an inevitable result of work and personal life. Well managed stress can improve health and performance. Managers must learn how to create healthy stress for employees to facilitate performance and well-being. Managers can help employees by adjusting workloads, avoiding ethical dilemmas, being sensitive to diversity among individuals concerning what is stressful, and being sensitive to employees’ personal demands. Managers should be aware of gender, personality, and behavioral differences when analyzing stress in the work place. Managers can be sensitive to early signs of distress at work, such as employee fatigue or changes in work habits, in order to avoid serious form of distress.

**6.5**. **Implications for performance and satisfaction**

***Inverted-U Relationship between Stress and Job Performance***

