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**STRESS IN THE PROCESS OF MANAGEMENT WITHIN
THE CONTEXT OF A SOCIALLY ORIENTATED ECONOMY**

**ESTRÉS EN EL PROCESO DE GESTIÓN DENTRO
EL CONTEXTO DE UNA ECONOMÍA SOCIALMENTE ORIENTADA**

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Abstract

A major problem of functioning of every modern organisation is the efficiency of its staff. Practice shows that nowadays stress is among the main managerial problems in our country and all over the world. High stress levels within the organisation inevitably result in a multitude of negatives: breakdown in personnel policy and increase of staff fluctuation, decrease of productivity of labour, drop of product and/or service quality, growth of the number of disciplinary violations and occupational injuries, etc. Therefore, the modern manager should be fully aware of the hazards of stress, should be able to diagnose the stressing status of employees, to identify and eliminate the reasons, to apply basic and modern approaches to overcoming the stress within the organisation, to develop programmes for overcoming the stress at the workplace. The **main objective** of this article is to identify the varieties and symptoms of stress in order to enable the modern manager to timely diagnose the level of stress in the employees' current state, to identify and remove the reasons, to apply basic and modern approaches to overcoming the stress within the organisation. The **main research approaches** used in the article are context-analysis, method of comparison and intuitive and systematic approach.

Keywords

Stress – Eustress – Distress – Types of stress – Stress symptoms

Resumen

Un problema importante de funcionamiento de cada organización moderna es la eficiencia de su personal. La práctica muestra que hoy en día el estrés es uno de los principales problemas de gestión en nuestro país y en todo el mundo. Los altos niveles de estrés dentro de la organización inevitablemente resultan en una multitud de factores negativos: interrupción en la política de personal y aumento de la fluctuación del personal, disminución de la productividad del trabajo, caída de la calidad del producto o servicio, aumento del número de infracciones disciplinarias y lesiones ocupacionales. etc. Por lo tanto, el gerente moderno debe ser plenamente consciente de los peligros del estrés, debe ser capaz de diagnosticar el estado estresante de los empleados, identificar y eliminar las razones, aplicar enfoques básicos y modernos para superar el estrés dentro de la organización, desarrollar programas para superar el estrés en el lugar de trabajo. El objetivo principal de este artículo es identificar las variedades y los síntomas del estrés para permitir al administrador moderno diagnosticar oportunamente el nivel de estrés en el estado actual de los empleados, identificar y eliminar los motivos, aplicar enfoques básicos y modernos superando el estrés dentro de la organización. Los principales enfoques de investigación utilizados en el artículo son el análisis de contexto, el método de comparación y el enfoque intuitivo y sistemático.

Palabras Claves

Stress – eustress – distress – Tipos de stress – Síntomas del stress

Introduction

Nowadays, stress is among the main managerial problems in our country and throughout the world. The high stress levels within the organisation inevitably bring to a decrease in productivity of labour, in the quality of products and/or services, to an increase in personnel fluidity, to a growth in the number of violations of discipline, of occupational injuries, to an increase in the numbers of sick days, being late for work and leaving the workplace before the end of the workday.

Therefore, the modern manager should fully realise the dangers brought by stress, should be able to diagnose stressful state of employees, identify and eliminate the reasons, apply basic and modern approaches to overcoming the stress within the organisation, develop programmes for prevention of stress at work.

The studies on the subject of stress as a scientific category have began as late as the 20th c.: first in terms of medicine (the research began with the influence of stress on the cardiac activity), and then – much later, in organisational terms (influence of stress on employees' productivity)¹.

In many countries there are special institutions for stress management, universities conduct courses in stress management, governmental programmes are developed and specialised centres are established for support of managers of business companies in fighting the organisational stress.²

What is stress?

In Bulgarian the word „стрес“ comes from the English stress and means pressure, deformation, tension. That is to say that the essence of stress is bringing the body out of its state of rest or standstill and mobilising it to meet or repulse certain circumstances.

In psychology, stress is defined as a state of a strong nervous pressure caused by a negative physical or emotional impact. It is emphasised that high stress levels could influence negatively the physique, emotions and mind concentration, lower levels could be factors of adapting and coping³. In other words, this is the state when as a result from an excessively heavy and continuous psychological stress the individual's nervous system comes to an emotional overloading. Stress, especially if frequent or long-lasting, has a negative influence not only on the mental status of the individual but on the physical health, too. Stress is among the major “risk factors” in the occurrence and aggravation of cardiovascular and gastrointestinal diseases. Scientific data prove that the negative impact of stress nowadays is responsible for taking away more and more human lives.

So, stress is an unspecific reaction caused in response to unique circumstances, physical and mental response for protecting and mobilising the powers of body to meet the

¹ See, for example, H. Selye, Stress without distress, Nauka & Izkustvo, 1982; I. Temkov, Stress and Personality Crises, Sofia: 1987; V. Yadov, Dispositional concept of personality. Social psychology. E. Kuzmina, V. Semenova, 1979.

² Richard Mulvey, Stress Management: Managing Business And Personal Stress. Perception Business Books, 2008.

³ Dirk Hellhammer and Juliane Hellhammer, Stress: the brain-body connection. Karger Publishers, 2008.

perceived threat from the environment. This threat is named *stressor*. „Stressor is every action, event or situation bringing to the occurrence of stress.“⁴

Stress to a large extent depends on the particular individual's assessment of the situation, on his/her experience, expectations, self-confidence. Of course, the threat assessment, the expectations of hazardous consequences contained by the situation are of a particular importance, too. The occurrence and experience of stress depend rather on the subjective factors, on the individual's specificities (his/her assessment of the situation, comparisons of the powers and skills, required from him/her, etc.) than on the objective factors.

Stress varieties

In everyday life we encounter two varieties of stress⁵: *eustress* and *distress* (Table 1⁶).

| Type | Characteristics |
|---|---|
| EUSTRESS – stress caused by positive emotions, a beneficial form of stress bringing to the subject's adaptation to stress. This is the pressure that tones and helps the individual to meet and overcome the unpleasant situations, a source of enhanced activity, of joy from the effort and successful overcoming the obstacles. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Positive emotional background; ➤ Availability of sufficient resources for overcoming the stress; ➤ Experience from solving similar problems in past; ➤ Beneficial prognosis. |
| DISTRESS – stress caused by frequent and continuous negative emotions, excessive spiritual and physical tension in the human body bringing to mental and physical problems. Combination of unfavourable factors at which the individual experiences a sense of weakness, helplessness, reluctance and feeling of injustice and underrating caused by the lack of a positive valuation of the efforts made. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Negative emotional background; ➤ Lack of sufficient resources for overcoming the stress; ➤ Lack of experience from solving similar problems in past; ➤ Unfavourable prognosis. |

Table
Stress varieties

Presently, one more type of stress is clearly identified – the so-called *organisational stress*. Organisational stress as a social problem is to be distinguished from other concepts similar to it by consequences as damages caused at work, incl. due to the unfavourable occupational conditions⁷.

It is also referred to as a *stress at work*. It is defined as a harmful physical or emotional response occurring at the presence of poor correspondence between the needs occurring at work and the employee's possibilities, abilities, resources or needs⁸. A

⁴ M. Usheva, Managerial psychology: skills, diagnostics, impacts (Blagoevgrad: "N. Rilski" Univ. Publ., 2017), 77.

⁵ I. Temkov, Stress and Personality Crises...

⁶ M. Usheva, Managerial psychology: skills, diagnostics... 77-78.

⁷ M. Usheva, Managerial psychology: skills, diagnostics... 78.

⁸ NIOSH, Stress at Work. U.S. National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, DHHS (NIOSH) Publication Number 99-101 (1999).

significant part of entrepreneurs, for example, experience intense stress even on the basis of the dependence “mainly on regional trends, which do not always coincide with the national ones”⁹. As it is known their decisions are based on planning and forecasting, i.e. “the future assessment of the environment where they operate, which includes expectations of the consumption of their products, competitors’ actions, administrative interference, and others”¹⁰, which may prove insufficiently adequate to expectations. Besides, an intense stress may occur also at the disturbance of balance between work and individual’s personal life, when one is neglected on the account of the other. So this is all about the *mental stress*, expressed by physiological signs.

Emotional tension is one of the stress factors; it is physiologically expressed by the changes in the human endocrine system. For example, at experimental studies with diseased persons it was established that people living under a constant nervous pressure coped more difficultly with virus infections (i.e. the level of ill people within the organisation is excessively high). In such cases a help of a qualified psychologist is needed.

The main characteristics of mental stress are:

- 1) stress is a state of body, and its occurrence presumes an interaction between the body and environment;
- 2) stress is a more strained condition than the usual motivating one; the perception of a threat is required for its occurrence;
- 3) stress occurs when the normal adjustment response is inadequate.

Close to the experience of stress is the experience of frustration felt as strain, anxiety, sense of dissatisfaction, and anger that seize the individual when on his/her way to the goal he/she encounters unexpected obstacles hindering the satisfaction of needs. At that the obstacles and impediments encountered by the individual could be objectively insurmountable or subjectively insurmountable. *For example in the “superior – inferior” dialogues the superior may use louder voice when speaking, but the inferior could not let him/herself do that although he/she is physiologically capable of that.*

Frustration occurs when a man desires something very badly but cannot get it. This brings to emotional disorders expressed in the increase of conflictness, insomnia, elevated anxiety, drop of work efficiency, and in some particularly bad cases, to neurotic deviations in behaviour requiring the help of a psychotherapist.

It is accepted to divide stress into *emotional* and *informational*. While the emotional stress is related to physiological and emotional loads, the informational one is related to the individual’s inability to cope with the avalanche-like flow of information.

The Canadian physiologist Hans Selye¹¹ back in 1936 described the stress as a common adjustment response of the body undergoing **three stages**:

- 1) response to anxiety;
- 2) stage of resistance;
- 3) stage of exhaustion.

⁹ P. Dimitrov, Situation of tourism industry (Blagoevgrad: “N. Rilski” Univ. Publ.,2007), 10.

¹⁰ P. Dimitrov, Situation of tourism industry...

¹¹ H. Selye, Stress without distress...

We find that as of nowadays no essential changes in the concept of stress and its stages have occurred. In the occupational environment they are identified, followed and responded to by the part of the manager. Therefore, for the contemporary manager it is important to understand and identify these stages. The earlier it is responded to a potential situation at work, the bigger are the guarantees that the results from its overcoming shall be quick, adequate and taking minimum efforts by the part of the manager. We shall here review briefly the stages and their main characteristic specificities.

*During the first stage – **anxiety*** – an employee becomes aware of the new situation and decides how to act, to accept the fight or to run, if possible.

At the **response to anxiety**, the adaptive capabilities of the body are mobilised, resources are drawn from the superficial adaptation energy. But the body cannot endure a constant and systematic state of anxiety.

*The **stage of resistance*** occurs when the body manages to reach a balance and steady use of its adaptation resources. This way the body mobilises itself, acts and changes or overcomes the situation, and then the stress disappears. The symptoms typical for the response to anxiety practically vanish, and the resistance grows above normal. This explains the effects of body's training and hardening.

However, adaptation energy is not inexhaustible. If a stressor continues its action it will sooner or later bring to the *third stage – **the phase of exhaustion***. Stress is stronger than the individual can bear. If the situation remains unchanged in time it could result in the occurrence of physical damages, and in the worst case - in death.

In fact, Hans Selye has also developed the thesis that not **what happens is important, but how we perceive it**. In other words, this is the reason for the people's different responses to the same irritants and stress: some people go into the state of enhanced activity, others – in depression. So it all depends on the people's individual specificities, and a large part of the stresses are provoked by people themselves. Moreover, stress may occur not only in the presence of one strong irritant. Frequently stress accumulates owing to the effect of multitude small permanent negative impacts causing a state of threat, anxiety, insult, danger, etc. – something very typical for the modern dynamic occupational environment. Ignoring or durable refusing to perceive such conditions, incl. the presence of a huge volume of information, for example, is typical for the managerial activity itself, and could bring to serious stress and mental problems. Therefore, it is good to know and track down the main symptoms of stress in order to be able to take adequate and timely measures for their removal before things escalate to result in a loss of motivation for work, inefficiency of performance of assignments, personal-psychological problems turning into occupational ones.

Depending on the time it takes an individual to cope with the negative consequences of stress, the following types of stress are differentiated: situational, chronic and post-traumatic. Apart from that several more types can be differentiated and their names suggest their essence:

- Intrapersonal;
- Interpersonal;
- Personal;
- Informational;

- Physiological;
- Professional;
- Financial;
- Environmental;
- Social

Stress symptoms

In our opinion, it is very important to know and identify the main stress symptoms: physical, mental and behavioural, and to distinguish the symptoms indicating that there is a damage of organs and systems at a physiological level (Tables 2a and 2b¹²). Their diagnostics supports managers not only in their work with subordinates but also in the timely recognising the symptoms and undertaking measures in personal plan.

Apart from that it is important to emphasise that the lack of efficient management system (incl. related to adequate management of stress within the organisation) often brings to non-performance of work duties, and in some cases to “rising against the system”¹³.

The recognition of changes supposes a need for permanent definition of borders, forms and contents of quantitative and qualitative changes within macro- and micro-aspects at maintaining a particular desired state in a situation of sustainability¹⁴. Organising preventive measures requires, first, to assess the company situation, incl. the main stress factors and models of personnel's behaviour (for example, the degree of steadiness of the organisational stress), to assess the level of danger from professional “overburning” of employees, their nervous-mental tension¹⁵. The problem of stress at work is the most serious one regarding the provision of occupational health and safety in public administration, too. The lack of teamwork and even distribution of obligations brings to higher levels of workloads resulting in stress. The lack of consultations between managers and employees at the introduction of novelties in work also results in higher stress levels at work¹⁶.

The number of stressors in managerial activities is very high, and they are specific regarding their contents. The high level of stress actually influences the work of managers taking key positions within the organisation. Main managerial stressors include factors like informational load (and overload) related to huge information volumes required for the manager's efficient performance; information uncertainty, a factor of responsibility, deficit in time, permanent interpersonal and intrapersonal conflicts, need for finding simultaneous solutions for many problems (of high or similar level of responsibility), performance of a

¹² M. Usheva, Managerial psychology: skills, diagnostics... 80-81.

¹³ D. Yaneva, Motivational factors for the enhancement of efficiency of labour, IX Scholarly conference with international participation “Management and Sustainable Development”, University of Forestry, 2007, 428.

¹⁴ For further details see Stankova, M. Restricting natural and social threats in tourism (Blagoevgrad: University Publishing House at “Neophyte Rilski” SWU, 2016), 27-28.

¹⁵ Frank Bond; Cary Cooper and Valerie J Sutherland, Organisational Stress Management: A Strategic Approach. PalgraveMacmillan, 2010.

¹⁶ M. Dimitrova, Problems of Health and Safety Management in the Bulgarian Public Administration, International Journal of Contemporary Economics and Administrative Sciences Volume :1, Issue:3, (2011), 165-187, www.ijceas.com/index.php/ijceas/article/download/28/pdf

multitude of functions and responsibilities, inability to control the factors of outer environment, and others.

| Type of symptom | Characteristics |
|-----------------------|---|
| Physical symptoms: | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accelerated heart rate; • Quickened pulse, harsh shallow breathing; • Muscle strain and pains; ▪ Quickened breathing; ▪ Intense sweating; ▪ Dry mouth; ▪ Eruptions, irritative fever, itching, etc. |
| Mental symptoms: | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • vexation; • intrusive thoughts; • perplexity; • Concentration inability; • Disorders of short-term memory and quick forgetting; • Difficulty in decision making; • Sickness; • Lack of control; • Anxiety, apprehension, panic, panic attacks, etc. |
| Behavioural symptoms: | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fast-paced speech; • Neurotic manners – tapping, frequent flickering, pacing up and down, trembling; • Gnawing one’s nails, restlessness, fidgeting or pulling one’s hair; • frowning; • yawning; • loss of sense of humour, etc. |

Table 2a
Stress symptoms

The human body gives an indication of stress through various illness symptoms of particular physiological systems of the body. A manager may with a sufficient degree of reliability diagnose the level of employees’ stress even if only tracking down their absences from work and the diagnoses given by the doctors. Every affected system in the body gives signals through various (often repeated) symptoms, some of which can easily be observed in a work environment. Therefore, one of the most important personal qualities for the modern managers that turn into professional ones are watchfulness and empathy.

| Affected system | Symptoms |
|------------------------------|--|
| <i>Cardiovascular system</i> | High blood pressure (hypertension), quickened pulse, looking tired, tensed expression, chest pain and/or heaviness, difficulties in breathing |
| <i>Digestive system</i> | Enhanced peristalsis, acid secretion of stomach, decreased salivation, appetite disorders, quick loss of weight, painful bloated stomach, irritated intestines, oesophageal acids and burning, pain beyond the sternum, nausea, dry mouth, frequent urination. |
| <i>Muscles</i> | Increased tension and rigidity of muscles, neck stiffness, teeth gnashing, persistent headache. |
| <i>Skin</i> | Increased sebum secretion, frequent and uncaused sweating (often smelling badly), cold and sweaty limbs, problems with skin and hair, eczemas. |

| | |
|-------------------------------|--|
| <i>Immune system</i> | Drop of immunity, allergies, frequent colds, cancer diseases. |
| <i>Mind</i> | Decreased memory and libido, lack of concentration, high level of anxiety, difficulties in memorising and learning new information, sleep disorders (nightmares, shallow sleep, frequent waking and difficult falling asleep, too long or too short sleep). |
| <i>Emotions and behaviour</i> | Depression, irritability, hostility, negativism, use of narcotic and psychotropic substances, reduced interest to outer world, frequent flaring-ups and low spirits; sense of overfatigue, loneliness, isolation; nervous tics and habits; overreaction to weak stimuli; lies and excuses for poor professional performance; quickened, fragmentary and inconsistent speech. |

Table 2b
Stress symptoms – affected organs and systems

Regardless of the thing said hereinabove stress is a phenomenon of significant importance of human life. Selye states that full absence of stress is equal to death. Stress enables the individual meet the occurring difficulties in the state of alert and adapt to the new circumstances.

With repeated stressors the individual adjusts to stress and stressful responses decrease. This means that within particular limits the stress-resistance of mind could be trained. In some circumstances stress may influence beneficially the work efficiency.

For example, in some types of artistic activities and in sports the individual experiences a state of emotional stress accompanying the activity and bringing to specific sensations from liveliness to enthusiasm. An individual may even experience a sense of euphoria which is a result from the effect of the serotonin hormone, actively secreted by the adrenal gland cortex and is the most important physiological response to stress.

This hormone enhances the sense of optimism, the feeling that everything is possible and the sea is only knee-deep. This state is however hazardous as it may bring to seriously elevated and inadequate self-esteem and that, on its part may bring to mistakes.

Conclusion

After a manager establishes all the reasons bringing to the organisational stress, he/she has to use the entire set of measures aiming at its elimination and further prevention of occurrence of stress situations. As the elimination of consequences from the organisational stress involves serious investments, the US, west European and Japanese companies undertake a series of active measures. In their budgets they specifically incorporate expenses for organisational stress management. Many of them have long ago opened special courses for their employees to learn them how to cope with stress. At such classes employees are offered various help – from group consultations to hypnosis, meditation, relax, autosuggestion and visualisation to courses in martial arts and self-defence.

Other companies involve their employees in sports, yoga, dancing. Some companies offer game-therapy, art therapy, light and colour therapy, relaxation in nature, fish-keeping, methods of auditory perception (music, vocal therapy, relax through sounds from nature, etc.).

At a company level the following measures of stress management are recommended: observations and formation of a beneficial social-psychological climate; optimisation of the organisational structure taking into account the specific employees' capabilities and abilities; career planning and explaining the professional outlooks; staff's participation in the management of the company including contribution to the development and implementation of the objectives and tasks of the organisation, decision-making at various levels, maximum possible transparency and awareness of all the coming changes within the organisation; establishment of a system of efficient and effective feedback; keeping the sanitary and hygienic norms; training the higher and medium management staff in specific skills for coping with stress (the personal and collective one), incl. of conflict management.

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