



Auditing Stress for Good Governance in India

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Abstract

Objective

The objective of this paper is to focus on how the personnel in the government can develop approaches and strategies that will enable them to deal with work related stress (WRS). It also offers an overview of some of the basic skills that are essential for effective performance while dealing with the work-related stress.

Methods

An inductive method is used to interpret the processes of the available data. The data draws heavily upon existing review of literature from the academia and current practices in public and private organizations in India and around the world. The literature from research database on stress studies particularly on workplace stress, job-satisfaction, and motivation studies of administrators in public service delivery are reviewed.

Findings & Conclusion

Stress exists in every organization, however, through regular practice of stress reduction techniques, administrators and employees can figure out effective ways to cope with stress. This paper has stated workplace techniques for administrators/managers to cope with stress, along with physical techniques to be performed.

Research Limitations/Implications

This is not an exhaustive list of workplace techniques or physical exercises to cope with stress in government or private administration, but it incorporates the perspectives of experts in the specific domains whose knowledge, insights, advice and experiences prove handy in honing skills, essential for strengthening the capacity for effectiveness and quality of public service delivery at all levels of government specially in India.

Keywords: *Audit, Stress, Good Governance, India*

Introduction

Recent statistics reveal that stress is one of the primary reasons for sickness from work. Almost two-thirds of people are suffering from work related stress. Stress in the workplace also jeopardises the performance and productivity in the organizations.

Stress is defined as the emotional and physical strain caused by a person's response to pressure from the outside world. It occurs when there is a mismatch between what the



people aspire to do and what they can do. In other words, stress results when the pressure to perform a certain task is greater than the resources available to perform it¹.

$$S = P > R$$

[S - Stress; P-Pressure; R- Resource]

Medical research suggests that some thirty hormones are released as part of the body's automatic and innate "fight or flight" stress response. These hormones provide quick energy to cope with emergencies and exigencies. Stress hormones often build and, without release, contribute to wear and tear. Excessive stress can inhibit the body's immune system functioning and directly impair the functioning of key body systems. This is the reason why stress can increase one's susceptibility to illness, exacerbate an illness, or protract recovery from an illness.

Unrelieved stress, over time, can take the form of; tensed muscles that lead to headache, neck-ache, jaw-ache, back-ache; stomach pain, indigestion, bowel upset, ulcers; feelings of anxiety, nervousness, tension, helplessness; increasing anger or irritability, chest pain; depression, exhaustion, lack of concentration, insomnia; restlessness, boredom, confusion, the impulse to run and hide².

Good Governance

American Heritage Dictionary (2000) defines governance as "the act, process, or power of governing." Commonly 'governance' means the process of decision-making and the process through which decisions are implemented. The concept of 'good governance' conveys the qualitative dimension of governance. Good governance has 8 major characteristics. It is participatory, consensus oriented, accountable, transparent, responsive, effective and efficient, equitable and inclusive and follows the rule of law. It assures that corruption is minimized, the views of minorities are taken into account and that the voices of the most vulnerable in society are heard in decision-making. It is also responsive to the present and future needs of society³. To provide this participatory and inclusive governance the personnel /managers/ administrators need to be stress free⁴.

Objective

This paper explores the conceptual framework of work- related stress, workplace and physical techniques for coping with stress. It also reviews the perspectives of experts in the specific domains whose knowledge, insights, and experiences prove handy in honing skills, essential for strengthening the capacity for effectiveness of public service delivery at all levels of government.

Methodology

The method used for this article is review of the secondary data accessed from research database on stress studies particularly on workplace stress, job-satisfaction and motivation studies of administrators in public service delivery. The review examines published evidence on the causes and effects of stress and the suggestions for managers to deal with stress in organizations. Similarly, the literature on workplace stress and the handbook of stress management skills for the personnel working in public administration in India and was reviewed for major suggestions.

**Conceptual framework –Work-Related Stress (WRS)**

Studies on stress shows that prolonged or intense stress can harm individual's health which also depends on differences in occupations and their basic stressors⁵. Cooper and Marshall (1976) proposed a model which includes five sources of work stress: 1. basics of the job; 2. Role in the organization; 3. Career development; 4. Relationships at the work and 5. Organizational structure and climate⁵. Public contexts represent a field in which work-related stressors are more likely to appear, because of several reasons: the service and intangible nature of the activities generally deployed, the lack of structured human resource systems encompassing the pay and career systems, the lack of competitive logics, and the eventual exposure to the general public.

Public service organizations are subject to additional sources of stress, being embedded in more widely regulated and institutionalized frameworks in which new practices and operational procedures are often infused into the organizational settings in a top-down, a critical manner⁶. Accordingly, employees consider their work as threatening or challenging and are afraid that their coping resources are insufficient or inadequate for managing the situation⁷. Apart from the physiological effects (e.g. impact on the autonomic nervous systems) and psychological reactions (e.g. isolation, frustration), stress may affect the organizational activities, threatening the motivational activation of individuals. Such motivational symptoms of discomfort or strain include loss of enthusiasm, loss of interest, erosion of work motivation, disappointment, boredom.

Coping with Stress - Workplace Techniques for Administrators/Managers

The managers/ administrators can make use of following few techniques to overcome stress at workplace viz; getting organized, delegating, being assertive and balancing work and personal time.

Getting Organized: Poor organization is one of the most common causes of stress. Prioritizing objectives, duties and activities makes them manageable and achievable. Administrators should not overload their mind. Organizing things will help avoid personal and professional chaos.

Delegating

Delegation is the downward flow of formal authority from superior to subordinate. The hazards of doing everything by oneself can include burnout and missed deadlines. Administrators should, however, realize that effective delegation of responsibility and authority can increase employee motivation, create sense of belonging and improve interpersonal relations with employees.

Being Assertive

Being assertive involves standing up for one's personal rights and expressing one's thoughts, feelings and beliefs directly, honestly and spontaneously in ways that do not infringe the rights of others. If administrators want to be assertive, they should be turning aggressive behavior into assertive behavior. They should use clear, concise and good body and verbal language



Balancing Work and Personal Time: This can result in problems, like time pressures, family/ work conflicts, guilt, etc. one should learn how to set limits and stick to them which means how you will respond to demands from both your work and your personal life that will prevent you from over-committing yourself¹⁰.

Coping with Stress – Physical Techniques for Administrators/Managers

People need to develop a regular exercise program to reduce the effects of stress before it becomes distress. Regular physical activity improves health in the following ways: Reduces the risk of dying prematurely; Reduces the risk of dying from heart disease; Reduces the risk of developing diabetes; Reduces the risk of developing high blood pressure; Helps reduce blood pressure in people who already have high blood pressure; Reduces the risk of developing colon cancer; Reduces feelings of depression and anxiety; Helps control weight; Helps build and maintain healthy bones, muscles, and joints; Helps older adults become stronger and better able to move about without falling; Promotes psychological well-being¹¹.

Breathing, Stretching, Exercise: Conventional yogic breathing exercises help managers overcome anxiety and stress. Besides, it also; steadies the mind in concentration; improves digestion; increases appetite; reduces the risk of coronary diseases.

Meditation: Meditation is something which gets easier, more enjoyable and more intense with practice. Meditating for 20-30 minutes a day, over time, can lead to a generalized feeling of relaxation in many areas of one's life. Some of the benefits of deep relaxation are: Reduction of generalized anxiety; Preventing stress from building up; Increased energy and productivity; Improved concentration and memory; Reduction of insomnia and fatigue; Prevention and/or reduction of psychosomatic disorders such as hypertension, migraines, headaches, asthma, ulcers; Increased self-confidence and reduced self-blame.

Meditation is meant to bring about awareness. It's a time to connect to your inner "source" and let go of the issues, responsibilities and situations that bind your life. The benefits of mediation are uniquely individual, but both physiological and psychological balancing is common. Along with above exercises administrators should strive for making good rest, correct diet, visual imagery, and laughter essential part of daily life.

Concluding Remarks

We have seen that not only in India but globally stress is an unavoidable element in every organization, however, it is studied that through regular practice of stress reduction techniques, administrators and employees can figure out an effective way to cope with stress. It should be remembered that stress need not result in distress or in a burn-out. Today if the Indian administrators and managers take cognizance of the stressors in life and workplace and strive to deal with them positively, both internal and external stress transforms into eustress for improved health and work performances in our country .



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