A Study of Stress among the Employees in NEEPCO Limited

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1. Stress
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Abstract: Stress is any stimulus from the environment which demands some extra adjustment efforts or survival effort from the body. It is the condition arising from the interaction of the people and their jobs and is characterized by changes within people that force them to deviate from their normal functioning. The present study was conducted in NEEPCO Limited, Shillong with an attempt to understand the stress level of employees. It was found that the professional life of employees is affected by the events that happen in their personal life. Too much of stress also affects the physical and mental wellbeing of the employees.

Introduction:

The North Eastern Electric Power Corporation Limited (NEEPCO) under the Ministry of Power, Government of India, with an authorised share capital of Rs.3500 crore was established on 2nd of April, 1976. It is a Government of India enterprise established to promote plan, investigate, survey, design, construct, generate, operate and maintain the hydro and thermal / gas stations in North Eastern (NE) region of India. NEEPCO has an installed capacity of 1130 MW which is 44% of the total installed capacity of the NE region. Twenty Six units are in operation under NEEPCO.

The contribution of NEPCO to the North East Region (NER) is significant. NEEPCO operates the largest hydro and thermal power plant in N.E. Region, provides electricity to 7 houses out of 10 in N.E. Region. More than 90% employees in NEEPCO are from N.E. Region. NEEPCO provides free medical treatment to locals in all NEEPCO hospitals and dispensaries.

Stress:

Stress is any stimulus from the environment which demands some extra adjustment efforts or survival effort from the body. The pricks and pressures of daily life ranging from bodily adjustment to sudden temperature or humidity changes in the weather, an emotionally charged argument with spouse or boss, all contribute

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to stress. Stress that an employee encounters at the workplace adversely affects the productivity of an organisation (Pestonjee, 1999).

Unmanaged stress has a devastating impact on the organisation and the consequences vary from loss of individual productivity to increased absenteeism to rise in employee turnover. The present study has been undertaken with an aim to understand the stress level among the employees in NEEPCO Limited.

Literature Review:

The term stress is derived from the Latin word stringere which means to be drawn tight. Hans Selye (1936) first introduced the term stress in the Life Science domain. Stress is a complex, dynamic process of interaction between a person and his or her life. It is the way we react physically, mentally, and emotionally to the various conditions, changes, and demands of life. According to Robbins (2007) "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 has been spoken of as the plague of the 21st century. As Chajut and Algom (2003) noted, "It is difficult to overstate the practical significance of resolving the question of performance under stress."

Stress refers to an emotional experience associated with nervousness, tension, and strain (Cooke & Rousseau, 1984). The literature on stress features a variety of approaches to its conceptualisation, its antecedents, and its effects. Stressors can be understood as "stimuli that evoke the stress process" (LePine et. al., 2005). Workers subject to similar stressors may differ in the extent to which they feel nervous or tense as a result of personal experiences or happenings in their work setting (Parker & De-Cotiis, 1983).

More and more executives from across the organisational

hierarchy today report increased competitive pressure, greater volume of work and ever increasing performance targets. The attendant consequences of work-life balance being thrown off-balance and an increased sense of inadequacy at personal and professional levels eventually lead to burnout for many. From earlier research it is revealed that organisational, individual and external factors cause occupational stress (Agarwal, 2007, Robbins, 2007).

Organisational Factors:

Several organisational factors known to aggravate the matter are:

1. Underutilisation of one's skills and abilities due to management's philosophy and policies.

2. Uncertain professional role and status.

3. Perceived job insecurity.

4. When one is expected to show results and performance, but without sufficient authority to ensure execution of the work, the manager will experience stress.

5. Exorbitant work demands.

6. Conflicts within the organisation due to interpersonal relationships, conflict of power and authority, conflicts between organisational and departmental goals, allocation of resources, poorly defined responsibilities, and clashes of values and interest serve as stresses for the managers and executives.

7. Organisational size and bureaucratic system have certain rules and regulation, which are inherent parts of the system to serve as checks and balancing forces. However, they are likely to serve as constraints and stress for the managers.

8. Each organisation has its own personality. The organisational climate demands conformity and this may serve as stress for the executive.

9. The job design systems and the associated socio-technical problems serve as stress for the managers and professionals.

10. Inappropriate leadership style, as perceived by the manager, serves as a stress for the managers and professionals. If there are differences between the perceived leadership style and the expected style of leadership there is likely to be conflict and stress for both managers as well as subordinates.

The above noted stressors could be said to create felt job stress - a sense of time pressure, anxiety, and worry that is associated with job tasks.

Researchers have studied these aspects in various contexts. Ivancevich (1985) in his study highlighted that working conditions lead to high stress in the software professionals.

Emsley (2003) in a study of multiple goals and managers' job-related tension and performance suggested that job-related tension and performance deteriorate as managers pursue multiple goals although the relationship seems to be non-linear. The relative importance of goals does not appear to be important. Hadfield (2005) reported that lack of control over standardised products and inflexible deadlines are the biggest causes of stress among IT managers. It also revealed that stress is the worst hazard of the workplace and repetitive strains are the greatest problem. Rajeswari and Anantharaman (2005) in their study of "Role of Human-Computer Interaction Factors as Moderators of Occupational Stress and Work Exhaustion", reveal that IT professionals have long work hours with different time zones, total team work, task to be completed on deadline with perfection as per client needs, which requires interpersonal, technical, and organisational skills. These aspects lead to occupational stress.

Kumar (2006) conducted a study on Job Stress of Nationalised and Non-Nationalised Bank Employees and found that occupational stress is higher among non-nationalised bank employees compared to nationalised bank employees. The study also highlights that occupational stress variables such as role over load, role authority, role conflict and lack of senior level support contribute more to the occupational stress among employees of non-nationalised banks as compared to employees of nationalised banks.

A study to find out the relationship between personality and stress resistance ability in employees was conducted by Chirayath (2006) found that there exists a higher degree of positive correlation between stress resistance and work related stresses in case of non-executives.

Nobile and McCormick (2007) conducted a study on teaching profession, and revealed that occupational stress is linked to absenteeism, turnover, and other negative organisational outcomes. Bakhshi, Sudha and Sandhu (2008) conducted a study on "Impact of Occupational Stress on Home Environment: An Analytical Study of Working Women of Ludhiana City" covering the working women viz. doctors, university teachers and bank employees with 50 respondents in each category. The study revealed that 58% of the respondents were having high occupational stress, followed by 42% who experienced medium stress levels and none were found to have low amount of stress level. The impact of stress on house care and upkeep was evident as results showed that they pay full attention towards orderliness in home despite moderate work stress which added to their overall stress and fatigue.

Individual Factors:

The mere presence of stressors does not automatically lead to felt stress. Individuals may endure stressors or dissipate their effects either cognitively or behaviorally, and thus felt job stress can be distinguished both from stressors and from physiological symptoms.

Some of the individual factors that lead to stress are:

1. Lack of opportunity for meaningful contribution serves as a stress for the professionals.

2. Unrealistic ambitions or environmental constraints inhibiting the pursuit of ambitions result in frustrated ambitions, which serve as a stress for the professionals.

3. The conflict between careers demands vs. family demands also serve as a stress for the professionals and managers.

Worry and conflict at home tends to influence unfavorably the job behavior which increases job stress, which further influences behavior at home.

4. Personality characteristics such as Type A and Type B category people are also related to stress.

Pestonjee (1999) explained that optimum level at which stress is effective changes is person dependent and is dependent on a variety of factors such as the personality of an individual, self-esteem, educational background, authority to make decision, control over various organisational and environmental variables and the like.

Ganaraj (2001) made an attempt to study the role of environmental factors and individual characteristics in the stress process and found that an internal locus of control was found to be related to lower level of stress.

External Factors:

Besides the organisational and individual factors discussed above, environmental factors also cause stress. External factors such as economic environment, political environment, social environment, technological environment, terrorist related problems and global environmental issues also create stress. It is interesting to note that the global financial crisis of USA of 2008 is also a dominant factor of stress for the entire world (Singh and Dutta, 2010).

Stress and the Business Environment:

As long as the individual handles stress constructively through learning and improved effectiveness, it is beneficial both for the individual and the organisation (Robbins, 2007). Stress consequently has a domino effect in greater efficiency of the manager and the organisation in terms of better achievement of the goals and objectives for instance, achievement of ambitious production targets, completion of research projects ahead of schedule, etc.

Constructive means of coping with stress usually involve greater personal effectiveness of the manager like learning new techniques and technologies, improvement in leadership qualities, becoming more sensitive to the needs of one's subordinates and boss, building up a team etc. Thus, when the manager adopts these means to cope with the demands, the source of stress becomes an instrument of self growth and feelings of achievement and accomplishment. For an organisation, these aspects result in higher growth, profitability, excellence (Nelson and Cooper, 2007).

However, if the stress results in distress of the manager, it is harmful both for the individual as well as the organisation, and a solution has to be found to reduce distress, and to move him or her towards a situation where stress becomes a source of professional stimulation, evoking feelings of challenge rather than feelings of defeatism.

Stress that an employee encounters at the workplace adversely affects the productivity of an organisation. The negative impact of occupational stress on business environment is now an acknowledged factor. Unmanaged stress has a debilitating impact on the organisation and the consequences vary from loss of individual productivity to increased absenteeism to rise in employee attrition. Team morale and company productivity are also adversely affected. Thus, stress is both a friend and a foe (Batiwala, 1990).

Essence of Stress Management:

Stress is indispensable to keep one going, but overstress kills one's ability and creativity. The life of today's manager is stressful one. Managers are more prone to stress than mere mortals because they have to carry the weight of running an entire business on their shoulders. Overstress can cause a number of health related problems like migraines, insomnia, high blood pressure, a weakened immune system, depression burnout, nervousness, sleeplessness and the like (Khanka, 2005). Eventually, stress impacts a business owner's work and reduces productivity. Although it is impractical to advise managers to avoid stress completely, it is important for them to understand the effects of being stressed out and learn some basic techniques for dealing with occupational stress.

Objective of the Study:

The objective of the present study is to identify the level of stress among the employees of NEEPCO Limited and explore how this stress level will help an employee to enhance the productivity of an organisation.

Data and Methodology:

Primary data was collected from executives employed at the head quarter of NEEPCO, Shilling. The sample size of the survey consisted of 30 executives (i.e. 15% of the total number of executives of the organisation). A structured questionnaire was prepared and used as the data collection instrument. The relevant information was collected by non-probability sampling technique of convenience sampling because of cost and time constraints.

Analysis and Results:

1. The study reveals that 93.1% of respondents were satisfied with their work, only 3.45% were not satisfied and 3.45% did not comment. Thus it is clear from the data that majority of the executives of NEEPCO are satisfied with their work environment.

2. The study reveals that all the executives agree with the statement that they have the opportunity for continued growth. It also reveals that 72.41% of the respondents can easily adapt to the changes that occur in the organisation.

3. The study reveals that 55.17% of the employees replied in the affirmative and 34.48% of employees replied in the negative when asked whether the health disorders like cardiac; hypertension, diabetes etc. are result of job related stress. Thus it is found that majority of the employees agree with the statement that health disorders occur because of job related stress.

4. The study shows that 27.58% of respondents replied positively whereas 68.96% of respondents replied in the negative when asked whether they feel that managers/executives consume intoxicants due to excessive stress. Thus it is clear from the facts that majority of the

executives don't think that excessive stress is a reason for consumption of intoxicant.

5. The study shows that 37.93% of employee responded positively and 55.17% responded negatively when asked whether the low stress people have higher commitment towards their chosen profession. Thus it is clear that majority of executives do not agree with the statement that low stress people have higher commitment towards their chosen profession.

6. The study reveals that 58% of executives prefer limited number of jobs and limited time. But 21% prefer large number of jobs, but limited time and another 21% prefer large number of jobs and limited time. Thus we can conclude that most of them would like to work within a definite pressure level to give maximum output.

7. When asked, "What they do when something forces them to change their life style?" 78% of executives commented that they can learn how to deal with the changes and rest 22% opined that they accept the changes. Thus we can infer from above that the employees of NEEPCO are able to cope up with the changes.

8. The study reveals that 34.48% of executives, held the lack of time as responsible for not able to devote enough time for care of health, 20.68% find their carelessness as one of the reason. 6.89% said that stress in job is responsible for all type of disorders. 24.13% are not suffering from any type of disorder. 3.45% are suffering but for other reasons and rest cannot answer when asked whether they have ever suffered from diabetes, piles, pain in the joints, low backache, headaches, and frequent variation in the blood pressure, depression etc. Thus we can infer that lack of time is the main reason for the occurrence of such disorders.

9. The study reveals that 51.72% of executives feel that to some extent minimum stress will motivate an employee to do his work, 27.58% opined that minimum stress will motivate an employee and 20.68% opined that minimum stress will not motivate employees. Thus it is clear that executives feel that to some extent minimum stress will motivate employees to do his work.

10. The study reveals that 44.82% of executives feel that excess stress will increase absenteeism, 41.37% felt that to some extent stress is responsible for increase in absenteeism, 13.79% felt that absenteeism will not increase due to excess stress. Thus we can conclude that most of the Executives of NEEPCO were in agreement with the statement that excess stress will increase the absenteeism.

11. The study reveals that 59% of Executives are satisfied with the existing information system, 14% said that they are not satisfied with the information system and rest 27% don't have any idea.

12. The study reveals that 79% of executives are satisfied with the infrastructure provided to them for performing the job. While 7% of them are not satisfied and rest 14% do not have any idea regarding this. This highlights that the infrastructure provided in the organisation is well suited with the job structure.

13. The study reveals that 90% of employees are satisfied with the relationship they share with their colleagues. It is inferred from above that the working condition in NEEPCO is congenial.

14. The study reveals that 41.37% believed that their professional life is affected by the personal life events like death of spouse, marital separation, death of a close family member, son or daughter leaving home etc. 24% replied to some extent professional life is affected by the personal life, 21% felt that their professional life is not affected by the personal life, while 14% do not have any idea regarding this.

Findings of the Study:

The main findings of the study are given below:

1. Information system is a stressor among employees.

2. Employees prefer to work within a definite pressure level to give maximum output. Stress is, to an extent perceived as a motivator.

3. Majority of the executives believed that they have the opportunity for continued growth.

4. The executives of NEEPCO were confident about adapting themselves to changes.

5. Majority of executives do not agree with the statement that low stress people have higher commitment towards their chosen profession.

Conclusion and Policy Implications:

In today's uncertain business environment, stress management in work place is a reality that most of the employees have to face. When people feel overwhelmed, they lose confidence and become irritable or withdrawn, making them less productive and effective and their work less rewarding. If the warning signs of work stress go unattended, they can lead to bigger problems. Beyond interfering with job performance and satisfaction, chronic or intense stress can also lead to physical and emotional health problems. Thus, it is very essential that stress should be properly managed in the organisation to ensure high productivity.

Exercise in any form like walking, jogging, yoga and meditation, swimming, bicycling, playing different games etc. can help an executive to lead a stress free life and be more effective. Sometimes periodical interaction between line and staff management for assessing the areas of interest and job rotation is necessary and weekend should not be overloaded.

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