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RESULTS & DISCUSSION

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STRATEGIES TO COPE UP WORK - PLACE STRESSORS: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY IN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

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GANDIPET

ABSTRACT

In modern societies, stress has become a widespread phenomenon and therefore an issue of major concern to employees as well as to organizations. Higher education is not immune to this problem. Teachers' work has always been considered to be very stressful. A host of factors cause stress. It has been identified that poor workplace relations are one of Organizational Stressors. If not developed coping strategies that encourage Workplace Camaraderie, faculty stress will have more negative than positive consequences and thwarts the Organizational effectiveness. The aim of this research is to investigate what aspects of Workplace relations cause stress on an individual and to find out the coping strategies that encourage Workplace Camaraderie that combat stress operatively and strategically in Educational institutions. The sample for the study was faculty from engineering colleges in Hyderabad. A well framed questionnaire was used as primary source of information regarding organizational stressors. The secondary sources of data are used for framing strategies to handle stress at workplace. The Analysis of the study resulted in framing a model that consists of appropriate measures that helps an individual to manage stress effectively in educational institutions.

KEYWORDS

camaraderie, coping strategies, educational institutions, stress, workplace relations.

INTRODUCTION

Stress is a common complaint of employees worldwide, in which individuals experience an emotional state in which both physical and mental discomfort are present. Stress is an interactive concept. It does not simply arise from internal organs of an individual, but comes from the interaction of human beings with the environment. Thus environment has profound influence on the stress (Sarma, V. S. Velluri, 2010). When it is observed that over last two decades the transformation that has been taking place worldwide at higher educational institutions has resulted in significant changes in the nature of work at the institutions and there is increased stress on the staff. This would result in physiological, psychological, behavioral, job and organizational consequences. It has been identified that poor workplace relations are one of Organizational Stressors. Work place camaraderie is one of the ways to cope up with the organizational stress. Camaraderie is the spirit of familiarity and trust existing between friends. In meeting personal and group needs, and in regulating employee's behavior constructively, stress management strategies that focus on improving Workplace relations can be very helpful to the Organization. An Organization may not find always the ways to manage workplace stress by making huge changes or rethinking career ambitions, but rather it can focus on improving the Camaraderie among its subjects.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In the words of Fred Luthans, Stress is defined as "an adaptive response to an external situation that results in individual psychological, and/or behavioral deviations for organizational participants. When stress is experienced by an individual, its symptoms can surface as physiological, psychological and behavioral outcomes. Variables like individual perception, job experience, social support, belief in locus of control and hostility differentiates people in terms of their ability to handle stress. Social support acts as a palliative, mitigating the negative effects of even high-strain jobs (Stephen P. Robbins, 1996).

Teacher stress is defined by Kyriacou (1987) as "the experience by a teacher of unpleasant emotions, such as tension, frustration, anxiety, anger, and depression, resulting from aspects of work as a teacher". Job Control, Resources, Communication and Work Relationships were found to be problematic stressors that mainly influenced organizational commitment (Mostert, et.al, 2008). Teaching is the most stressful occupations out of 26 other occupations. Office/workplace is where one spends many hours of life, so getting along and working productively with colleagues is very important. Unfortunately, many employees experience stress because team members argue, give each other the silent treatment or allow one person to do all the work (Johnson, S. et.al. 2006). Low levels of social support are associated with psychological distress. Teachers employed far away from home and family, opportunities for group interaction can offer much-needed assistance. A network of groups—both social and professional—can support teachers in coping with acculturation (Zoe Ann Brown and Denise L. Uehara).

There is need to build a repertoire of techniques and strike a balance between work and social activities to effectively manage stress. This will invariably reduce the enormity of economic costs to both organizations and the employees characterized by consequences of unmanaged stress (Elizabeth & Godswill, 2009). An assumption that we can live without distress would be very naive. Stress is a feeling produced by an individual in relationship with the environment so it can also be controlled and managed. Stressful situations can be turned to one's profit and kept in the area of a good stress or eustress (Marija Rok, 2011). Less secure employment and work-life imbalance strongly predicted increased psychological distress. Consideration of contemporary academic work by both academic staff associations and university administrations with respect to the implementation of changes in policies and procedures that might lead to reductions in work-related stress and strain (Catano, Vic, et.al., 2010).

It's proven that in a business, big or small, having each member feel uniquely vital to the organization, and who have friends within the organization, not only reduces turnover but also increases production and profitability (Nick Morris, www.ideamarketers.com). Firms that rank high on the consulting and research group's lists of great employers have three traits in common: employee trust in management, pride in the company and camaraderie with colleagues (Laura Petrecca, www.usatoday.com).

NEED OF THE STUDY

Stress is a universal phenomenon. A lot of research has been carried on organizational stress, but very few studies were conducted regarding faculty stress in higher educational institutions. The reason behind this lies in perception that teaching is generally a low stress job when compared to other professions. Occupational stress is becoming a key concern for both faculty members and administrators at higher educational institutions. It has been identified that lack of Workplace Camaraderie is one of the organizational stressors. So, this study has been initiated to identify the aspects of Workplace relations that cause stress on an individual and then propose a model that includes coping strategies that encourage Workplace Camaraderie resulting in reducing stress.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study has been carried with the following objectives.

1. To investigate what aspects of workplace relations cause stress on an individual in the educational institutions.

2. To develop a model proposing the strategies that can be applied to encourage Workplace Camaraderie to confront stress in the educational institutions.

METHODOLOGY

To identify what aspects of Workplace relations cause stress, questionnaire has been used as a major source of data. Primary data for the study is collected from the Employees (faculty) working with engineering colleges in Hyderabad who represented the respondents of the study. To identify the issues relating to this study, secondary data sources i.e., texts, journals, magazines, newspaper and websites were used. The questionnaire was administered to sample of 100 faculty members based upon their convenience, interest levels and availability. Out of 100 questionnaires 76 are used for the analysis as others were incomplete. The relevant quantitative technique, average Mean score is adopted for gaining insight in to the study and there by a model has been proposed showing Workplace stressors with corresponding coping strategies for educational institutions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

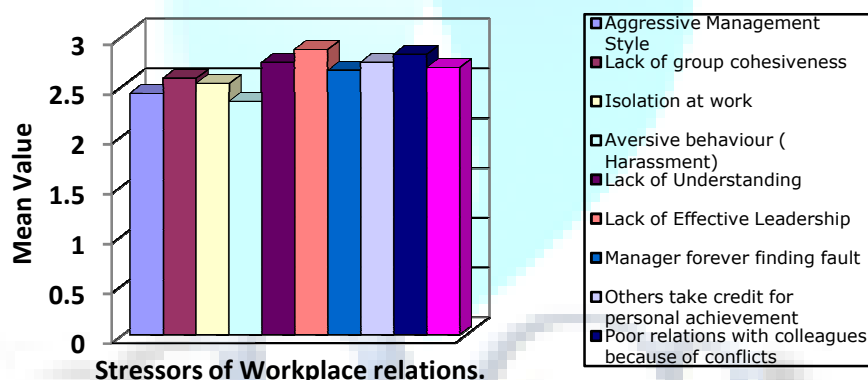
The aim of this study is to propose a model with stress coping strategies that help Workplace Camaraderie by identifying the Workplace relation's stressors. To identify the aspects of workplace relations that causes stress, ten questions were framed based on five-point scale (1- Never, 2- Rare, 3- Sometimes, 4- Often and 5- Very Often), a average score of 3 and around indicate a moderate stressor on the aspect of Workplace relations, while around 5 and 1 indicates a high stressor to the employees and low stressor to the employees on the aspects of workplace relations that cause stress on an individual. The responses are summarized in table-1.

TABLE-1: STRESSORS RELATING TO WORKPLACE RELATIONS AND MEAN VALUES

Aspects of Workplace relations	Mean values
Aggressive Management Style	2.42
Lack of group cohesiveness	2.57
Isolation at work	2.52
Aversive behaviour (Harassment)	2.34
Lack of Understanding	2.73
Lack of Effective Leadership	2.86
Manager forever finding fault	2.65
Others take credit for personal achievement	2.73
Conflicts with colleagues because of conflicts	2.81
Miscommunication	2.68

The identified stressors related to Workplace relations in Educational institutions are Aggressive Management Style, Lack of group cohesiveness, Isolation at work, Aversive behaviour (Harassment), Lack of Understanding, Lack of Effective Leadership, Manager forever finding fault, Others take credit for personal achievement, Poor relations with colleagues because of conflicts and Miscommunication. Based upon the responses (table-1) under the study, mean value of the each stressor is calculated. Lack of Effective Leadership (Mean value 2.86) ranks the top most factors leading to stress. This is followed by poor relations with colleagues because of conflicts (2.81). On the other side employee feel that Aggressive Management Style (2.42) and Aversive behaviour (Harassment) (2.34) cause less stress than other aspects of workplace relations that cause stress on an individual in Educational institutions. It is also observed from the Table-1, that the other stressors have mean values around 2.5 indicating that all these factors are causing stress moderately. The mean values are as follows: Others take credit for personal achievement and Lack of Understanding (2.73), Miscommunication (2.68), Manager forever finding fault (2.65), Lack of group cohesiveness (2.57) and Isolation at work (2.52).

FIGURE 1: WORKPLACE STRESSORS IN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS.



From the fig-1, it is clear that among the stressors, lack of effective leadership and poor relationship with colleagues due to conflicts are found to be the major factors causing stress. Management style and aversive behavior are considered as having low impact compared to other factors. This indicates that the management style can be implemented based on the type of employees and their enthusiasm levels. The more enthusiasm, creativity, commitment and talented, the more would be participative style of management. Otherwise autocratic style of management is advisable.

Stress management is of paramount importance in modern organizational settings. Although management of stress is primarily the responsibility of an employee, the role of Organizations cannot be undermined. The figure-1 explains the Stressors and the related techniques that help in understanding the creation of stress-free environment and the significance of Work place Camaraderie.

FIG-2: STRESS COPING STRATEGIES WITH RESPECTIVE OUTCOMES IN EDUCATIONAL SERVICES

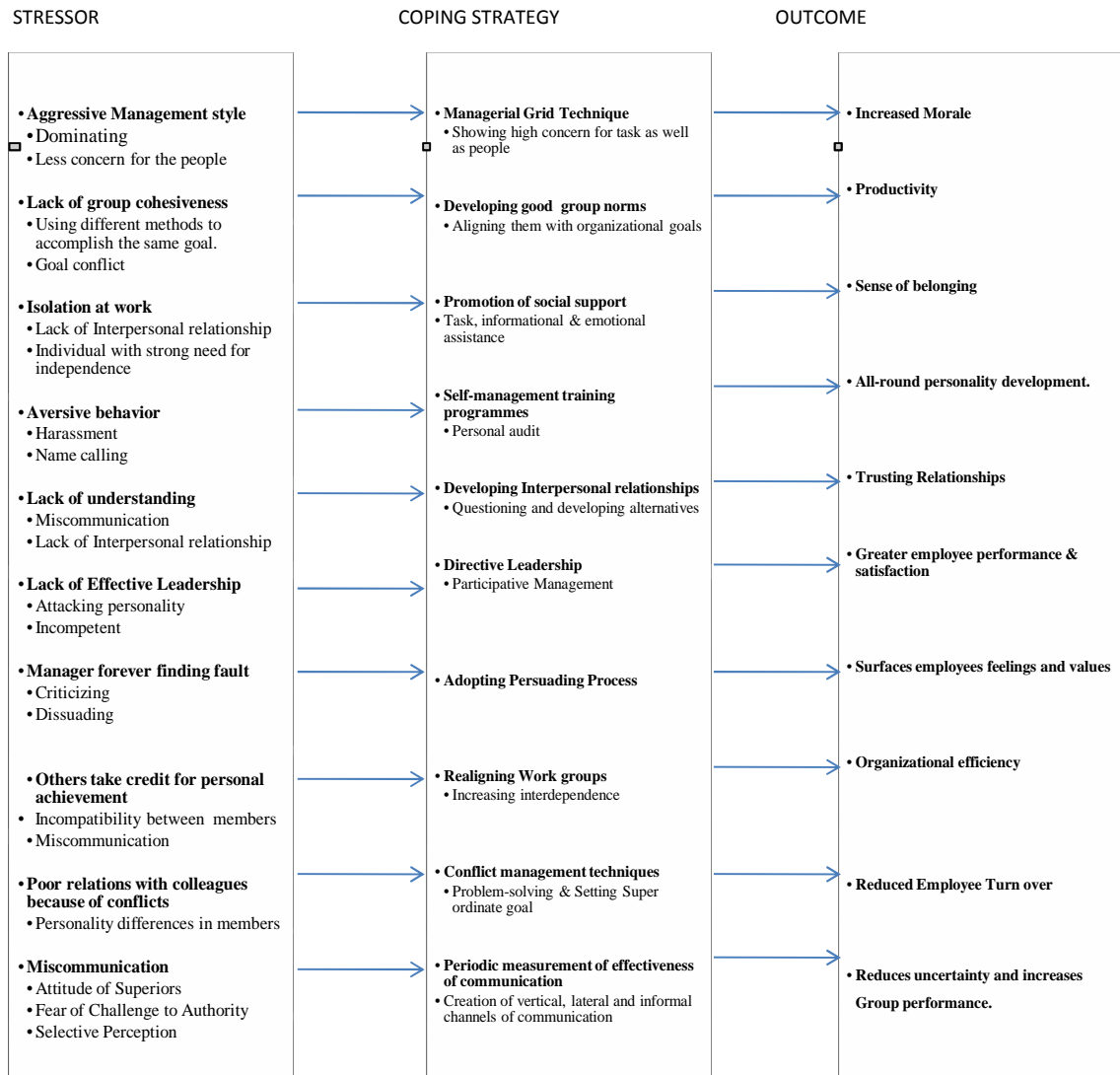
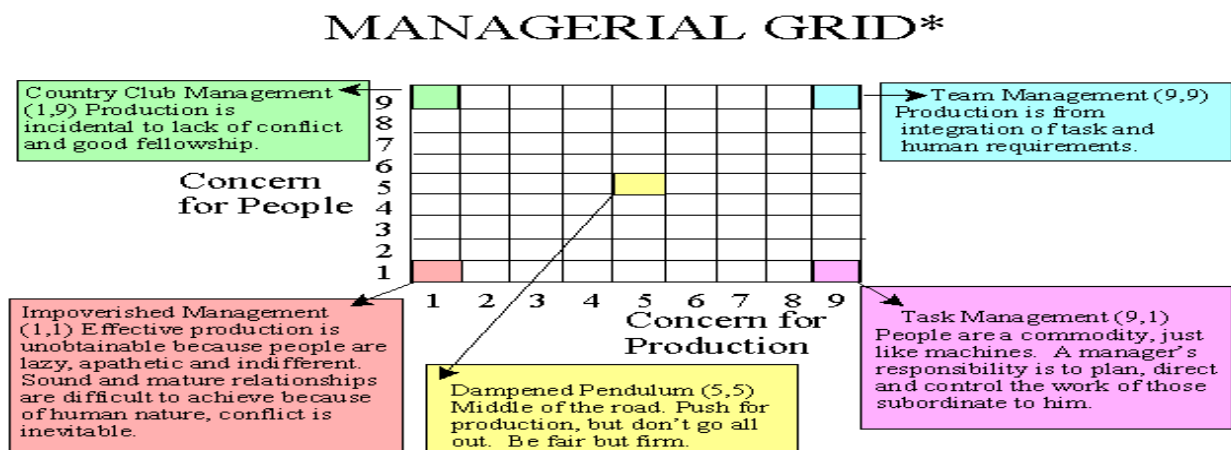


Fig-2 shows the stressors among the faculty in educational institutions (analysis based upon the primary data, table-1); coping strategies and its impact on individual, group and the organization. It is found in table-1, that all the stressors identified for the study were causing moderate stress among the faculty. Based upon the stressors, various strategies have been developed to have a positive outcome in the institute. The result is depicted in the form of model in fig-2. To minimize the effect of Aggressive management style, the organizations can adopt different kinds of management styles given by 'Grid Technique' depending upon the situations in the organization. Blake and Mouton (1964) devised a 'Grid' model showing how concern for people and production can be combined in varying proportions and what kind of Management Style would be used according to the nature of the organization. Aggressive management style is one of the management styles. It is found from the study that this style is one among the stressors. In Aggressive Management style, the superior gets his/her own ways regardless of others by personal dominance. Even though the Mean value of this stressor is less when compared to other stressors in educational institutions, it cannot be ignored. The figure-3 shows the five different Management styles in managerial grid. They are 1. Impoverished (1, 1), 2. Country club (1, 9), 3. Task (9, 1), 4. Middle road (5, 5) and 5. Team (9, 9).

FIG-3: BLAKE & MOUTON'S MANAGERIAL GRID



* Adapted from Blake, R. R. and J. S. Moulton. 1962. The managerial grid. *Advanced Management Office Executive* 1(9).

The most efficient management combines high concern for the task with high concern for people. Even the management of educational institution can reduce the stress on the individuals by developing efficient teams with respect and trust among the individuals. As employees are shown concern along with assignment of the task, the morale is increased.

Group cohesiveness is the degree of attachment and agreement of the members in a group. In educational institutions too, goal conflicts and personal differences leads to lack of group cohesiveness, which in turn cause stress. From table-1 it is observed that lack of group cohesiveness is causing considerable stress on the faculty. In order to avoid this, the Organization should develop group norms that include rules of behavior or proper ways of action which are accepted as legitimate by the faculty members. These group norms should be aligned with Organizational goals so that productivity is ensured.

Sometimes employees feel detached from the world around (isolated) at work place when they lack warm interpersonal relations. Generally these are the individual with strong need for independence. They sacrifice fulfillment of their social need to achieve success and fail to develop close attachments with friends and colleagues and undergo stress. Promoting social support by conducting activities that provide task, informational and emotional assistance can help the individuals manage stress as they will slowly develop sense of belonging.

Harassment and name calling exhibits the aversive character of an individual. Though the employees in educational institutions are not facing this problem seriously, it has to be addressed as little of this can have immense impact on the individual performance. Self-management techniques can render a helping hand to handle such behavior. These help an individual to understand themselves in a free and fair manner. Some individual with their aversive behavior puts others in a stressful situation. Personal audits can help individuals to analyze their capacities and limitations and gives them a scope to improve one's skills and capacity to overcome limitations in scientific way. The Organizations can conduct Self management programmers for employees so that they result in an all round development.

Lack of Interpersonal relations and miscommunication leads to lack of understanding. Employees can feel stress free environment only when they find trusting relationships and it is observed that misunderstanding never leaves any room for trusting relationship. Developing Interpersonal relations by questioning and providing alternatives can reduce misunderstandings among the individuals so that they can manage Workplace stress.

It is observed from figure- 1 that the majority of faculty members who are undergoing stress because of workplace relations is due to Lack of effective leadership. The employees feel strained when they feel tasks that they are carrying are ambiguous and stressful. In order be an effective leader a superior has to motivate, create confidence and build morale in his/her subjects without any discrimination (Directive leadership). Mental and emotional involvement of a person in a group situation encourages him to render greater performance as they enjoy job satisfaction.

Employees express that when their superior criticize, dissuade and find fault they feel stressed. In order to avoid such situation the management should encourage persuading process where employees can surface their feelings and values. It is sometimes observed that many employees get disturbed when they notice that others are taking credit instead of them. These kinds of situations happen when there is incompatibility and miscommunication among the members. The Organizations have to realign workgroups with increasing interdependence and ensuring group cohesiveness. This kind of strategies can ultimately result in Organizational efficiency.

Conflicts results in poor relationships and increased employee turnover. Personal differences that individual surface in their behavior is the greater reason for this. It can observe from the figure -1 that the poor relationship with colleagues because of conflicts is one of the major stressors in educational institutions. A serious consideration has to be given to this problem. The Organization can introduce conflict management techniques. It can make conflicting parties sit together and solve the differences (problem solving) and it can also set super ordinate goal for the conflicting parties where they cannot ensure success unless they work together. This kind of activities can increase group performance and reduce the employee's turnover.

Attitude of the superior and their fear of challenge to authority and selective perception are the major sources of miscommunication. Significant consideration has to be given to this problem as the employees are often experiencing stress because of misunderstanding. Periodic measurement of effectiveness of communication has to be carried so that credibility in the communication process is observed. The Organizations have to create vertical, lateral and informal channels of communication so that uncertainty is reduced and group performance is increased.

Thus strategies so developed for the stressors identified in educational institutions, not only help improving workplace relations but they promote Workplace Camaraderie among the employees. When the educational institutions seriously give a thought to Organizational behavior techniques that are used in the model and apply accordingly, it would be creating a great workplace for its employees.

CONCLUSION

It can be concluded from the study that unhealthy Work place relations cause significant stress on the employees. Ineffective leadership and poor relationships with colleagues because of conflicts are important stressors of workplace relations. The model developed with stress coping strategies helps the employees of educational institutions to effectively manage stress with a condition that the Organization should have true intension to help the individual by implementing the initiatives with commitment. At the same time the individuals should also contribute to the process so that the entire Organization enjoys Workplace Camaraderie by promoting stress free environment.

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