



## EMERGING DIMENSIONS OF STRESS MANAGEMENT AND ITS ASSOCIATION WITH BETTER WORK LIFE BALANCE

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### ABSTRACT

Some sources of stress are unavoidable. Managing stress is all about taking charge - taking charge of thoughts, emotions, schedule, environment, and the way one's deal with problems. The ultimate goal of every employee is a balanced life, with time for work, relationships, relaxation, and fun – plus the resilience to hold up under pressure and meet challenges. Work life balance is about effectively managing the juggling act between paid work and other activities that are important including spending time with family, taking part in sport and recreation, volunteering or undertaking further study. Work-Life Balance does not mean an equal balance. Trying to schedule an equal number of hours for each of the various work and personal activities is usually unrealistic and unrewarding. All are engaged in a number of roles every day and one hold a number of duties throughout our life. How effectively we manage our stress is a significant determinant of many things in our life including better balance between work and life.

**KEYWORDS** : Work Life balance, Stresses, Stress management, Stress threshold, burnout.

### INTRODUCTION

It is often said that a happy employee is a productive employee. Work-life balance is about adjusting working patterns which allow employees to combine work with their other responsibilities. The clash between work and family in life occur 'when demands of participation in one's field are unsuitable with demands of participation in the other field, or ,when one's efforts to fulfill work role demands interfere with one's ability to fulfill family demands and vice versa. Stress free mind helps a person to handle day to day activities diplomatically and with maturity. An employee can achieve better results at office and can also be happy homemaker when he/she is stress free and struck his/her chord right between work and life.

Stress is the emotional and physical strain caused by our response to pressure from the outside world. Stress management starts with indentifying the sources of stress in our life. To do so one need to look closely at his/her habits, attitude and excuses. Until one accept responsibility for the role he/she plays, stress levels will remain out of control.

If one can't avoid a stressful situation, it is often said that efforts should be made to alter it. Some sources of stress are unavoidable, acceptance may be difficult but in the long run it's easier to accept than to rally against things one can't change. Managing stress is all about taking charge - taking charge of thoughts, emotions, schedule, environment, and the way one's deal with problems. The ultimate goal is a balanced life, with time for work, relationships, relaxation, and fun – plus the resilience to hold up under pressure and meet challenges head on.

Stress management starts with identifying the sources of stress in life. This isn't as easy as it sounds. True sources of stress aren't always obvious, and it's all too easy to overlook own stress-inducing thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. To identify true sources of stress one should look closely at habits, attitude, and excuses. Until one's accept responsibility for the role one's play in creating or maintaining it, one's stress level will remain outside one's control.

### Unhealthy ways of coping with stress

These coping strategies may temporarily reduce stress, but they cause more damage in the long run:

- Smoking
- Drinking too much
- Overeating or under eating
- Zoning out for hours in front of the TV or computer
- Withdrawing from friends, family, and activities
- Using pills or drugs to relax
- Sleeping too much
- Procrastinating
- Filling up every minute of the day to avoid facing problems

- Taking out one's stress on others (lashing out, angry outbursts, physical violence)

### Learning healthier ways to manage stress

If one's methods of coping with stress aren't contributing to one's greater emotional and physical health, it's time to find healthier one's. There are many healthy ways to manage and cope with stress, but they all require change. One can either change the situation or change one's reaction. When deciding which option to choose, it's helpful to think of the four A's: Avoid, Alter, Adapt, or Accept.

Since everyone has a unique response to stress, there is no 'one size fits all' solution to managing it. No single method works for everyone's or in every situation, so we should experiment with different techniques and strategies. Focus on what makes one feel calm and in control.

### Dealing with Stressful Situations: The Four A's

#### Change the situation:

- Avoid the stressor.
- Alter the stressor.

#### Change one's reaction:

- Adapt to the stressor.
- Accept the stressor.

### Stress Management Strategy

#### Avoid Unnecessary Stress

Not all stress can be avoided, and it's not healthy to avoid a situation that needs to be addressed.

**Learn how to say 'no'** – Know one's limits and stick to them. Whether in one's personal or professional life, refuse to accept added responsibilities when one's close to reaching them. Taking on more than one's can handle is a guaranteed recipe for stress.

**Avoid people who stress one out** – If someone is consistently causes stress in one's life and one can't turn the relationship around, limit the amount of time one's spend with that person or end the relationship entirely.

- **Take control of one's environment** – If a particular TV show makes one anxious, turn the TV off. If traffic got one tense, take a longer but less-traveled route.
- **Avoid hot-button topics** – If one get upset over religion or politics, cross them off one's conversation list. If one repeatedly argue about the same subject with the same people, stop bringing it up or excuse oneself when it's the topic of discussion.
- **Narrow down one's to-do list** – Analyze one's schedule, responsibilities, and daily tasks. If one has got too much on one's

plate, distinguish between the 'shoulds' and the 'musts'. Drop tasks that aren't truly necessary to the bottom of the list or eliminate them entirely.

### Alter the Situation

If one can't avoid a stressful situation, try to alter it. Figure out what one can do to change things so the problem doesn't present itself in the future. Often, this involves changing the way one communicates and operates in one's daily life.

### Express one's feelings instead of bottling them up.

If something or someone is bothering one, communicate one's concerns in an open and respectful way. If one doesn't voice one's feelings, resentment will build and the situation will likely remain the same.

- **Be willing to compromise.** When one asks someone to change their behavior, be willing to do the same.
- **Be more assertive.** Don't take a backseat in one's own life. Deal with problems head on, doing one's best to anticipate and prevent them. If one has got an exam to study for and one's chatty roommate just got home, say up front that one only has five minutes to talk.
- **Manage one's time better.** Poor time management can cause a lot of stress. When one is stretched too thin and running behind, it's hard to stay calm and focused. But if one plans ahead and makes sure one doesn't overextend one's self, one can alter the amount of stress under.

**Adjusting one's Attitude** How one thinks can have an intense effect on one's emotional and physical well-being. Each time one thinks a negative thought about one's self, the body reacts as if it were in the throes of a tension-filled situation. If one sees good things about one's self, one is more likely to feel good; the reverse is also true. Eliminate words such as 'always', 'never', 'should' and 'must'. These are telltale marks of self-defeating thoughts **Accept the things one can't change**

Some sources of stress are unavoidable. One can't prevent or change stressors such as the death of a loved one, a serious illness, or a national recession. In such cases, the best way to cope with stress is to accept things as they are. Acceptance may be difficult, but in the long run, it's easier than railing against a situation one can't change.

- **Don't try to control the uncontrollable.** Many things in life are beyond our control— particularly the behavior of other people. Rather than stressing out over them, focus on the things one can control such as the way one chooses to react to problems.
- **Look for the upside.** As the saying goes, 'What doesn't kill us makes us stronger'. When facing major challenges, try to look at them as opportunities for personal growth. If one's own poor choices contributed to a stressful situation, reflect on them and learn from one's mistakes.
- **Share one's feelings.** Talk to a trusted friend or make an appointment with a therapist. Expressing what one is going through can be very cathartic, even if there's nothing one can do to change the stressful situation.
- **Learn to forgive.** Accept the fact that one lives in an imperfect world and that people make mistakes. Let go of anger and resentments. Free one's self from negative energy by forgiving and moving.

### Make time for fun and relaxation

By having a take-charge approach and a positive attitude, one can reduce stress in one's life by nurturing one's self. If one regularly makes time for fun and relaxation, one will be in a better place to handle life's stressors when they inevitably come.

### Healthy ways to relax and recharge

- Go for a walk.
- Spend time in nature.
- Call a good friend.
- Sweat out tension with a good workout.
- Write in one's journal.
- Take a long bath.
- Light scented candles
- Savor a warm cup of coffee or tea.
- Play with a pet.
- Work in one's garden.
- Get a massage.
- Curl up with a good book.
- Listen to music.
- Watch a comedy

Don't get so caught up in the hustle and bustle of life that one forgets to take care of one's own needs. Nurturing one's self is a necessity, not a luxury.

### Set aside relaxation time.

Include rest and relaxation in one's daily schedule. Don't allow other obligations to interfere. This is one's time to take a break from all responsibilities and recharge one's batteries.

### Connect with others.

Spend time with positive people who enhance one's life. A strong support system will buffer one's self from the negative effects of stress.

### Do something enjoyable every day.

Make time for leisure activities that bring one joy, whether it be reading, playing with one's pet, or working on one's bike.

### Keep one's sense of humor.

This includes the ability to laugh at one's self. The act of laughing helps one's body fight stress in a number of ways.

### Learn the relaxation response

One can control one's stress levels with relaxation techniques that evoke the body's relaxation response, a state of restfulness that is the opposite of the stress response. Regularly practicing these techniques will build one's physical and emotional resilience, heal one's body, and boost one's overall feelings of joy and calmness.

### Implement a healthy lifestyle

One can increase one's resistance to stress by strengthening one's physical health.

### Exercise regularly.

Physical activity plays a key

- role in reducing and preventing the effects of stress. Make time for at least 30 minutes of exercise, three times per week. Nothing beats aerobic exercise for releasing pent-up stress and tension.
- **Eat a healthy diet.** Well-nourished bodies are better prepared to cope with stress, so be mindful of what one eats. Start one's day right with breakfast, and keep one's energy up and one's mind clear with balanced, nutritious meals throughout the day.
- **Reduce caffeine and sugar.** The temporary "highs" of caffeine and sugar provide an often end with a crash in mood and energy. By reducing the amount of coffee, soft drinks, chocolate, and sugary snacks in one's diet, one will feel more relaxed and one will sleep better.
- **Avoid alcohol, cigarettes, and drugs.** Self-medicating with alcohol or drugs may provide an uneasy escape from stress, but the relief is only temporary. Don't avoid or mask the issue at hand; deal with problems head on and with a clear mind.
- **Get enough sleep.** Adequate sleep fuels one's mind, as well as one's body. Try to get between 6 and 8 hours a night. Feeling tired will increase one's stress because it may cause one to think irrationally.

## Effective Stress Management Helps to Achieve Work Life Balance

Work life balance is about effectively managing the juggling act between paid work and other activities that are important to us including spending time with family, taking part in sport and recreation, volunteering or undertaking further study. Various studies reveal that improving the balance between our working lives and our lives outside work can bring real benefits for employers and employees. It can help to build strong communities and productive businesses. In a society filled with conflicting responsibilities and commitments, work life balance has become a predominant issue in the workplace.

People continue to respond to social and professional demands, cope with social and professional roles expectations and attempt to balance or integrate the multiple roles and multiple systems. People need to handle the various and multiple dilemmas and manage the stress, guilt, anxiety and apprehensions together with their aspirations and ambitions to grow in the organization. In an attempt to balance social and professional roles they exert super human efforts and reach in a real dilemma. While social roles are part of people's existence, professional roles are part of choice making. People's location in the system and owning one's identity is a significant process in rising to the demands of both social and professional roles. They will find others in both new roles and provide support to others.

Making a realistic positive appraisal of one's strengths and capabilities is a strategic beginning. It is equally important that people create some personal space to be in touch with themselves and their identity, to define their location, the new roles both in social and work settings, and to add to themselves and the system they are part of. It is very important to give equal importance to all the stakeholders. There is constant interaction between members of society. This requires meaningful participation from diverse stakeholders. When people move beyond the self and family, they find their role in the community and they have the power to make a positive change in community. Work-Life Balance does not mean an equal balance. Trying to schedule an equal number of hours for each of the various work and personal activities is usually unrealistic and unrewarding. One is all engaged in a number of roles every day and one holds a number of duties throughout our life. Conflict occurs when one is unable to give our many roles the required time and energy as a result of which participation in one's role is made increasingly difficult by participation in another. The best work life balance for an individual will definitely vary over time, quite often on a daily basis. The right balance for today will probably be different for tomorrow. Work-life balance training programs, practices and information can enable employees to balance their work and personal lives in order to manage lifestyle commitments.

### Impact of work life balance

Management of people and management of risk are two key challenges facing any business organization. How to manage the people and how to manage the risks determine the success in any business. Efficient risk management may not be possible without skilled and contented manpower, the so-called 'human capital' which is defined as a collection of resources—all the knowledge, talents, skills, abilities, experience, intelligence, training, judgment and wisdom possessed individually and collectively by the individuals in a population. Economist Theodore Schultz invented the term in the 1960s to reflect the value of our human capabilities. He believed human capital was like any other type of capital; it could be invested in through education, training and enhanced benefits that will lead to an improvement in the quality and level of production.

It can enable employees to feel more in control of their working life and bring in lower absenteeism and a happier & less stressed workforce. An understanding of effects of imbalance will make it easy to understand the need for work life balance. The transition from work life imbalance to work life balance has obvious benefits to an organization and its employees too. At the organizational level it

increases productivity and efficiency of employees. It fosters cohesive team work and creates commitment to improve the efficiency.

Organizations should bring in a proper integration of human resource management strategies with the business strategies. The value of a company depends upon the enrichment of human skills and attitude. Physical and human capital must go hand in hand for a business to run its business operations successfully. Work life balance on an individual level can bring phenomenal changes in his/her life and can also have heavy impact on a society. The work life balance positively contributes to an employee's health which creates a healthy community at the end. Talent retention has become a major concern for corporates in the current scenario. Therefore, in an effort to retain employees, it is increasingly important for organizations to recognize this balance.

Work life balance requires flexibility, good judgment, strong leadership, negotiating skills and shifting of priorities. The balancing time is a challenge. It is the joint responsibility of the organization and employees to have a conducive platform. Organizations have to understand that capital and technology are replicable but not human capital. There is a need and desire on the part of workers for more flexibility in the workplace. Flex time as a concept is applied in the corporate world today.

The skill level and attitude play an important role in determining the success of any system including work system, family system and social system. The current economic condition has been accused for extended working hours and intense stress in workplaces all over the world. In these fast-moving lives, there are many pressures that new-age people have to deal with—running a home along with handling the tight deadlines at work. Personal development took a look at how to rise above the mess, by redesigning the life to achieve the balance necessary to ride through the storm and bring life back under control. Personal and professional roles are not an either/or choice but a new dimension of role taking.

### CONCLUSION

Stress management starts with identifying the sources of stress in our life. To do so one needs to look closely at our habits, attitude and excuses. Until one accepts responsibility for the role one plays, our stress levels will remain out of our control. To rise higher in one's competence at dealing with people it is not essential that individuals are good in their jobs, they are required to be endearing, positive, approachable, warm, compassionate and optimistic. When employees lead a contented personal life, their attention towards work becomes more yielding. When work life balance is able to attain there would be a better environment around the employees. This will lead to improved quality of life—both at work and family, which in turn, results in increased productivity and improved efficiency.

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