



Significance of Stress Free Environment for Sustaining Business in India

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ABSTRACT

Following liberalization in 1991 and introduction of reforms in the Indian industries during past two decades, there has been intense competition among all fields of industries. The existence of tough competition to have market edge over each other results in the adoption of newer operational methods. This also leads to introduction of new products, services and marketing techniques which generates stress among employees. This organizational stress originates in organizational demands that are experienced by the individual. Stress is built up in the concept of role which is conceived as the position, a person occupies in a system.

Naturally, all the employees have had to adapt to workplace changes which have caused stress among employees. However, management of each industries must aim at reducing stress breeding environment in their organization, thus infuse a sense of belongingness among employees which in turn act as force multiplier and motivate employee to work with devotion and dedication towards achieving goal of organization.

KEYWORDS : Creativity, Innovation, Business Sustainability, Marketing, Liberalization, Force Multiplier, Entrepreneurs, Stress Breeding Environment, Absenteesim, Presenteeism, Productivity, Depression, Competency, Counselling.

INTRODUCTION

In a challenging economic scenario, each company is struggling to balance costs and maximise productivity. Hence, each employer need to identify specific triggers that impact employee wellness, engagement and in turn result in enhanced productivity. However, only 38 per cent of Indian industries identified stress management at work place as a top priority of their health and productivity programs which indicates that a vast scope for improvement in this area.

Stress and strain plague life today. The world over people succumbs to life's trial and tribulation. Worry and anxiety infest people's thought. Stress related diseases are reaching epidemic proportions exerting a heavy toll on human life. Stress arises in a person when the mind overrides the intellect. Stress is the mental agitation caused by unfulfilled desires. Thus one can live a stress free life by developing a strong intellect and maintaining a control over one's mind.

Most industry owners face the common and costly problem of worker stress whether they are aware of it or not. In a recent Gallup Poll, 80 per cent of workers said they feel stress on the job; nearly half said they need help in learning how to manage stress; and 42 percent said their co-workers need help in coping with stress. The National Institute for Occupational Safety and health defines job stress as the harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when the requirement of a job do not match the capabilities, resources or needs of the worker. Job stress can lead to several problems including illness and injury for employees as well as higher in service costs and lost productivity for employees.

PREVAILING TREND IN FIELD

Let us take telecom, for example, When there were 6 competitors, now there are 12 in mobile service space. When there were only Nokia, Sony and Motorola, now there are Samsung, Micromax, Karbon, Lava, Spice, Iball, Xolo to name but a few. Thus competition has arisen exponentially. This is a business reality and can't be wished away. This has placed tremendous pressure on the existing employer and his workforce to maintain and grow their top lines and bottom lines respectively. Similarly, the hold on the market of the market leader has placed equally heavy pressure on the new players to make a mark and win themselves a niche. The other source of pressure is the increasing focus on profitability and revenue growth which is mandatory for any business organisation to maintain sustainability in corporate world.

STUDY ON STRESS

The research study carried out by various HR experts reveals that cost of workplace stress in the United States at somewhere between \$200 to \$300 billion owing to health care claims, workers compensation claims, absenteeism, employee turnover, productivity losses and other direct and indirect costs. It also reveals that health benefits for higher stressed employee cost some 40 per cent more than average. One study has even suggested that stress greatly contributes to unethical employee behaviours such as lying to customers and cutting corners on work tasks.

BENEFIT OF HAVING A STRESS FREE WORKPLACE

All industries in India are making an all out efforts to bring out a stress free work environment in their organisation mainly due to inherent merits attached with it. Though the advantage of stress free environment are plenty as brought out by Halton Region, few of them which are relevant to Indian business environment are mentioned below.

- (a) Improved employee retention and requirement
- (b) Improved employee engagement, thereby reducing presenteeism
- (c) Decreased disability coverage costs
- (d) Increased productivity and profitability
- (e) Reduced risks of workplace accidents and injuries
- (f) Higher employee morale

WHAT EMPLOYERS CAN DO?

Many Indian as well as foreign employers are taking action on workplace stress. Halton has brought out in his "Article on Stress Free Workplace" that the best way to do this is by using an approach which creates an environment that builds on the supportive efforts of the management and employees to care for their own well being. In Indian business scenario the creations of workplace stress free environment would be possible if the following measures are adopted in letter and spirit :

- (a) Effective communication with all employees
- (b) Social support to needy
- (c) Inculcation of supportive beliefs, values, norms and policies
- (d) Effective job control and decision making
- (e) Effective Leadership style

- (f) Work life balance practices
- (g) Supporting individual health practices

MANAGING STRESS

The top three reasons for stress at workplace include unclear or conflicting job expectations, inadequate staffing (lack of support, uneven workload in group) and lack of work/life balance. One of the most common solution adopted, by IT industries to manage employees stress is offering flexible working hours as 50 per cent of employees resort to this solution. Other top solutions adopted by employers include organising stress management interactions like workshop, yoga teaching and undertake education and awareness campaigns to help their employees manage stress. In addition business owners can adopt following measures for creating stress free work environment:

- (a) Ensure that workloads are in line with workers capabilities and resources
- (b) Clearly define worker's role and responsibilities
- (c) Give workers opportunities to participate in the decision and actions affecting their jobs
- (d) Improve communications to reduce uncertainty about career development and future employment prospects
- (e) Provide opportunities for social interactions among workers
- (f) Establish work schedules that are compatible with demands and responsibilities outside the job.

EMPLOYER STRATEGIES

Employers have to develop a number of tactics to help alleviate stress. There are two main categories of stress- reduction policies:

- (a) Programs to treat and reduce the effects of stress once it has already occurred
- (b) Programs to prevent stress from happening in the first place

Stress treatment initiatives were the earliest response to stress complaints when the issue began to gain momentum in the 1980s. These programs range from providing more generous health and wellness benefits including access to fitness centres, providing various assistance to employee who suffers stress such as counsellors and employee assistance programs. Other programs have offered yoga sessions, massage therapy and meditation classes. By one estimate in 1985, 27 per cent of U.S workplaces had some form of stress- reduction programs. This figure was expected to be closer to 40 per cent as of 2000.

MEASURES FOR CREATION OF STRESS FREE ENVIRONMENT

The Indian industries have to be proactive in creating stress free environment in their organisation. The following measures which is adopted by few firms is suggested for adoption by all the companies.

(i) Stress Busting Course

Stressed, depressed while well dressed is the profile of every second corporate employee. With growing stress, employers are to pay attention to comprehensive competency developing and personal development of employees to increase productivity. Stress level among mid level senior executives remains high due to lack of interaction and interpersonal communication. Corporate management needs to start effective stress management classes' because each happy employee is of more productive employee.

The major industry giants like HDFC Standard Life, WIPRO, World of TITAN are of few, who are spending about Rs 2000 per employee for such stress management session conducted by professionals. Stress management is also available on line to enable small companies in Tier II and Tier III cities can make use of these services without spending or handling or organising events. "Ripple Learnings" and ILDFS Skill Development Corporation Ltd are one of few companies based at Kovamangla (Bangalore) organising stress management course and majority of corporate small industries are availing these facilities for their employee.

(ii) Yoga

The corporate yoga classes are an answer to many prayers for relief from constant stress at work and life style related issues. The companies found reach dividend as a result of conduct classes

for their employees because fitness sessions such as yoga di-stresses the employees and invariably the number of sick leave go down. The various companies which is positively adopting yoga class are Dell, Grant Thornton and Accenture. Many industries are having own yoga studio in their work place itself and conduct regular or as and when need basis.

(iii) Employee Assistance Programs

Employee assistance programs (EAPs) are found greatly successful in UK. It is implemented in UK as early as 1980 and originally consists of confidential counselling as revealed by the study carried out Sian Young on work place well being. Later EAPs are expanded and provide financial and legal services to employees which now found adopted by many developed countries including India. Many firms specialises in providing EAPs. These services are used by larger organisation. EAPs can be an efficient way of supporting employees in all aspects of their work/life. The inclusion of family members within EAPs leads naturally an additional benefit.

(iv) Invest in People

Measures such as automation, modern technology can only cut cost, but can never replace human. Money may motivate a few employees that too only to an extent but the sense of accomplishment, recognition would work wonders. Herein, it is pertinent to note that the HR practices followed by the armed forces to enable soldiers are worth emulating. The Indian Air Force's vision statement "People First, Mission Always" explains the organisational commitment towards the welfare of its employees and their families.

INDIANS AHEAD OF ASIAN PEERS IN MANAGING WORK RELATED STRESS

Indian employees are ahead of their Asian Pacific counterparts in developing strategies to manage work related stress and generate stress free environment for their employees. According to the inaugural Asia Pacific edition of the "Staying Work" survey conducted by Professional Service Company Towers Watson, "Almost 1 in every 3 Indian employees have instituted stress or resilience management programmes in 2013 and are almost equal number plan to follow suit in current year 2014. With stress being ranked as No. 1 life style factor, their number is likely to grow" the report said. To maintain lead in stress free environment at workplace, the Indian companies needs to adopt all above suggested measures.

SEVEN GOLDEN STEPS TO SUSTAIN STRESS FREE ATMOSPHERE AT WORKPLACE

In today's global economic climate, jobs are hard to come by, companies are stretched to thin and tensions are high as revealed by Katie Morell (Oct 2010). To compete with globalisation and sustain profit in business all industries are struggling to create stress free friendly work environment. This can be achieved by all business firms across the world if they are adopting the following seven golden steps:

(a) Provide Space

A lot of companies provide a serenity room, which results in employees take a time out, then it boosts productivity. The room can be a place for people to decompress.

(b) Volunteer Together

When people are part of a cause bigger than themselves their happiness levels increases. Find a cause about which the employee is passionate and do something to help. It is great way to boost morale.

(c) Communicate

All industries to maintain line of communications as easy to bottom of workforce. Also find someone who can give honest answers about what is right and wrong in the business. Encourage open dialogue.

(d) Exercise

Each business house should develop a wellness program where one have a group fitness instructor, who teaches thrice in a week. Research shows that working out can be as effective in helping to increase happiness as anti-depression medication. Working out as a team will build camaraderie.

(e) Assign an Employee Advocate

In India a lot of industries do not have a human resources manager. It

is really important to find someone who can continuously get feedback from employees, which will fetch a rich dividend.

(f) Motivating Box

This is same as an encouragement box and is opposite to complaint box. When you notice a co-worker doing something good, let them know on a piece of paper and then make a copy and put it into the box. At the end of the month, the winner can be selected and can have lunch with CEO.

(g) Form a Team

The business is success against competitors when it compete against other as a team. When we have a common goal and are working together it makes us stronger. It will act as force multiplier and yields good results.

CONCLUSION

This paper provides sufficient evidence to suggest that stress at workplace cannot be ignored and avoided once for all. Almost one third of the working populations in most developing countries like India report high or extreme levels of stress. The impact of stress on employee may force them to leave organisation or in some case leave work all together. Such effects are likely to carry a price to individuals, organisation and the wider society.

The various remedial measures suggested for allevation of stress breeding environment and creation of stress free workplace needs due consideration by Indian Industries. The implementation of this suggested measures not only promote friendly stress free environment at workplace but also leads tos higher productivity and will go in long way in promoting sustainability of business in India.

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