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# Current Scenario of Stress Management Training (SMT) @ IT Firms

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## Abstract

In the recent walks of work life, the much spoken and worried about subject among men and women is to have a balanced living, in the midst of work and personal pressures. Almost each and every individual is prone to the ever spreading syndrome called 'Stress'. Especially the working professionals in the field of Information Technology are much affected by stress due to their hectic work schedule and prolonged working hours and many more to quote...

In this juncture, the organizations are very much keen in taking care of their employees by taking up utmost measures to reduce and control stress levels of the employees. The Stress Management Training (SMT) programme is one of the current hot and hard to talk concept, which still awaits for better and better solutions for numerous work life stressors.

This paper brings in the current scenario of Stress Management Training at the IT firms and vitality of having an effective SMT that is really beneficial to the employees and the organisation. It deals with the types of stress and stressors, its sources. The consequences of stress, and how it affects the individual physically, psychologically and behaviorally. The essentials of an effective Stress Management Programme, and the general critics which in turn reveals the vital areas of focus and new methods to practice in the training programmes.

## Introduction

Stress is the simple word with enormous consequences. In today's world men and women are becoming materialistic day by day. The sources through which they get the pressures are many in every walks of life and they keep thinking of it round the clock, but the fact is the avenues through which we get peace are also many and they don't find time to concentrate on them. The avenues are identified and shown to the affected by following some procedures, which are termed as Stress Management Techniques.

If you consider the rural and the urban areas, the people who are prone to stress are mostly from Urban areas. Especially the working category are much affected and also this phenomenon requires immediate attention.

The levels of stress are high among the work group, especially the people forming part of the rapidly

growing field of Information Technology and ITES is notably high. The measurement of stress is a challenging one, even then it can be analysed approximately, but the consequences of stress is immeasurable and is very harmful for the mind and body too. The healthy body and sound mind alone can produce a good quality output. It becomes the ultimate

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responsibility of the corporate to have concern for their employees well being.

Hence it becomes the vital need to equip the employees accordingly so as to cope up with organisational stressors. The Stress Management Programs are conducted in the organizations to reduce the stress level of employees. Lets have the insights of the various stressors and the stress management training programs in the IT organisations.

### **Work-life at IT firms:**

The use of information technology has expanded tremendously during the past few decades. Although the computer is basically a tool, the development of information technology usually changes the work profile and the organization of work, and thereby affects the well-being of the employees. Since 90's the information technology is widely used in all kinds of jobs, including routine work tasks and demanding designing work. Especially the demands for memory, attention, selection and organization of information, and decision making process increase.

"Work... Work... Work and Earn More... More... More..." is the ultimate aim of the employees at IT firms. As a result they are prone much to stress directly or indirectly.

### **What is stress?**

Stress may be considered the 'wear and tear' our bodies experience as we adjust to a continually changing organisational environment. It is important that managers and team leaders be able to recognise its causes and its effect on performance and productivity. High levels of stress over a long period of time often results in increased absenteeism, work-related conflict and lower work performance. It has physical and emotional effects, both positive and negative. As a positive influence it can motivate some employees to accept many of the changes and new opportunities. Other employees may experience negative reactions such as anger, distrust, withdrawal, rejection and depression, resulting in (1) health problems such as headaches, insomnia, stomach upsets, etc.; (2) decreased motivation and risk taking; (3) increased sick leave and higher staff turnover; and (4) internal conflict as they question their loyalty to

the organisation itself.

Stress, normally put, is the way you react both physically and emotionally to a change. There are as many different ideas about stress as they are people who experience change in their life.

And, like change, stress can either be positive or negative, high or low. It may be the sense of heightened concentration you feel when faced with a new and challenging situation or it may be continual sense of being geared up and unable to relax.

Stress can refer to physical effort as well as mental effort. All individuals feel stress, but each one feels it in different amounts and reacts in different ways.

### **Major sources of pressures that leads to stress in work life:**

1. Factors intrinsic to the job
  - Poor Working relations
  - Shift working hours
  - Longs hours of work
  - Travel
  - Work under load and over load
2. Role in organisation  
When a person's role in the organization is clearly defined, stress can be kept to a minimum level.
3. Relationship at work  
There are three critical interpersonal relationships at work,
  - Relationship with one's boss
  - Those with one's sub-ordinates
  - Those with one's colleagues.
2. Career Development factor
  - Degree of job security
  - Fear of job loss
  - Obsolescence of one's skills and capabilities
  - Termination
  - Performance appraisal
  - Potential appraisal

3. Organisational Structure and Climate

- Non-participation at work
- Lack of control

4. Non-work pressures

- On the home due to job stress
- Dual careers (especially for women)
- Acceptance of transfers when wife is also working.

**Consequences of Stress:-**

The stress syndrome affects the individual in three major areas, as follows,

- (i) Physiological,
- (ii) Psychological, and
- (iii) Behavioural

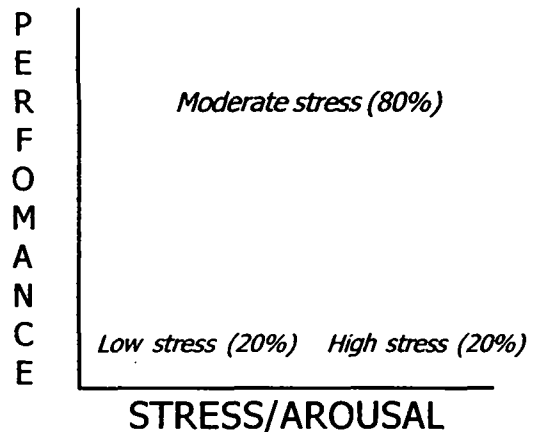
**Physiological Problems:** Stress causes physical reactions, including autonomic, excitability of nerves, increased heart beat, and a decrease in body temperature. It is proved in various researches that high level of stress accompanied by high blood pressure and high level of cholesterol and result in heart disease, ulcer and arthritis. There may even be link between stress an cancer. Such serious ailments are not caused exclusively by stress alone, their physical characteristics also have their own contributions. These ailments have a notable effect on the individuals, their families and in their work place.

**Psychological Problems:** High level of stress may be accompanied by psychological reactions such as anger, anxiety, depression, nervousness, irritation, tension and boredom depending upon the nature of the stress and the capacity of individuals to bear stress. The effects of psychological reactions of individuals may be changes in the mood and emotional states, lowered self-esteem and self-confidence, inability to concentrate and make decisions, and job dis-satisfaction. The effect of these can be clearly seen in the output of their performance in an adverse manner.

**Behavioural Problems :** People show adverse or dysfunctional behaviour as a result of high level of stress. Such behaviour may be in the form of alcoholism, drug addiction, increased smoking, sleeplessness, under eating or over eating, etc. In the extreme situations it may even lead to suicide. At the work place, employees may show behaviour in tardiness, absenteeism, and turn over. Ultimately the

organization is the one that gets affected adversely.

Relationship between Stress Level and Arousal in Individual performance parameters:

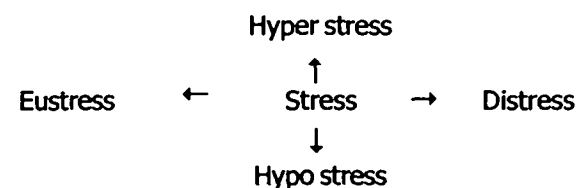


The performance of the employees are poor or the output is not up to the standard, when the individual undergoes low stress, as a result he lacks seriousness, lacks responsibility, lacks interest and take things so easy and cool without giving the due importance for it, when it deserves badly.

The performance of the employees are high when he is influenced by moderate stress, which gives him the fullest attention, commitment, concentration, dedication and a bit of fear which is likely to be when the out put is of much importance.

The performance of the employees are again poor and far below the expected standard, when he undergoes high stress, as the result of high stress, he is prone to panic and losses his concentration and very often gets nervous while taking up some task and gets a feel that he is not capable or it task is impossible to be done. And obviously the output is worse leads to a destructive critic on his part.

**Types & Manifestations of stress :**



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**Hyperstress** refers to extreme stress, which affects the physical and mental health of the individual very badly.

**Hypostress** refers to the minimal stress, and leads to lack of interest in every aspect of life.

**Distress** refers to the negative stress that the individual faces.

**Eustress** refers to the positive stress that the individual faces, and is good for the person.

Stress can be due to both pleasant and unpleasant events. The goal should be to cope up between the equally destructive forces of Hypostress and Hyperstress. And at the same time, one should work on maximizing Eustress and minimizing distress.

Stress can be manifested in various forms, for instance, Cynicism, Anger, Loss of Sleep, Frustration, Anxiety, Fear, Tension, Pressure, Difficulty in making Decisions, Loss and Lack of Concentration, etc.

### **Stress Management Training (SMT)**

The prime difficulties related to this SMT are like, to know whether an employee requires stress management training or not, as far as stress is concerned it is difficult to define and much more difficult to measure. The only sign is the decline in one's performance and other problems such as absenteeism and frequent irritating feeling. If an EAP (Employee Assistance Programme) has been launched in the organization, then the counselor would be the right person to judge the SMT needs of the employees.

There are considerable similarities between Stress Management Training and Employee Assistance Programmes. Both are driven by an element of coercion, because of the tacit understanding that job promotion depends on the ready participation of the employees in development programmes. Both are aimed at relieving tensions and frustrations, so that employees manifest fewer grievances. By helping individuals cope up with stress, job performance is much enhanced, which directly benefits both the employer and the employees. In the form of quality outputs and at a good quantum as far as the employers. The employees get benefited by way of hike in packages, incentives, promotion, rewards and recognition.

In a focused Stress Management Training, the employees are informed about the basics of stress, which is very important. They are clearly warned about the ill effects of stress, its physiological basis and the relationship between stress and work. The next session may focus on the assessment of stress in employees, the extent to which it impacts the behavioural, emotional and cognitive aspects of their personality, and diagnosing the etiology of stress. In the third and subsequent sessions actual training may be imparted in Stress Management strategies, depending on the employees, their circumstances and the level of felt stress. It is important to clarify to the employees that the reason for their frustration is not because the work environment is overly stressful, but because their own inbuilt coping techniques are inappropriate. Stress Management Training provides a basis to overcome these inbuilt handicaps so common to everyone. Through Stress Management Training, what are usually perceived as job stressors can become exciting challenges of the modern business world. While the management makes all efforts to launch these types of Stress Management Training and Employee Assistance Programmes, they are not quite effective due to various reasons.

### **Why Stress Management Programmes Don't Work... effectively!!!**

It seems that every week there's yet another report telling us how serious the problem of Stress is becoming – how many working days are lost, how much it costs industry, what percentage of workers experience Stress, and so on. And despite the publicity, nothing seems to be changing. If anything, Stress seems to be becoming even more widespread, and at an alarming rate.

So why are things getting worse instead of better, and why don't Stress Management programmes seem to work?

Some people think the way to manage Stress is to go to a Stress Management workshop. What they don't realise is that to manage their stress they need to do something different. And why don't people take any **action** to manage their stress better? Why do they seem to be stuck in Stress?

There can be many reasons, but one of the

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most common ones seems to be fear of the consequences, that is, fear of how they will be seen by their employers and colleagues. Another reason is that when people are already stressed, and they then have to think about taking time to exercise or relax, the thought creates more stress. It's yet another task in an already busy lifestyle, and so people are reluctant to make time for it — even though we know it leads to better health, more effective working and quality of life.

The third reason is that many people make other things more important than their own health and well-being. People are keen to contribute time and effort into meeting their boss's & organizational expectations in preference to looking after their own health and personal life.

The reality, of course, is that unless we look after ourselves properly as employees the job will never be done properly anyway. So self-management has to be a priority.

#### **Critics about SMTs:**

- Mis-match of the individual and the training programmes
- Duration of the programmes
- Place & Schedule of the Programme
- Educating the participants
- Lack of know-how
- Stress levels and intensity of the training
- Time management and prioritizing
- Convey but mustn't force
- Change is a threat – quoted often, should be avoided

#### **Some of the vital areas that could be brought to focus in the Training programmes are like:**

- Error Management
- Professional Supervision
- Employee Assistance
- Alcohol and Drug Free Work place
- Wellness at Work
- Critical incident support
- Work / Life programmes
- Quotients ( Emotional , Intelligent, Social, Spiritual and Passion)

The training programmes orientation is normally on reducing stress and to make them perform well, but it is much more important to make the employees understand to manage the errors in the work place, which is the very source of stress, the 'errors' and its consequences. If the errors are managed effectively then its obvious that the performance is enhanced and leads to Eustress and not distress for the individuals.

#### **Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy( REBT):-**

Organisational change and increased stress levels have become inseparable these days. Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy (REBT) is based on the assumption that emotional and behavioural reactions are largely caused by conscious and unconscious beliefs. During organisational change, self defeating internal self talk may cause employees to experience strong self defeating emotions such as resentment, hostility, anxiety, depression, and the like.

REBT focuses on providing employees with strategies and tools that can lead to professional growth and development, better workplace relationships and less conflict and stress. These can be used individually or as part of a team to accept change and come to terms with the difficulties involved.

The Stress Management programme described in this article is designed to show the links between change and stress, identify common work place stressors and the physical and emotional consequences to employees, and teach REBT strategies and tools to help minimise these effects. The programme is intended for organisation employees who are not in any life threatening situation or specifically seeking treatment, so the format is different than when using REBT as a remedial therapy.

#### **Analyse, Map and Prioritize: "Take-in these 3 to Give-out your stress"**

Stress normally arises from the factors that are uncontrollable from our end. So, it becomes the prime step to **Analyse** the controllable and uncontrollable factors that are present in the environment we live. For instance, The actions taken by the Top management, Government regulations, country's economy and behaviour of the people around you,

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and the like are uncontrollable factors, there is no point in worrying with these and getting stressed, where as the controllable factors are like our behaviour or actions towards certain things or situations, our thoughts, choices, the input we take and our hardwork, dedication and performance. Hence an indepth analyses in this regards is a must and try to control the controllable and attain success which is very much feasible and avoid controlling those that are beyond our control.

#### **Organisational benefits:**

- Increased organizational efficiency
- Role and goal clarity
- Effective team worker
- Decreased absenteeism
- Enhances creativity and innovation
- High employee morale
- Quality outputs
- Promptness in task completion
- Loyal and committed employees
- Better employee relations, etc.

#### **Personal benefits:**

- Healthy body and mind
- Enhances confidence
- Emotional stability
- Enhances sense of belongingness
- Fair sexual satisfaction
- Positive attitude development, etc.

#### **Conclusion:**

Human beings are much complicated, and to change their typical ways of thinking is not an easy task. When people state that they want to enjoy work, be productive, and be a valued team member, the question that arises immediately is 'what are you prepared to give up in order to achieve this?' and its hard to get any quotable response for this.

At some point we are all faced with this question when seeking to lead a more balanced life and minimise the effects of work place stress. When, collectively as an organisational community, people from employees to top management are willing to give away old, self defeating beliefs and habits, the scene is set for a healthier, more productive organisational

culture. SMTs can provide many of the features needed to achieve their desires. The SMT is one of the current hot talk of the corporate platform for which the alternatives are many but the solution is a big question mark. Hence, the effective Stress Management Training programmes has got a tremendous scope to act as remedial as well as precautionary measure against stress and can aim towards overall development of the organization and the individual to the fullest.

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