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Role Stress and Coping Among Business School Professors: A Phenomenological Study

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Abstract

The purpose of the paper is to identify the determinants of role stress amongst business school professors in India and explore the coping strategies followed by them based on the professional experiences shared by the professors. We employ Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to gain insights into the causes of rising levels of stress in business schools and the practised coping strategies from the professors' perspective based on their narratives of lived experiences. We conducted semi-structured interviews with 64 professors from 29 public and private business schools in India. Analysis of qualitative data resulted in the emergence of 11 themes; we make recommendations based on the themes for the business schools' management to assist the professors in alleviating role stress. As pointed out by Chong and Ahmed (2014), phenomenological studies are rarely used for inquiry in the higher education context. The insights gathered from IPA help in understanding the tenacious causes of role stress in the management institutes and the day-to-day coping strategies followed to reduce the same.

Keywords

Role Stress, Business Schools, Professors, Stress Coping Strategies, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

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Role Stress and Coping Among Business School Professors: A Phenomenological Study

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The purpose of the paper is to identify the determinants of role stress amongst business school professors in India and explore the coping strategies followed by them based on the professional experiences shared by the professors. We employ Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to gain insights into the causes of rising levels of stress in business schools and the practised coping strategies from the professors' perspective based on their narratives of lived experiences. We conducted semi-structured interviews with 64 professors from 29 public and private business schools in India. Analysis of qualitative data resulted in the emergence of 11 themes; we make recommendations based on the themes for the business schools' management to assist the professors in alleviating role stress. As pointed out by Chong and Ahmed (2014), phenomenological studies are rarely used for inquiry in the higher education context. The insights gathered from IPA help in understanding the tenacious causes of role stress in the management institutes and the day-to-day coping strategies followed to reduce the same. Keywords: Role Stress, Business Schools, Professors, Stress Coping Strategies, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

Scholarly investigations on occupational stress among academicians have gained currency only recently. These studies (cf., Abouserie, 1996; Kinman, 2001; Sang, Teo, Cooper, & Bohle, 2013) discredit university teaching by calling it a low stress occupation (Fisher, 1994; Shen et al., 2014). The international education environment has evidenced significant changes during the past decade, namely enhanced information technology support, improvements in educational infrastructure, innovations in curriculum design and development (Coaldrake & Stedman, 1999; Sun, Wu, & Wang, 2011), favoring alternative pedagogical methods in lieu of traditional lecture method, emergence of newer disciplines (Catano et al., 2010; Clark, 1996) and increased emphasis on research based teaching (Brew, 1999). These developments have made the responsibilities of academicians more challenging and demanding.

While the paradigm shift in the education industry has affected all streams, it is more pronounced in the case of applied disciplines like management education. Business Schools cannot simply remain the institutions for imparting management education. The faculty members of business schools are also required to be actively involved in consultancy, management development programs, and research projects for corporate houses, and to develop liaisons with the industry experts to gain exposure to the subject matter. The professors are expected to demonstrate their capabilities in authoring scholarly publications, devising new courses, and adopting pedagogical innovations in teaching and evaluations. Simultaneously, they are also expected to assist in administrative activities. It is a great challenge for the business school teaching professionals to meet the dynamism and live up to the societal and administrative expectations.

Consequently, the present study takes up the lead in identifying the determinants of role stress amongst business schools professors in India and exploring the coping strategies followed by them. It is posited that the study will aid government and universities in particular with comprehensive and reliable current information about the nature of occupational stress

experienced by these academicians. Our findings from the study will enable business school management in formulating organizational policies so as to mitigate the occupational stress amongst their professors. Nevertheless, implications of the study presumably hold good across all the other developing Asian countries where the advanced and innovative methods of imparting higher education and rigorous standards for appraisal and evaluation of professors have been adopted only lately.

Review of Literature

Conceptualization of Stress and Coping

Stress is a mental state which arises when one appraises a situation as threatening or demanding and does not have an appropriate coping response (cf., Lazarus & Launier, 1978). In other words, stress is a state of mental or emotional strain or tension resulting from adverse or demanding circumstances. However, occupational stress is the stress involving work. According to the current World Health Organization's (WHO, 2014) definition, occupational or work-related stress is the response people may have when presented with work demands and pressures that are not matched to their knowledge and abilities and which challenge their ability to cope. On the other hand, coping is defined as the person's constantly changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as exceeding the person's resources. In other words, coping is accomplished through the thoughts and behaviors used to manage the internal and external demands of situations that are appraised as stressful (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004).

Stress Amongst Higher Education Teachers

According to Houston, Meyer, and Paewai (2006), educational institutions have classified the role of faculty members into teaching, research, and service. Rowley (1996) expressed that professors face role stress in trying to do equitable justice to these multifaceted tasks. Smith, Anderson, and Lovrich (1995), in their study, reported that professors consider work overload as a major contributor to job stress. On the other hand, Abouserie (1996) demonstrated that professors rated administrative work as the most significant cause of stress in their lives and conducting research was the secondary cause of stress at work. According to Coaldrake and Stedman (1999), teaching and research have become more specialised and demanding. Accordingly, the professors are being asked to meet the dynamic requirements of diverse groups of students, master the use of information technology in teaching, teach with flexible timings and across disciplines, and design the pedagogy around learning outcomes (Mark & Smith, 2012).

Ahmady, Changiz, Masiello, and Brommels (2007) stated that only little research has been conducted in developing countries to investigate role stress experienced by professors. According to these authors, the significant role related stressors are too many tasks and everyday work load, conflicting demands from colleagues and superiors, inadequate resources for appropriate performance, insufficient competency to meet the demands of their role, and a feeling of underutilization. Reddy and Poornima (2012) noted that the Indian higher education system has undergone rapid transformation in terms of expansion, privatization, pedagogical innovations, and curricular reforms. All these changes have created a huge pressure on professors in higher education.

Transformation of Management Education in India

According to the All India Council of Technical Education, the number of business schools has outdone all other post graduate streams in the country, resulting in an acute shortage of professors in management related disciplines (Mahajan, Agrawal, Sharma, & Nangia, 2014). The new generation business schools are emphasizing adopting a mix of concepts, cases, business games, and role plays against the use of traditional lecture-based methods (Dayal, 2002). Additionally, the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC), a statutory body of India, emphasizes academic research for accreditation and recognition (Ranganath, 2013). Similarly, University Grants Commission (UGC) of India has issued guidelines for performance appraisal of professors, in which due weightage is given to research work in determining professors' appraisal and promotion (UGC, 2013). Discrete and multiple key result areas determine professors' performance assessments, increments, and subsequent promotions, resulting in increased level of role stress amongst Indian business school professors.

Although the existent literature connotes tremendous increase in the work pressure and occupational stress in higher education institutions in general and business schools in particular, there is paucity of research investigating the causes and moderators of role stress from academicians' perspective. The purpose of the current study, therefore, is to understand the determinants of role stress amongst business school professors and the coping strategies followed by them based on their lived experiences.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was used to explore the experience and perception of the participants regarding their job situation and the coping practices followed by them. Understanding people's lived experiences and the meanings they attach to their experiences is the central focus of IPA (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Therefore, it is a suitable approach when we are trying to find out how individuals perceive the particular situations they face and how they make sense of their personal and social world (Chapman & Smith, 2002). Access to the participants' subjective world and its interpretation depends on the researcher's own conceptions which are required in order to have understanding of others' personal worlds through a process of interpretative activity (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006).

Method of Study

Researchers' Background

We would like to present our background and our stance on this study so as to enable the readers to build a perspective for making inferences about our findings. The first author of this paper is a doctoral scholar in the area of Human Resource Management in a business school in South India and has been actively involved in academic activities like teaching and research in the last 2 years. The second author of this paper is also from the same business school working as an associate professor in the Department of Marketing for the last 5 years. He has taught qualitative research methods to the PhD students in the same institute and has published articles using qualitative research methods. The third author is an assistant professor in the area of Human Resource Management and has been in the same business school for last 2 years. The third author has conducted workshops on qualitative research methods and has several qualitative research publications to his credit.

All the authors are of theoretical stance that role stress of faculty members in business school has become pronounced and it has adverse effects on workplace productivity. This stance is influenced by both review of literature (cf., Kinman & Jones, 2003; Winefield et al., 2003) and practical exposure obtained by the authors. The business school where the authors

are working is seeking international accreditations. This pursuit brought about changes in faculty job roles and subsequent performance appraisals to fit with standards of accreditation evaluation parameters. Being a part of this phenomenon ourselves, and based upon the insights from our colleagues in other business schools facing similar circumstances, we have come to conclusion that role stress of faculty members in business schools is increasing. Based on these initial insights, we wanted to conduct a qualitative research to investigate about this phenomenon in depth as a scholarly pursuit.

To conduct the study, first author was trained by the second author for data collection and analysis and they both jointly prepared the interview schedule and conducted interviews with the participants. The first author conducted the literature review and transcribed the interviews. The third author contributed in data analysis using IPA procedures and conducted the coding exercise along with first and second authors. All the authors jointly participated in the report of findings.

Participant Selection

The target sample for the present study consisted of the faculty members imparting management education in different business schools across the country. The participants were selected through an intense purposive sampling method. The underlying principle of this sampling technique is to select information rich cases that manifest the phenomenon of interest intensely, that is, “cases from which one can gain deeper insight into the subject matters of study and therefore it is worthy of in-depth study” (Patton, 2002, p. 242). In order to select the appropriate group of participants, a two-fold exercise was carried out. A web-based form seeking participants for a study on “occupational stress experiences at business school by faculty members” was floated amongst different social media groups such as LinkedIn and Facebook. A total of 150 faculty members from various business schools across India who expressed their interest were contacted individually and asked to fill the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI)-Educators Survey questionnaire (Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1996) to assess the three components of stress which were the criteria for participating: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. The MBI-Educators Survey is the most widely used and valid scale to measure stress amongst academicians (Kokkinos, 2006); those who experienced moderate to high level of burnout (MBI score greater than 4 on a scale maximum of 6) were considered for further qualitative inquiry. This exercise resulted in selection of 79 teachers of which 34 were females and 45 were males. In a nutshell, participants from 11 public business schools (PBS) and 18 private business schools (PRBS) in India participated in the study.

Data Collection

After seeking the permission from the institutional review board comprised of the head of the department and senior faculty members at our University, we conducted face-to-face interviews from June to September 2014. Semi-structured interviews were conducted for collecting the data as it facilitates rapport, allows greater flexibility of coverage and allows the interview to go into strikingly new areas, which tends to produce richer data (Smith & Osborn, 2007). We conducted the interviews with the objective of gaining insights into (a) the work-related stress experienced by the academicians; (b) their perceptions about the causes of stress in the business schools; (c) the coping strategies followed by them; and (d) the changes they want the university management to make in the policies and norms to reduce the workplace stress. We obtained the consent of participants to tape record the proceedings and anonymity was also assured for the same.

Based on our own experiences, informal talks with our fellow colleagues about the topic and review of literature on occupational stress (e.g., Barkhuizen & Rothmann, 2008; Gillespie, Walsh, Winefield, Dua, & Stough, 2001; Mkumbo, 2013; Winefield et al., 2003), the interview manual for semi-structured interview was developed. For constructing the interview schedule, we firstly determined the range of issues to be covered in the interview (e.g., causes of stress, moderators, and the recommendations). The topics were arranged in a logical sequence (e.g., cause and effect). First and second authors underwent a brainstorming session to identify appropriate questions and probes related to three listed areas we were interested in. As suggested by Smith and Osborn (2003), producing an interview schedule enables us to think of difficulties that might be encountered while conducting the interview. Having thought in advance about the different ways the interview may proceed helped us to focus more thoroughly on the responses elicited from the participants.

We followed the suggestions laid down by Smith and Osborn (2003) and used the funneling technique to design the questions for interview. This approach enabled us to obtain respondents' general as well as specific views on the matter of inquiry. The interview was initiated with the ground mapping questions like the years of teaching experience and changes in the education system observed over the years, which further moved to questions built upon the answers given by the participants. This approach was applied initially to elicit the respondent's general view on the rising level of stress in higher education, followed by specific stressors and their remedy. Probes were also used from time to time to avoid deviation from the main topic and elicit responses on more specific areas of inquiry. The progress of the interview was structured in such a manner so as to maximize the quality of in-depth information. All interviews were audio-taped in order to capture the action and inner feelings expressed by the participants through change in pitch and tone of voice and use of specific jargon in the course of the interview. On an average, each interview lasted for around 70 minutes which allowed the participants to express their ideas and thoughts. Some broad questions addressed in the interviews are outlined in the Appendix. However, the authors did not utter the exact questions while conducting the interviews and these questions were used as a broad outlines to trigger discussion with the participants.

Data Analysis

The IPA analysis in the present study is based on the recommendations given by Smith and Osborn (2007). This involved the four stage process outlined by Smith and Osborn (2003) which begins with a detailed interpretive reading of the first case in context followed by all responses being annotated along the left hand margin of the transcribed document. At the next stage, these preliminary annotations were subsequently utilized to generate emergent themes at a higher and deeper level of abstraction. These themes are noted down along the right hand margin. This exercise is carried out for all other cases. The analysis led to the development of a list of super-ordinate themes embedded with subordinate themes which maintained the linkage between all the related themes within the transcript. For example, in the case of the super-ordinate theme pertaining to the moderating factors which can affect the stress coping abilities of individuals, two related subthemes were identified as (a) social support and (b) personal coping strategies. Social support obtained by faculty members from family, friend and other peer networks helps to ameliorate role stress. Similarly, personal characteristics such as personality, knowledge and persistence results in an individual's capability to cope up with role stress. Responses related to these two factors were concentrated under the central theme, moderators of stress coping. In this way, a list of master themes was created for each participant and subsequent themes which were similar to the master themes were dropped from the analysis. During the interview stage, we paid more attention towards listening to the narratives

rather than involving in cross-examination. This step was guided by the suggestions given by Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009, p. 64), who emphasized that researchers should never let their personal perceptions and attitudes predispose their analysis of the stories. In this regard, suggestions by Alexander and Clarke (2004, p. 82) and the “minimal probe” approach of Smith and Osborn (2007) were solicited and respondents were given the freedom to mold the interview as the sessions progressed.

Following in line with Smith and colleagues (2009), the validity of the study was ensured through Yardley’s (2000, pp. 180-183) principles of maintaining rigor for qualitative studies. We accordingly maintained a sensitive stance towards the context, which was facilitated by our own lived experiences as academicians in high-stress environments. At no time did we project our own perceptions onto the participants, and respondents themselves validated their feedback during the respondent validation stage. At all stages, we ensured that our motive was not hidden from the respondents and they were suitably debriefed after the completion of the interview about the purpose and value addition from the study.

Since we were interested in capturing three broad phenomenological issues, namely, stressors, moderators, and recommendations for alleviating role stress, theoretical saturation was evidenced by the end of 64th interview. Although based on the MBI score we had selected 79 faculty members initially, we did not conduct interviews with all of them due to extinction of new master themes after completion of 64th interview. Since the questions were based on the schedule prepared beforehand, it allowed the participants to discuss their experiences pertaining to role stress, practices they follow to cope with the stress, and the changes they want to see in the facilities and policies by the management, three different set of themes emerged from the study.

We ensured that the data collection and interpretation was conducted following guidelines for rigor in qualitative studies (Seale & Silverman, 1997). The selection of respondents was guided through theoretical sampling process (Goulding, 2000). The thematic analysis was conducted independently by the first and second authors to ensure multiple coding. The third author cross-checked the themes for confirming data saturation. A few respondents were later requested to validate the findings generated from the study to check for anomalies in the emergent themes. In this way, at every step, we attempted to maintain bias-free and authentic responses.

Results

Experience and Perception about the Level of Stress

Professors at business schools reported experiencing moderate to very high levels of stress at their workplace. In relation to changes in stress levels as compared to the initial days of their job, the majority of the professors reported a significant increase in the level of stress at work during the last 5 to 7 years. They opined that the transformation of the higher educational system has resulted in a drastic rise in the level of stress in the last decade. A senior faculty Shyam shared his experience as follows:

Back in the days, I would tell my family and friends that I am lucky to be in a job which gives me plenty of time for myself and my family members. Nowadays, I come to the university on weekends very frequently...sometimes it is some extra-curricular event of a student club for which I am the mentor...I stay back at the campus even during weekdays...recently there was an exercise where faculty members were required to conduct simulation interviews for the passing out batch of students to make them more confident during the actual

placement drives...I used to mock my brother who is in the service industry that I do not have any monthly sales target like him, so I do not have any deadline and he used to be jealous of me (sighs heavily). Today I have to work after coming back home to complete my research articles...I feel like I am working round the clock these days. (age 47 years, male, professor)

The above response highlights the change in rigor that the teaching profession has undergone in recent times. From being perceived as a passive and reactive profession suitable for those people who crave leisure time, the profession has become more dynamic and requires people employed in this occupation to be more proactive. From Shyam's perspective, this shift has taken him by surprise and he never anticipated that he would have to cope with so much stress in his occupation. This shift in the intensity of the teaching profession may very well be a big contributor to the perception of the interviewees with regards to rising stress levels associated with their job.

Theme 1: Causes of Stress

Four categories of themes were identified as the sources of stress. They were (a) pedagogical changes, (b) annual publication targets, (c) increased expectations, and (d) increased competition. Academicians across all the business schools identified each of these themes as sources of stress. The following section examines each of these sources in more detail.

Pedagogical changes. Pedagogical innovations in academics have become one of the common practices across the globe. The participants in the present study reported that changes in the educational pedagogy are one of the major factors contributing to stress (cf., Hendel & Horn, 2008). Implementation of case-based teaching in the Indian business schools resulted in higher degree of stress among the professors as they found the new method very different from the traditional method of lecturing in the class. This experience is succinctly captured in the following narrative:

The fact is that case pedagogy is very different from lecture mode and this transition is not very easy...yeah...It takes a lot of time to read the lengthy cases. Umm...unlike in lecturing [preferred method], a teacher has to take a relatively passive role in conduct of the class and I find it difficult to sustain the quality in discussion. Add to that, we have to do simultaneous evaluation along with discussion management. It is very difficult to recall individual responses and grade students afterwards. We do not have teaching assistants who can assist in the process. (age 36, male, associate professor, PRBS)

The contributor (of this vignette) expresses dissatisfaction with the transition to case based pedagogy from the preferred lecture based method. The participant expresses apprehension as various facets of case based teaching are diametrically opposite to the lecture style of teaching such as elaborate preparation, less control over class, and passive role of teacher during class proceedings. We infer that the participant does not attribute extensive preparation alone as a contributing factor to stress; rather he acknowledges that in spite of extensive preparation he is unsure whether such effort will lead to positive learning outcomes. The added responsibility of in-class evaluation of students for class participation without the support of teaching associates was contributing further to this rising discontent among the faculty members.

Annual publication targets. All the participants under study shared the common view that research driven teaching is demanding of the era and research involvement results in

coruscating teaching (cf., Moses, 1990). The majority of the participants stated that the universities where they are working emphasize making regular publications and that professors' research productivity is linked with the publication count (cf., Neumann, 1992). A few professors also reported that they are being given annual targets to make publications in some of the high rated journals. Teachers who failed to make publication targets within a particular semester were given with an extra teaching load in the subsequent semesters.

If I do not have any publications in a year, I will be given extra teaching load...so there is a pressure that we need to publish. The main factor behind stress is time...after devoting time for research work I get less time to prepare for the class. The management expects us to publish in quality journals but they do not acknowledge the fact that publishing in quality journals is a time-consuming process. After every month, there is a review meeting where management enquires about the status of my working papers...it is pointless to convince them that quick responses are hard to come by when the journals apply rigorous peer review processes...It is not that the organization provides adequate window for conducting research as well...The class load is unevenly distributed across the faculty resources...those who are not very prolific researchers sometimes end up getting less course load than those who are actively publishing papers...Sometimes the management promises that course load will be reduced if a faculty can achieve a certain target for publication, but in the end, no such action really takes place...that becomes frustrating. (age 41, male, associate professor, PRBS)

From the vignette, we infer that the participant finds it stressful and frustrating to balance his time between teaching and research. One of the inferences that can be made from his narrative is that a lot of time has to be spent undertaking academic research and hence it should not be a time-bound exercise. We also infer that the participant is experiencing a sense of urgency to produce research, implying that such research might not be up to his ideal standards.

Similarly, a few participants also reported that in the course of meeting the publication targets and performing the various administrative jobs assigned to them by the institution, they are left with less time for effective preparation (cf., Ramsden, 1998). Inadequate time results in a higher degree of stress amongst the professors and negatively affects the quality of their teaching.

Increased expectations. Since the management education has become more student centric (Friga, Bettis, & Sullivan, 2003), experienced-based, problem oriented, and feedback driven (cf., MacNamara, Meyler, & Arnold, 1990), student professor interaction has a crucial role to play in enhancing the intellectual outcomes of students and their overall satisfaction with learning experiences (cf., Endo & Harpel, 1982). The participants also opined that the increased level of interaction, in turn, leads to increased expectations of the students (cf., Houston et al., 2006). Participants have reported that students have become more demanding with respect to flexibility, quality of teaching, attention, and feedback seeking from teachers due to commoditization of higher education (cf., Sander, Stevenson, King, & Coates, 2000).

...the students have become very demanding nowadays...when it comes to the quality of teaching and feedback from the teachers and if a teacher is not able to match up with the expectations, he has to fear the wrath of low rating from the students...Students have access to the internet all the time these days...the moment you state a concept in the class, they start surfing Google...if you have said something which does not match Wikipedia, they will counter your

logic...yeah...at the same time there are targets for internship and placement of students and we are the ones who are held accountable for everything...the academic calendar leaves no window for liaising with corporate executives; consequently, the effort put in by academicians to arrange for placements is not enough...The management does not understand such issues...at quarterly meetings, we are asked to justify our output in terms of placements and internships generated, those who lag behind are reprimanded in open forum... (age 32, female, assistant professor, PRBS)

Since teaching effectiveness is also being measured by student rating (Neumann, 1992), the responsibility of the business school professors has risen to a next level. Unlike earlier times, the cost of education has been multiplied in terms of the fees and other expenses charged by the higher education institutions, which results in expecting a greater rate of return from the institutions and the professors as a whole (Woodall, Hiller, & Resnick, 2014). Therefore, structuring curriculum around external needs and demands and in line with the newly created disciplines are reported to be increasingly demanding by the professors (cf., Ylijoki, 2005), which significantly contributes to the role stress.

Increased competition. The business school professors reported that performance of competitive business schools has a significant impact upon their day-to-day work due to increased competition between institutions and growing emphasis on university rankings (cf., Dowling-Hetherington, 2014). Consequently, they also opined that sustaining in the cut-throat competition with the other institutions operating in the same field, has become a major contributor to the increased level of stress.

Yea...many times we feel the pressure...because...these days since the competition is increasing, apart from teaching, research, and administrative work, we have to facilitate other works like management development programs, guest lectures etc.; all these activities have become essential for maintaining the ranking of our institute. Our job has become manifold these days, in terms of the subject that I teach, this is a job enragement at unacceptable proportions...the institute would not gain anything in the long run...more and more faculty are going to leave their jobs if the organization keeps mounting pressure on them... (age 29, female, assistant professor, PRBS)

From the vignette, we infer that a business school professor's job which was confined to the dual role of teaching and academic publishing has now encompassed other facets such as maintaining relationships with the industry for mutual benefits, such as calling industry executives for guest lectures and contributing to the industry with management development programs. These developments have made professors' job more challenging to include relationship management skills and liaisoning skills that span beyond the role of traditional teacher's teaching and research skills. The requirement for these new skill sets is causing stress to business school professors as they form a substantial part of everyday job roles.

Theme 2: Moderators of Stress

Though stress has become an inevitable part of the occupation, it is not totally unmanageable. The effects of the stress can be reduced, to a considerable extent, through planned efforts. The themes which emerged as the moderators of the stress are (a) social support and (b) personal strategies.

Social support. Participants of the study reported that social and emotional support available to them helps to cope with the stress effectively. Professors who maintained close relationships with their family and friends were able to use the confronting strategies to cope with the stress (cf., Pestonjee, 1992). Confronting strategy of dealing with stressful situations is supposed to be more effective and healthy when compared to the avoiding strategy which includes denying the presence of stress (Pareek, 1983). The findings mirror the literature on social support which states that social support effectively decreases the work stress experience by mitigating the harmful effects of occupational stressors (Cohen & Wills, 1985). Nevertheless, Moeller and Chung-Yan (2013) also provided empirical evidence confirming the positive role of social support on the stress experience of the university professors in Canada.

On my usual weekends, I spend time with my family which is very relaxing for me after a hectic day at work...and at the same time I try to keep in touch with my friends, it helps in eliminating the frustration of work...with all this pressure to publish, these days I am at my laptop even on weekends...my family members become angry with me for not spending time with them, they expect to have some quality time with me...I feel so frustrated that I can not manage to work on my papers during office hours...every day there is some meeting or other event which requires my presence, add to that all the course loads...Also if colleagues are supportive it becomes easy to cope with the stress...instead sometimes it is more politics than patronage... (age 31, female, assistant professor, PBS)

From the narrative we infer that social support and family support are important contributors in stress reduction. From the narratives, we infer that both family and colleagues at the workplace are cognizant of rising stress levels of professors at their workplace.

Personal coping strategies. Personal strategies to cope with the stress included trying to strike a balance between research and teaching by prioritizing work, advance preparation for the class, enjoying the work through positive cognitive appraisal, seeking help whenever required, withdrawal from taking work home, practicing therapies like meditation for stress relief, taking out time for non-work related interests and going for recreational activities on weekends (cf., Gillespie et al., 2001). Some of the elderly participants also reported reading spiritual books as a method of coping with stress.

Umm...almost in a 50-50 ratio I divide my weekly time and when I don't have classes I start writing the research articles. What I believe is...enjoy what you do and do what you enjoy [laughs] there is no other way out. (age 43, female, associate professor, PRBS)

Advance preparation must be there every time for delivering the lecture or discussing the case, I think...if one starts preparing before commencement of the semester...then...it doesn't take much time to prepare for the class later on. (age 36, male, assistant professor, PBS)

I do Meditation. Meditation does not only help in reducing stress...but it is also a good way to get fit and stay healthy. I read spiritual books as well...sometimes...listen to music to reduce the stress. (age 45, female, professor, PRBS)

We infer that the participants adopted a number of techniques to cope with the stress experienced by them. The narrative suggests time management, advance preparation for the classes and performing meditation as the most helpful measures to moderate the stress.

Theme 3: Recommendations for Reducing the Stress

Stress related to work can be minimized, to a large extent, through various interventions by the organization. The following recommendations for minimizing the stress were suggested by the participants from different business schools.

Focus on quality instead of quantity of publications. Almost one quarter of the participants from the private business schools were of the view that more emphasis should be given on the quality of articles published instead of the numbers of publications made in a particular year, to be taken as eligibility criteria for the promotion and/or increment. In order to inflate the quantity of the publications and meet the given target, the professors were found to compromise the quality of research work conducted (cf., Haslam & Laham, 2010), which in turn, does not provide satisfaction to them.

Semester wise publication targets build enormous stress for us. Conducting research work haphazardly...to increase the number of publications does not provide satisfaction from my work. I believe that instead of quantity...the management should consider the quality of publications as the criteria for increments and promotion. (age 45, male, associate professor, PRBS)

We infer that participants are feeling role stress due to the publication targets prescribed to them every semester. In the quest to increase their publication count, the participants are feeling helpless in sustaining quality in research work they publish.

Inadequate research facilities. Although business schools were found to be building a strong research culture, not all the institutions were found to be well-equipped with adequate facilities so as to obtain the desired research output from the professors. Participants opined that the universities should attempt to promote and nurture collaborations with foreign universities in order to enhance the quality of research work and subscribe to online research databases.

We do not have access to some of the leading databases yet...Yea...I feel frustrated at times when I cannot download the papers required for conducting my study. (age 37, male, assistant professor, PBS)

We infer that the participants feel distressed due to lack of research support available to them in terms of research databases. Institutional policies which facilitate collaborative sharing of resources such as strategic ties with other universities to share library and other knowledge resources and liaising with subject experts may foster better research at lower expenditure. Such efforts can significantly improve quality of the research output.

Faculty development programmes (FDPs). A potential step to reduce the stress and nurture the effectiveness of the business school professors, as suggested by the participants, could be to organize the FDPs on a regular basis. One way of it could be organizing workshops and training programs in collaboration with some multinational companies, attending which, professors will be exposed to practices of the corporate world. While another proposed method could be the in-house FDPs, which includes the mentoring approach within the institution. Mentoring by senior professors can prove to be helpful in enhancement of the teaching skills of new joiners and facilitate reducing performance related stress.

FDPs not only help the faculty members in their career development...but...they also benefit the institutions by improving their ranking and networking. Pressure of effective delivery and handling the class with diverse group of students builds up a lot of stress on me...adopting the mentoring approach will be of great help to a newcomer like me. (age 28, male, assistant professor, PRBS)

This narrative emphasizes the dual role of faculty development programs both as knowledge enhancers as well as skill enhancers. At the knowledge enhancement level, they introduce the faculty to colleagues who are experts in a given area contributing to networking for scholarly collaborations. On the other end, faculty development programs in the areas of pedagogy may orient newcomers to innovative methods in teaching pedagogy and other pedagogy related strategies for efficient management of the class. Participants expressed the utility of FDPs in improving their competencies both in the areas of teaching and research, which in turn could result in reduced stress levels.

Collaborative goal setting. The teachers must be consulted prior to the allotment of courses, so as to bridge the gap between the area of research and the courses taken by them. There should be a proper nexus between the courses taken by the teachers and the area of their interest in order to reduce the challenges faced by them.

We should be consulted before allotment of courses to us. It is due to the shortage of competent faculty members that we are often allotted with some courses which are different from our area of research...and sometimes...it is done without any prior consent from us. (age 38, female, assistant professor, PBS).

Based on the narrative, we inferred that the participants were not always consulted before allotment of courses to them due to faculty shortage in some of the disciplines. The participants felt that the course allocation should be done with prior consent of the faculty members and there should be a proper nexus between the research interest and courses to be taught in the class. Any endeavors which are made in this direction may significantly lower stress levels related to teaching.

Discussion

This paper reports the causes for occupational stress faced by the professors across the public and private business schools in India. Previously, the studies on stress in academia were restricted to the field of medical science (cf., Saini, Agrawal, Bhasin, Bhatia, & Sharma, 2010) as it was the only domain considered as stressful within the purview of higher education. But with advent of globalization and economic growth, the demand for competent managers became noteworthy in the market, resulting in the mushrooming of management institutions across the globe. Similar to management discipline, the higher education system in general is also witnessing a bubble growth with an increasing number of institutions offering a variety of applied courses. Driven by increasing enrolments of students with diverse needs, the higher education system has shifted to a market-infused paradigm wherein knowledge is regarded as a commodity whose exchange value is measured by comparing the cost of acquiring a degree with the financial earnings the degree supposedly enables. At the same time, students are being treated as customers and the responsibility to satisfy these customers lie on the shoulder of faculty members (Woodall et al., 2014). As reported by the participants in the current study,

the academicians are held accountable not only for the performance of students in the class but also during their internship and placement activities.

On the other end, there is also an increasing pressure on higher education institutes to contribute to generation of knowledge. This has become especially relevant for the institutes striving for accreditation and better ranking. Consequently, it puts additional burden on faculty members to engage in academic research pursuits along with teaching (Griffiths, 2004). Considering that the goals of this research are not egalitarian and are driven by accreditation and rankings (cf., Gibbs, 2001), emphasis on quantity of research produced per faculty member is given more weight than the quality of research produced. As an outcome, discrepancies are reflected in promotion, increments, and incentives awarded to the faculty members across both public and private business schools in India.

Analysis of the qualitative data also indicated that the level of role stress experienced by the academicians is substantial and has drastically increased in the past decade. To a large extent, the causes and moderators were found to be overlapping across institutes considered for the study. The results reported in the current study are also consistent with the results of recent studies conducted in Chinese and Nigerian universities (cf., Akinyele, Epetimehin, Ogbari, Adesola, & Akinyele, 2014; Sang et al., 2013; Shen et al., 2014;) across different higher education disciplines. The current study, to a large extent, also confirms the findings by Gillespie et al. (2001), Winefield et al. (2003), Tytherleigh, Webb, Cooper, and Ricketts (2005), and Faria, Gonçalves, and Gomes (2013) with regard to the causes of role stress amongst higher education academic staff.

Although, the sample of the study is restricted to India, the findings are still likely to be valid across other Asian countries where the traditional methods of teaching have been replaced by the modern and practical methods lately. The unique contribution of this study lies in the recommendations provided by the participants so as to help them alleviate the level of role stress experienced by them. Previous studies in this domain have extensively focused on the causes and coping mechanism of occupational stress and did not capture the corrective measures that are required to be taken by the policy-makers and management of the organization from the respondents' perspective. The findings of the study posits to assist the government bodies, university management, policy makers, and departmental heads of the business schools and other applied disciplines across these nations in formulating new policies and/or in bringing about the required changes in the existing policies in order to cater to the recommendations laid down by the professors. By considering the listed recommendations of the study, business school management can assist the faculty members to cope with the work related stress and allow them to excel in the area of their work.

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Appendix A

The Interview Schedule

1. Have you felt any change in the level of stress as compared to earlier days?
2. Have you ever felt that there is higher degree of stress in this institution as compared to other business schools? If yes, what are the major reasons behind it?
3. What personal strategies do you adopt to cope with the work stress?

4. Does your institution take any initiative to ensure the stress free working environment for the faculty members? What should be done by the university's management to reduce the level of stress at work?

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