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Work stress as a worldwide problem in present time

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Abstract

Nowadays, the emphasis is taken on protection of environment and very strict standards of the European Union are valid, each of which obliges us to protect our environment. This is the reason, why it is important to check the effectiveness of the measures to protect the health and justify using the financial funds. Area dealing with work - related stress many world organizations show the consequences that may cause long-term effects on the human body. Stress is not just personnel in leadership positions, but the problem is everyone at any level of business and therefore should be given due attention to its elimination. Aim of this paper is evoke the interest of society to address the issue of work stress, enhance communication between employees and the company and identify problem areas in the work process.

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1. Introduction

Work-related stress is today a global issue, and companies operating in Slovakia are no exception. According to the statistics, stress affects about one out of four workers. Stress involves not only personnel in leadership positions, but it is the problem of everyone at any level. The current world situation is very favorable for the growth of the phenomenon, such as stress. Many people are losing their jobs due to the economic and debt crises, and many others are in daily stress whether not soon becoming one of them. For the company, addressing the problem of eliminating the stress-associated risks is very advantageous, since the consequences of its impact bring about only financial losses from absenteeism, errors, low performance, accidents of own employees, but also a loss of reputation as a result of poor working conditions, in which company employees must carry out their working activities.

2. Reasons for Dealing with the Stress Issue

The issue of stress is still given a little attention in the Slovak companies. Not many recognize the importance of addressing this issue, which can cause serious health problems of employees and economic losses. We think that one of the main causes of such a little interest in solving the problem not only by employers but also by employees is the

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ignorance of the consequences of stress (Mikloš, 2004). The European Agency for Safety and Health at Work provides on its website interesting stress issue-relating statistics and information. An interesting fact that can be encountered is: "Stress is the second most commonly reported work-related problem, which affected 22 percent of employees in the European Union in 2005".

The importance of addressing the work stress issue is confirmed by the prognoses of many experts related to the emergence of new psychosocial risks that cause an increase in the stress level.

These psychosocial risks can be classified as:

1. **Job Insecurity** - businesses lose their contracts, which leads to a reduction in jobs, causing a feeling of insecurity and concern among employees.
2. **Labor Intensification** - employees process an increasing amount of information and have to cope with higher daily workload and work pressure every day.
3. **Imbalance in the Work and Personal Life** - insecure work, high workload and pressure at work can cause problems that employees carry over into their personal lives, which can have a negative impact on employee's well-being (Drahten & Hermann, 2007).

3. Process of Preventing and Minimizing Work - Related Stress

According to Csikosova & Szombathyova (2000), a major problem in preventing the work-related stress is the ignorance of employees themselves as to what exactly the stress is, what its symptoms are, what consequences it may exercise on them, what consequences it may have for the company, or what stressors can occur in the work process. This may be one reason for the failure in solving the stress prevention and, therefore, it is important to increase the knowledge of employees about stress either:

1. By issuing a simple, clear and understandable Guide for employees that would contain basic information related to stress. The Guide should inform employees about:
 - Basic characteristics of stress; Basic symptoms of stress;
 - Possible consequences of stress;
 - Fundamental methods of preventing and suppressing stress, shown in a simple and comprehensive way;

Accountability and Collaboration:

 - The issue of the Guide would be in the responsibility of an expert on the issue of stress;
 - The distribution of the Guide to employees would be in the responsibility of senior employees of the company at all levels of management;
2. Through expert lectures held by experts in the subject matter, which should encourage employees to work together towards solving this problem; such presentation should be developed in an interesting way, using a video presentation, prepared in an interesting and purposeful form, eventually completed with videos or animations associated with the issue.

Below, there is a draft Guide to coping with stress, which should be available to every employee at each company workplace.

DRAFT GUIDE		
I. Basic Characteristics of Stress		
Stress is the body's response to any excessive burden (both, pleasant or unpleasant) that affects it. Stress at work occurs when the demands of the working environment exceed the ability of employees to deal with or control them. Stress is not a disease, but if intense and taking a certain amount of time, it can lead to disruption of both, the mental and physical health. Stress can reach every employee at any level.		
II. Stress Symptoms		
<i>Physiological Symptoms of Stress;</i>	<i>Emotional-Affective Symptoms of Stress;</i>	<i>Stress Symptoms in Human Behavior;</i>
- Respiratory disorders	- Sudden changes in mood	- Indecision

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sweating even at rest - Thirst - Dizziness - Fatigue - Vomiting - Pain behind the breastbone - Back problems - Frequent urination or the urge to urinate - Abdominal pain - Heartbeat - Shaking hands - Pain in extremity - Sexual impotence - and others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A feeling of inability to cope with challenges - Worsening relations with colleagues, family, friends - Closing-in on ourselves - Inability to relax - Sleeping disorders - Frequent depression - Unwillingness to cooperate - Constant fear - Frequent feelings of guilt fear or anger - and others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sick leave - Frequent change of employment - Accident at work is more likely - Reduced coordination, precision and control of movements - Sleeping disorders - Loss of appetite or overeating as the opposite case - High consumption of alcohol, cigarettes...
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III. Possible Health Effects at Prolonged Man's Exposure to Stress

- Gastric diseases, Heart and blood pressure diseases
- TB, asthma, Allergies, Reduced immunity, Cancer

IV. Possible Causes of Work-Related Stress

External Stress-Inducing Situations at Work:

Internal Stress-Inducing Situations at Work:

1, *Working Environment:*

1, *Lifestyle:*

- Noise
- Sharp light
- Heat
- Cold
- Enclosed space
- Onerous working materials
- Lack of working means
- Insufficient workplace ergonomics

- Lack of sleep
- Poor eating habits
- Busy schedule

2, *Way of Thinking:*

2, *Enterprise Culture:*

- Pessimistic thinking
- Over-analyzing
- Exaggerated self-criticism

- Poor communication
- Own blame from failures and errors
- Expectation that people will work excessively long

3, *Mental Attitude:*

3, *Demands of Work:*

- Do a lot in a short time
- Too much training
- Too short training
- Boring and monotonous work

- Taking things personally
- Exaggeration
- Unrealistic expectations

4, *Relationships:*

- Bad relationships in the workplace with other employees
- Violence, discrimination...

5, *Communication:*

- Uncertainty about what is happening
- Concerns about job security
- Missing information

V. Practical Advice on How to Manage Stress

1, Relaxation - Deep Breathing

This kind of exercise is suitable for calming down and can be practiced almost anywhere. The essence of this relaxing method lies in deep breathing using the diaphragm and abdominal muscles.

Procedure:

1. Find a quiet place (as appropriate);
2. Take a comfortable seat;
3. Place one hand on your chest and the second one on the abdomen;
4. Breathe in slowly through your nose, hold your breath for a moment and slowly exhale;
5. Try to use abdominal muscles in order to lift the lower hand more than the upper one;

6. When conducting belly breathing, place your hands under the ribs: feel the movement of your hands when lifting the belly up and down - if feeling more relaxed, put your hands to the hips and keep relaxing.

2, Positive Thinking

Optimistic thinking is a strong defense against stress. It should be noted that nothing is as bad as it looks at first sight. Important for this defense against stress is not to worry for everything; always have in mind that there is always a way out; it only depends on our perspective.

3, Work Without Fear and Tension

- Perform the tasks in order of importance;
- Do not allow the work to dominate over you;
- Avoid being overworked; behave assertively.

4, Regular Exercise

Regular exercise greatly reduces stress levels and contributes not only to the physical but also to the mental well-being.

- Ideally, devote to sports at least three times a week, but half an hour a day minimum;
- Simple nature walks can be strong too.

5, Healthy Diet

- At least three meals a day; A diet rich in vitamins and low in fat;
- Eat at ease; Do not use too much salt;

6, Laughter

During laughter, the breath gets deeper and heartbeats are more frequent; shaking of chest, diaphragm and lungs cause muscle vibrations, which are beneficial for digestion, massaging the intestines and stomach. Laughter releases endorphins in the body – i.e. the happiness hormones that have a painkilling effect, and relieve headaches, aches of teeth and muscles.

7, Listen to Relaxing Music

- 8, A very important criterion to combat stress is to avoid alcohol and drugs!!!*

4. Implementation of Measures to Eliminate Stressors

The current period is characterized by numerous regulations and policies governing the area of work safety, which aim to inform employees about safe practices and the principles at work. Companies should be aware that too many rules, too many controls and a lack of free space could cause disinterest, inhibit rational thinking and induce significant health problems to their employees (Čulková & Teplická, 2008). Therefore, when drafting new measures, these facts should be taken into account too; the process of their adoption should not be artificially accelerated and meaningless or ineffective measures taken that will only apply burden. It is very difficult if not impossible to quantify the exact value of the benefits from the elimination of stress. However, they should be based on the characteristics of the business practice as listed below.

Quantification of Benefits:

- Increased occupational safety and reduced number of accidents
- Reduced sick leaves
- Increased labor productivity and improved quality of the output
- Improved relationships in the workplace
- Time savings

Quantification of Costs:

- Cost of design and organization of the implemented process
- Materials needed to implement the process
- Wages for external consultants, experts, own employees
- Time losses of trained staff
- The costs incurred for the implementation of corrective actions.

The following equation can be applied to calculate the return on investment in the process:

$$\text{Net Gain from Process Implemented (\%)} = (\text{Net Benefits of Process Implemented} / \text{Total Cost of Process Implementation}) * 100$$

The success of the process is closely linked to the implementation of the measures. Employees should see that something is happening and their comments and suggestions were accepted; it is therefore necessary to inform employees about the measures being implemented to improve. This process is based on the principle of continuous improvement; it is not a one-time affair, but it should be repeated, for example due to the introduction of new technologies, changes in personnel, or other fundamental changes in the company.

Addressing the issue of stress is very important for a successful company as the man is a key factor affecting performance and security (Perichtova, 2004). Reliability of the human factor is closely related to the work stress, which can be a serious problem.

5. Conclusion

Minimizing the work-related stress is a complex process that is not easy to solve in a day. Work-related stress is difficult to measure, and its symptoms can often remain hidden. It is important to appeal to employers and managers to pay due respect to their employees and create good working conditions for them. The best tool for the prevention of work-related stress and associated problems is to comply with all legal requirements, create good working conditions for employees and provide fair dealing by the employer.

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