

# CONSEQUENCES OF ORGANIZATIONAL STRESS ON WORKFORCE PRODUCTIVITY. RESEARCH ON STRATEGIES TO PROMOTE A SUSTAINABLE WORKFORCE

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## **Abstract**

Work has an important contribution to employee welfare. Investing in improving the overall welfare of employees at work can have more benefits for employers. Employee well-being at work involves issues such as: providing adequate resources, good communication, a reasonable degree of employee control over your own jobs, a balanced workload, job security and change management, positive work relationships, favourable working conditions. Employees who benefit from a positive work environment are responding to an increased organizational commitment. The paper provides an organizational holistic approach to stress management. It advocates increasing the quality of jobs where both employees and employers assume a shared responsibility for managing stress at work. It must be acknowledged that, by optimizing the health status of the workforce, we can ensure the good health of the organization.

**Keywords:** Organizational stress, Sustainable workforce, Employee well-being

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

In recent years, intensification of physical and mental demands on workers has led to new risks associated with work, stress being a matter of priority. This psychosocial risk factor draws the attention of researchers as well as decision-makers interested in the psychological risks and their associated risks on health and safety at work. Psychosocial risks in an organizational and social context are the risks arising from the interaction between work design and management, resulting in a worker's physical or psychological well-being (Cooper, 2015). Psychosocial risks such as work-related stress, violence, intimidation, harassment and interpersonal conflicts are recognized as major challenges, contributing to the decline in welfare and health at work as well as organizational performance (European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, 2007).

The preparation of the workforce for the profoundly modified economic and social environment presupposes the placement in the foreground of the competences, the abstract reasoning, the emphasis on the importance of knowledge based work, the rapid solution of the problems, new ways of communication and collaboration, which is permanently an overloading of cognitive skills of workers. An unhealthy context of work is influenced by excessive workload or time constraints, contradictory demands, lack of clarity about the role of the worker, inefficient communication, poorly managed organizational changes, lack of support from management or colleagues, poor interpersonal relationships, harassment, aggression and violence, difficulties in combining workplace and family commitments (den Besten et al., 2011). According to the European Working Conditions Survey, Eurofound (2012), about 45% of the interviewed workers said they had experienced during the three previous years a certain type of organizational change affects their working environment and 62% reported tight working hours. Managers are also aware of this problem, with 79% of European managers being concerned about stress at their jobs. Instead, less than 30% of European organizations have procedures to deal with stress at work, harassment and violence. ESENER has shown that more than 40% of European managers believe that psychosocial risks are more difficult to manage than risks related to traditional health and safety.

The organizational environment presents multiple challenges that can generate different types of stress, organizational stress defining a conflictual relationship between the worker and the work environment when job requirements exceed the capabilities and resources of the worker. Stress research models look at the dynamic process between the individual and his environment as a cumulative entity, physiological, psychological, and behavioral, cognitively interpreted by the individual. Stress occurs as a result of inconsistencies and malfunctions between the person and his / her work environment through excessive pressure due to the tasks or conditions of the organizational environment (Blix & Lee, 1991).

## **2. CONSEQUENCES OF ORGANIZATIONAL STRESS ON EMPLOYEE HEALTH**

Studies show that more and more people appreciate their health as falling, with an increase in mental illness: depression, chronic fatigue syndrome, anxiety, personality disorders, schizophrenia (Lundberg & Cooper, 2011; Desa et al., 2018). Although the overall physical health status of the population has improved over the last period, stress-related health problems such as anxiety, depression, exhaustion, diabetes, sleep problems, muscle aches, have increased dramatically. This confirms that the combined effects of work stress and social conditions inevitably have an effect on the psycho-biological functioning of the individual. There is a deep and permanent relationship between organizational stress

and the physical and mental health of an employee. Workplace stress is a significant predictor of heart disease (Kivimäki et al., 2006), chronic stress is associated with obesity (Dallman et al., 2003), a reduction in wellbeing (Doll et al., 2000) or reduced involvement (Gates et al., 2008). Negative aspects of stress (exhaustion, toxic emotions, trauma or tragedy) cannot be ignored (Cameron, 2007). The dark side of stress, as a threat to health and well-being of workers, has become well understood over the last 70 years, stress being directly or indirectly linked to seven of the top ten causes of death in developed economies (Quick & Quick, 2013).

### **3. IMPACT OF STRESS ON WORKFORCE AND PRODUCTIVITY**

The main costs associated with health problems are those related to falling productivity and those with the labor force. These include the costs resulting from low work performance, lower employee morale, lower turnover, premature retirement, complaints and labor disputes. Too many workers leave the labor market permanently as a result of health or disability issues. Financial resources spent on disability pensions have become a significant burden on public finances and hamper economic growth. According to the International Labor Organization, about two million people worldwide die each year because of accidents and occupational diseases.

Organizations are mainly affected by absenteeism costs, presenteeism, reduced productivity, or lower turnover. These costs ultimately affect national economies. The main costs for the individual are related to low health, mortality and decreased quality of life. Many workers leave the labor market permanently as a result of health or disability issues. The amount of money spent on disability pensions has become a significant burden on public finances and prevents economic growth because it reduces active labor.

### **4. PROMOTING WELLBEING AT WORK**

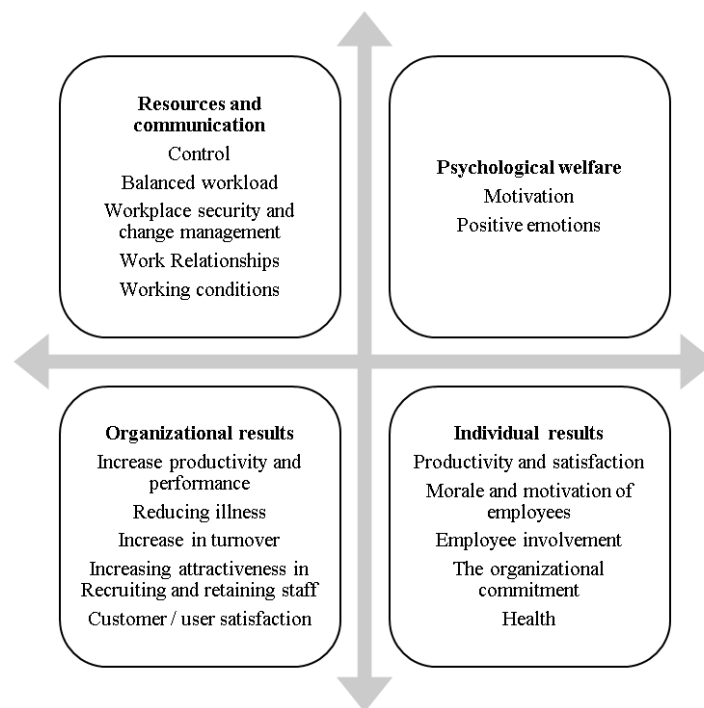
The overall change in the working environment is far from satisfactory worldwide, the economic and financial uncertainties of most organizations and the domino effect of economic and financial upheaval, have a negative impact on the majority of citizens in terms of their psychological and physical welfare. The difficult economic situation has forced the governments of all states and organizations to make structural reforms and cuts in spending and personnel in order to survive, and the way these difficulties are handled is of great importance today.

Research over the last decades has created a wealth of evidence on managerial procedures and working conditions that help promote health and welfare. According to the World Health Organization, "a

**CONSEQUENCES OF ORGANIZATIONAL STRESS ON WORKFORCE PRODUCTIVITY. RESEARCH ON STRATEGIES TO PROMOTE A SUSTAINABLE WORKFORCE**

healthy working environment is one where not only harmful conditions are absent, but abundant ones that promote health" (Leka et al., 2007). Today's organizational stressors are unique, however, the strategies and remedies known are not always appropriate. Organizational management has both legal and ethical responsibility to improve the well-being of employees at all times, both good and difficult. In order to ensure organizational health, a series of interventions have been proposed, whereby employers are pro-actively involved in creating a healthy working environment for their employees (Schnall et al., 2018).

Today, it is vital for organizations to support their staff and a fair and adequate management style, to be open and honest with the workforce is crucial in providing an appropriate working environment. Welfare is considered a "dynamic state in which the individual is able to develop his / her potential, productive and creative work, build strong and positive relationships with others, making a contribution to society. It is achieved when an individual is able to fulfill his personal and social goals and is useful to society ". Satisfied workers are considered to have jobs whose characteristics match individual needs and traits to create a state of satisfaction (Hobfoll et al., 2003). The term "thankfulness" has been defined and operationalized in various ways, and dissatisfaction has generally been associated with everything that affects individual welfare. In this conceptualization, contentment includes both subjective and objective dimensions. The objective elements are those that cannot be influenced by the individual.



**FIGURE 1. EFFECTS OF ORGANIZATIONAL COPING STRATEGIES**  
 Source: Created by author, based on literature review

These elements can be both from the work environment and from the environment. The subjective aspect of satisfaction is the abundance of positive and negative emotions. Thus, in order to face higher levels of well-being, workers need to experience higher levels of positive emotions and lower levels of negative ones. In this conceptualization, to be satisfied does not exclude exposure to negative aspects or emotions. Thus, a satisfied worker can be regarded as an individual with a high level of subjective well-being in the context of the workplace (Figure 1).

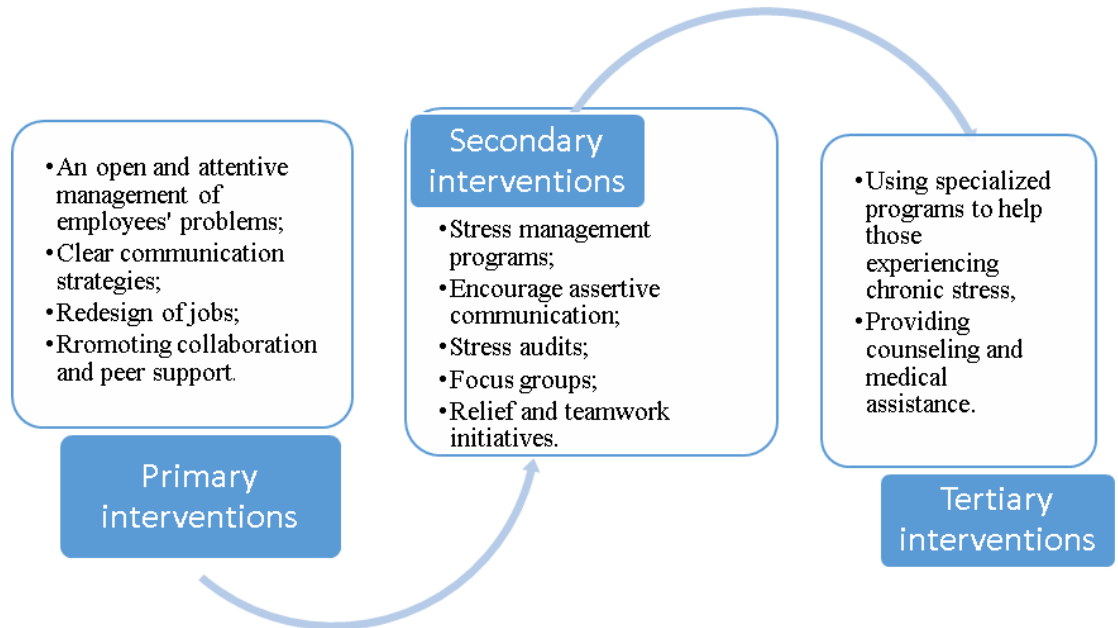
For employees psychological well-being leads to important individual results, manifested through satisfaction, motivation, involvement and organizational commitment, but especially a number of health problems. Although there is no clarity in defining and measuring employee engagement at work, it is considered "a positive attitude of the employee towards the organization and its values" (Robinson et al., 2004), while an involved employee "works to improve performance in the workplace, the benefit of the organization" (Hobfoll et al., 2003). Organizational engagement is a concept that describes positive employee behavior, which will most likely lead to an increase in productivity and performance, thus conferring direct benefits to the organization (Cartwright, 2017).

## 5. COPING STRATEGIES AT THE ORGANIZATIONAL LEVEL

Promoting a healthy work environment can be achieved through actions both at the organizational level and at the workplace or targeted at certain persons. The first category includes measures to raise awareness among managers about the importance of health and well-being at work. They need to better assess job content, working conditions, social workplace relationships, changes in the physical work environment, work schedule, better employer-employee communication, and provide opportunities for career advancement (Chen & Cooper, 2014). Unfortunately, both existing literature and organizational practice concentrate predominantly on employee-targeted interventions, compared with interventions to improve institutional organization and eliminate stressors (Bhui et al., 2012). Organizing strategies at the organizational level refer to the strategies used to overcome organizational stress. Strategies vary according to the state of implementation and the level at which they are used. These can be pan-organizational, at an extended organizational level, made up of groups and teams, as well as at a small level, through individual level interventions (Philip, 2015). Depending on the intervention stage, the adaptation strategy used may be preventive or curative. Figure 2 presents the intervention steps in strategies to adapt to organizational stress (Chen & Cooper, 2014). It provides an overview of

**CONSEQUENCES OF ORGANIZATIONAL STRESS ON WORKFORCE PRODUCTIVITY. RESEARCH ON STRATEGIES TO PROMOTE A SUSTAINABLE WORKFORCE**

the stages and strategies of intervention in organizational stress. Organizational coping strategies are needed at all stages of this process, and their benefits are proven.



**FIGURE 2. . INTERVENTION STRATEGIES FOR A HEALTHY WORK ENVIRONMENT**

Source: Adapted from Weinberg, A., & Cooper, C. (2011). Stress in turbulent times. Springer.

- Primary intervention - early stage - large-scale strategies - General adaptation strategies cannot eliminate all organizational stressors nor reduce their impact, they are more preventive, but must be structured to address key sources of stress and stress. Theoretically, if they are applied correctly and consistently in the organization, subsequent interventions are much less needed or not at all. In practice, however, this is not the case.
- Secondary intervention - medium stage - Adaptation strategies are implemented when stress is already experienced by groups and individuals. They tend to focus on certain groups and individuals, rather than being targeted at the entire organization.
- Tertiary intervention - advanced stage - Strategies focus on treating and rehabilitating affected staff. When individuals experience severe signs and symptoms of stress, specific strategies should be applied. These include counseling and other behavioral therapies. At this stage, recovery services are provided for those experiencing stress and illness, but unfortunately almost nothing is done to address the root causes. Currently, they are organizations that take into account work-life balance policies and try to model work practices and work organization so that employees can work faster and smarter

(Lewis & Anderson, 2013). But most employers believe that employees are solely responsible for ensuring their health and well-being, rather than relying on organizational support initiatives.

## 6. ORGANIZATIONAL MEASURES AND PRACTICES TO PREVENT STRESS

A preventive approach to stress the organizational environment refers to a series of practical measures used within organizations to prevent stress and promote health (Quick et al., 2013). From a literature review of preventing stress that little attention is paid to interventions "systemic" the interventions being concentrated on the organizational and individual level (Lamontagne et al, 2007). There are currently enough programs that could be considered "evidence-based" or practices that have been tested through rigorous research (Archer et al, 2011). The information provided by the researchers has led to the discovery of various organizational factors that cause organizational stress. To prevent these, a number of effective interventions have been offered, operationalized through a series of functional practices. Best practices include organizational and managerial commitment to health promotion, identification and elimination of stress factors, and effective communication. The leadership commitment and desire to include health in the management plan were considered as very important.

Today, a whole range of instruments for measuring organizational stress factors are available, but their applicability under today's conditions is questionable. The considerable economic and social changes that have occurred lately have contributed to the development of new stressors, and these tools are now prone to inherent bias. Thus, the importance of detecting new stressors, the significance of stress factors for the individual, and the measures to be used are emphasized. We do not know if stress measurement tools reflect reality, if researchers can interpret their results, by applying theory to practice, to the organizations they are studying.

## 7. THE NEED TO PROMOTE A SUSTAINABLE WORKFORCE

"Green Management" responded to people's expectations about how their managers and organizations should run their businesses to protect the environment so that more resource conservation and use reduces the economic burden. In recent decades, there has been growing concern about promoting sustainability of environmental resources, but in relation to other sustainability goals, people's sustainability in the organizational environment, maintaining work-life balance and well-being have been underestimated<sup>386</sup>. At the level of governmental and organizational policies there should be a similar concern to promote the sustainability of human resources (Pfeffer, 2010). A sustainable workforce can



be provided through a work environment that supports employee welfare. Employees should not only be considered resources that can be used and depleted to serve the employers' economic goals. Their abilities, talents and energies are too much used and too exhausted by excessive workload and unrealistic labor for weeks or years. Both environmental and social sustainability are confronted with a problem: the belief that the sole purpose of companies should be to maximize profits (Ambec & Lanoie, 2008).

Sustainability includes activities to renew and recycle what is being used to ensure that the ecosystem supports life and lifestyle can be preserved. Other issues include threatened conservation of threatened plants and species, cultural sustainability, preservation of values, arts, culture and food, communities threatened by globalization and modernization. Much of the sustainability research has focused on the amount of stress sustained by the ecosystem as well on restoring ecological balance.

Management research has focused on the possible links between cost-effectiveness and sustainability and the need for organizations to pursue sustainability strategies. Sustainability could focus on man and his physical resources, just as there is a concern to protect natural resources, there could be a similar level of concern for the protection of human resources. A system of reporting on physical and mental health of employees could be an important informative indicator for companies and at the level of state leadership regarding the sustainability of their people.

Management research emphasizes a series of indicators of company profitability and performance, not including organizational effects on employee health, early retirement, and mortality. Employee health has not received due attention in discussions about organizational effects on the environment and their implications for the workforce. Therefore, developing a coherent set of measures or a set of employee health indicators could be an impetus for organizations. In many ways, sustainability is a set of values and beliefs. As such, this is an ideology that needs to be expanded. Another factor that could explain the difference between the sustainability of the environment and the human one derives from the different actors in the two systems and the presumption of choice. There is an implicit assumption that people must act in the name of the environment, threatened plant and animal species because they cannot act on their own behalf. While employees can make choices, and if they do not like the conditions of their jobs, including the amount of stress, they may decide to work elsewhere. And if the working conditions of the employees really put their lives in danger, as the evidence shows, can they choose unemployment to keep them from illness and premature death? The idea that people are able to make choices, even if such choices are limited, naturally leads to a very different approach to human sustainability. Plants and animals are threatened, they need protection, but people can make free choices in competitive markets and should do it alone.



The use of human resources in a sustainable way implies that in the organizational environment employees can not only be able to fulfill the necessary roles but also can develop, be creative and innovate. Sustainable human resource management practices should foster positive social relationships at work, which would improve business performance (Cooperider & Fry, 2012), including greater cohesion among the members of the organization, commitment to work for fulfillment, hope for success, adaptability, exchange of knowledge, as well as the ability to collaborate. Synergies between employee roles can improve performance at work (Demerouti et al., 2010).

Human sustainability must consider how organizational activities affect the physical and mental health of people, well-being; the stress of working practices on man as a system; the effects of wrong management practices, such as working hours, behaviors that cause employees' stress. Therefore, focusing on human sustainability would "require employers to take into account the future welfare and performance of their employees."

## 8. CONCLUSIONS

Working conditions should take into account the individual differences in adaptability and vulnerability. There is convincing evidence that work contributes to the promotion of individual welfare and vice versa, if these conditions have been ignored or neglected, the effects are manifested by stress, with major consequences in depreciating individual welfare and often the activity organizational. It is obvious that certain occupations are inherently stressful. Moreover, the evidence suggests that some working conditions are stressful for most people, and this cannot be avoided. Encouraging managers to raise awareness and manage stress at work, involves highlighting sources or factors generating stress at work. Stress management refers to effective interventions related to both improving the skills and behavior of the manager, updating existing policies, and developing action plans following workplace stress audits.

The key message is that stress management should be seen as part of normal management activity, and relevant behaviors mean to evaluate whether or not these behaviors are part of the current repertoire of managers. Stress management activities tend to focus on the individual, who is seen as having a sort of problem or is perceived as unable to cope with his or her tasks. It must be acknowledged that, by optimizing the health status of the workforce, we can ensure the good health of the organization.

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