METHODS OF COPING WITH OCCUPATIONAL STRESS IN MULTINATIONAL CORPORATIONS

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Abstract
Since the development of the knowledge-based society, in the modern organizations, the managers are dealing with a new problem: the occupational stress. More than ever, more and more employees are affected by this type of stress, which affects their performances. The main objective of this article is to come up with new methods of copying with stress in service-based organizations, in order to improve employees' activities. For this objective to be achieved, first of all the concept of job stress will be defined. Secondly, the factors that produce stress and its effects will be analyzed. Next, the tools and methods used for measuring stress will be also analyzed. In a service-based organization, the employees' general level of stress will be estimated. All of the employees work on a tourism project. Last but not least, new measures for reducing stress will be promoted in the analyzed organization. It is desirable that the measures taken to be promoted in other organizations in order to improve the employees' performances.
Keywords: Stress, Occupational stress, Stress side effects, Multinational corporations.

1. INTRODUCTION

The modern companies focus their attention on an important issue, which affects their employees and has a huge impact on their performances: occupational stress.

The aim of this article is to find solutions for reducing this phenomenon.

In the first part of this article the concept of stress is defined and also the manner in which a series of specialists approached it: Walter Cannon (1915), Hans Selye (1956), Cox and Mackay (1981), Fletcher (1988), Lazarus and Folkman (1984). Then, the concept of occupational stress is defined and the most important root causes of stress will be discussed.

Next, the effects of stress on work force and companies will be analyzed and attention will be given to the instruments used for measuring work stress.

The last part of this article is dedicated to a case study, in which the general level of work place stress will be estimated for the employees who are working on a tourism project, whose main activity consists in offering customer support via email. Then, the root causes that conducted to that level of stress will be discussed and measures for reducing the stress will be promoted within the project. By reducing

workplace stress, the labor force will improve their customer support activities and the company will obtain better performances.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

One of the most often used words not only in management and organizational science, but in economy in general is the word "corporation". Corporations are of the most often forms of organizing a business activity. They are present in all parts of the world, although not to the same extent. Even besides the many joint characteristics of corporations, still they differ from each other in a great amount of aspects. The differences have to do with their size, type of industry in which they are active, way how they are internally organized. The characteristics of corporations are connected to the characteristics of countries in which they function. Most big and powerful corporations have originated in developed countries (Aziri B., 2014).

2.1 Defining the concept of occupational stress

As defined by the Agency for Health and Safety at work, **stress** is "an intense an unpleasant state, which, on long term, has negative impacts on health, performance and productivity." Another stress definition is:" an individual reaction and the interaction's results from the environment's requirements, on one hand, and the individual's capacities, resources and capabilities, on the other hand."

Stress is an unavoidable fact of organizational life today, taking its toll on both individual and organizations. According to a survey, 90 percent of American workers report feeling stressed at least once a week, and 40 percent describe their jobs as very stressful most of the time. What stress them is the volume of work and the fear of being laid off. Overall, work-related stress has been estimated to cost American companies $ 300 billion annually. (Greenberg, 2011)

Job stress "also known as *occupational stress*, represents one of the multiple problems the moderns society is facing with. It is generated by the professional life, the work environment, with direct consequences on both professional and personal activity, on those who are doing the jobs' health." (Albu, L., Paun, M., 2011)

At the work place, stress occurs when the professional requirements exceed the resources of employees. Stress does not appear only as a result of major negative events, but also as a result of daily tensions, which have a higher rate of occurrence, rather than major negative events, which are quite rare.

Regarding to the origins of the term stress, this came from the latin verb *stringere*, which means to tighten, to upset (Arnold et al., 1998, Legeron, 2003).

Formally, scientists define **stress** as the pattern of emotional and physiological reactions occurring in response to demands from within or outside organizations (Greenberg, 2011).

The first researchers who studied stress adopted a physiological approach. For example, Hans Seyle define stress in 1950 as "a general adaptation syndrome designating a set of body's adaptive reactions to the specific action of some stressors and it implies three stages: of alarming, of strengthening and of fatigue."

In the *alarming phase*, specific reactions of the body are occurring when encounter a stressor. Thus, the body's immunity decreases, and in case the stressor is powerful (severe burn, extreme temperature), death can occur.

The *resistance phase,* represents in fact, the mobilization and tension state which we experience as stress. The signs of alarming reactions apparently disappear, and the resistance' capacity exceed the normal level. In this phase, the body uses more resources than normal, and the resources depletion represents the resistance's limit, when the exhaustion appears. In this phase, the stress effects can be noticed, when a deterioration in health's condition appears. However, every person reacts in a different way to the events that cause stress: some person experience serious psychological and body problems, while others perceive the events that cause stress as challenges.

Hans Seyle and Walter Cannon analyzed the stress effects on physiological indicators. The key concept of Canon's activity is homeostasis, defined as being the body's physiological mechanisms tendency of maintaining on a long term, a constant state (1915). Any factor that disrupts this stability is perceived as stressor. Canon is the one who introduce the expression "*fight or flight*" for describing the options one has when meeting a stressor (Avram, Cooper, 2008).

Investigating the physiological mechanisms and the general adaptation syndrome's consequences, Selye (1956), proved that stress involves adapting stimulus and body wear. For making a difference between the two concepts, the same author introduced the terms *eustress* (which stimulate us, give us the capacity of moving forward) and distress (implies intense and prolonged solicitation, overload, the incapacity of adapt) (Chraif, Aniţei, 2011).

Scheuch (1996) believes that stress is a human activity, whose purpose is the attempt to adapt to interior and exterior changes. Scheuch understands stress as being a reaction to a negative change in

the functions of organs and of the changes that occurs between a person and his/her social environment.

Other specialists, such as Cox (1978), Cox and Mackay (1981), Fletcher (1988) have chosen a causal approach of stress. They see stress as a stimulus of the environment, defined by load, the individual's load level or by others environmental threatening elements. Given this approach, the job stress is treated as a property of the working environment and it is often presented as a measurable aspect of that environment. Spielberg (1976) thinks that the term "stress" should refer to an objective feature of a situation. Cox and Mackay(1981), Sutherland and Cooper (1990) draw attention that in some cases, stress can cause irreversible reactions and major damages. The idea of stress limit exceeded this concept and it was used for defining the differences between stress's resistance and vulnerability. This theory identifies stress with the root causes of stress, also called stressors, stimuls or stressors agents (Chraif, Aniţei; 2011).

Cox (1993) approaches stress as being an exterior stimulus which affects the body. So, "....stress is what happens to human being, not what is happening inside him; it is a set of causes, not symptoms." The ones who choose this stress approach, measure it through scales which represents stressful situations, giving points to certain events depending on their stress's level. The most common scale of this type is the one designated by Holmes and Rahe (1967). The subjects say if in a certain time, the specified events happened to them. The main problem of this scale is that the specified events happen rarely in one's life. Thus, for measuring the small inconveniences of daily life, Kanner (1981) developed a special scale (Daily Hassles Scale), whose items refer to: the lack of time, high demands, too many interruptions, responsibilities and social responsibilities, losing things, family members health's problems, worrying thoughts about future, worries concerning the assessment processes (Avram, Cooper; 2008) .

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) consider stress as the process in which the individual has the role of an active agent that can influence, helped by emotional, cognitive and behavioral strategies, the effects of facing the stressful situation. Lazarus defines three stages in evaluating the stress: the primary evaluation, secondary evaluation and reevaluation.

In primary assessment the situation's appreciation takes place. It is established how dangerous a situation is. The secondary evaluation refers to the adaptive possibilities and the measures which can be taken by the individual in order to face the situation. Reevaluation refers to a change in the perception from the primary assessment.

Lazarus and Folkman adopted a "interactional" or "transactional" stress vision. In other words, stress represents people's reaction when they ca not adapt to environment's demands (family, personal or at work). Not all the time the demands of the environment generate stress. In some cases, they can generate successes which lead to an increase in work's satisfaction. Stress appears when the demands are too high or on long term, or when they act from multiple directions.

In order to reduce stress and to improve the company's performances, the top management and the employees should identify the root causes of stress (stressors) first and then to establish the way in which they are acting on individuals. Next, the most important root causes of stress will be analyzed.

Stressor is any demand, either physical or psycological in nature, encountered during the life time (Greenberg, 2011).

For an event to become a stressor to someone, he or she must think of it as a stressor and acknowledge the danger and the difficulty of coping with it (Greenberg, 2011).

2.2 Factors that cause occupational stress

Stress at work is a nervousness/anxiety associated with the job, which influences physical and mental health of the employee (Cox, Griffiths and Rial-Gonzalez, 2000).

Elliot and Eisdorfer (1982) point out that the sources of stress identified as stressors (stress factors) are events or environmental conditions, sufficiently intense or frequent, to demand physiological and psychosocial responses from the individual. In the organizational environment, we refer to physical demands (heat, cold, noise, etc.) and psychosocial demands (lack of control and predictability, interpersonal conflict, role issues, etc.) as being generators of undesirable reactions for the individual and organization (Chraif, Aniţei, 2011).

According to the classification of the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, the main factors causing stress at work are:

1. *The status and the role of the employee within organization*: it refers of the problem of role ambiguity, role conflict, and responsibility for people;

The role ambiguity occurs when the employee does not have adequate or sufficient information regarding his/her role and contribution in the work processes and in the company. Also, the employee does not know the reward system or considers that the present system is not motivating. Not knowing the objectives and the purpose of their responsibilities also leads to role ambiguity (Cox, 1993).

The role conflict occurs when employees are expected to behave in a way that is in conflict with their values or when the different roles they play are in contradiction. (Cox, 1993).

Regarding the different roles performed by an individual, it was noted that usually work-family conflicts lead to organizational stress affecting employee's performance who are working in service–based companies (Molpus, 2003, the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health). On this basis, two stressors appear: those who create work-family conflict and family-work conflict.

One stressor refers to the role conflict created by the job, in which the requirements created by the job contradicts with the family life's responsibilities, and the second stressor refers to the role conflict in which the demands created by the family life contradicts with the job's requirements (Netemeyer, Boles and Mc Murrian , 1996).

The Work-Family conflict is an impediment for practicing the family's role, which will generate stress at work; on the other hand, those who experience high levels on Family-Work conflicts feel overwhelmed by home responsibilities and will experience stress at work.

The distinction between stress at work and stress at home was artificial. Since the last part of twenty century, when more and more couples decided it is better that both the male and the female should work, this distinction has seemed to disappear (Popescu, 2013)

Responsibility for people is also considered a stress factor connected to the individual's role in a given context, and it manifests particularly for those who have jobs that involve permanent contact with people (doctors, nurses, teachers, managers, so we may state that it is particularly manifested for service-based jobs). For employees who have jobs that involve contact with people, the symptom of **burnout** often appears. This is characterized by a state of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and a decrease in someone's performances. (Avram, Cooper, 2008).

Sometimes people find themselves worn down by chronic levels of stress. Such people are often described as suffering from **burnout** (a syndrome of emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion coupled with feelings of low self-esteem or low self-efficacy, resulting from prolonged exposure to intense stress and the strain reactions following from them (Greenberg, 2011).

2. *The task and the work rhythm:* refers to the amount of work that an employee must meet in a period of time (work task overflow or underflow), lack of control over work's rhythm, lack in prioritising the tasks

Regarding the workload, Verhoeven (2003), Kittel and Leynen (2003) demonstrated that high demands lead to emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and somatic problems. Other studies show that overworking causes sleep problems, headaches, stomach, depression and fatigue.

A fast work rhythm can be a stress factor. The working speed can be set up by the employee, by the machine on which he works or by an informatic system. If the employee sets up its own work rhythm, stress will be reduced because the employee will work at normal capacity; however if the rhythm is set up from outside, he will be under pressure and will work under stress.

Concerning the prioritization of the tasks, it is associated with good planning and time- management. It is recommended to adopt a prioritization of activities based on their urgency and their importance. Doing so, the employees will not feel the pressure.

3. ***The relationships at the work place***: Physical or social isolation, weak connection with top management, lack of communication, interpersonal conflicts, various forms of harassment (verbal aggression, physical harassment, etc.).

The lack of social support , according to various studies is associated with a high level of emotional exhaustion (Kittel şi Leynen, 2003; Verhoeven et al., 2003; van Emmerik, 2002), with job dissatisfaction(Bellman et al., 2003; Verhoeven et al., 2003; van Emmerik, 2002), somatic problems (Bellman et al., 2003; Verhoeven et al., 2003), sleeping problems (Waldenström., 2002) and nervousness (Waldenström, 2002).

4. ***The organization structure and climate***: concerns aspects link to the employees' participation in decision-making activities and the control over their own work.

 According to Karasek (1979), the possibility of controlling your own work is in inverse relationship with fatigue and depression. According to the same author, the small control is associated with dissatisfaction in work and life, a greater use of tranquilizers and an increased number of days spent on sick leave. The studies showed that in the companies where employees can take decisions, they have a huge degree of satisfaction and self-esteem (Cox, 1993).

Also, various organizational conditions determined employees not to work at full capacity (budget support, time and material resources, preparation for conducting business).

5. ***The workplace design***: repetitive and monotonous work tasks, significant risks of injuries and occupational diseases caused by technologies, noise, chemical pollutants, etc., the fear of technology in relation to responsibility, lack of skills.

The repetitive and monotonous work generates boredom, anxiety and depression (Cox, 1993).

Some jobs, such as bus driver, air traffic controller require a permanent vigilance in order to avoid possible dangers. The empirical proofs shows that working for a long time on this professions leads to an increasing risk for developing cardiovascular disease (Belkic et al., 2004).

6. *Career:* the uncertainty in development of the career, frustration in the development of the career, uncertain status and the lack of recognition, job insecurity, inadequacy of trainings,

A stress source is the lack of opportunities for career's development, especially in the companies which emphasizes the relationship between career development and competence (Cox, 1993).

Another source of stress is job insecurity. The study conducted by Lee and his collaborators (2004), shows that the persons which have insecure jobs have higher risks of being affected by a cardiovascular disease in the next four years. Meanwhile, Kopp and his collaborators, based on the on Hungarostudy Epidemilogical Panel 2006 test, concluded that having insecure jobs, makes the premature death in men increase (Avram, Cooper, 2008)

7. *Working schedule*: inflexible working schedule, unpredictable overload work volume, working in shifts, excessive overtime.

The study conducted by Chartered Management in 2011, on the quality of life at the workplace, showed that 91% managers work daily over schedule. This is the only way they can full fill their tasks and many times this is part of the company's culture.

Studies have shown that people who work in the night shift are more probably of having a heart attack compared with the ones who are working during day time (Avraam, Cooper, 2008)

According to a survey conducted by EU-OSHA, the most common causes of stress at work mentioned by workers are: reorganization or job insecurity (7 employees out of ten are worried about this aspect), working overtime, excessive workload, bullying or harassment at work (six employees out of ten). The same survey indicated that four employees out of ten think that their workplace is not properly managed.

The respondents were employees from 31 European countries (16 622 respondents, about 500 from each country, full-time, part-time and self-employed, between the 23 November 2012 to 5 February 2013).

In the European Survey among companies, based on new and emerging risks (ESENER), eight out of ten European managers express their concern on workplace stress. However, less than 30% admitted

they have introduced procedures to handle psychosocial risks. The survey also indicated that is harder to handle psychosocial risks than health and security risks, which are more obvious to observe.

The American Institute of Stress has developed several studies whose conclusion was that occupational stress is the main source of stress for American adults, and this form of stress emerged especially in the last decade. The increase levels of occupational stress, due to the low level of control and also many requirements, is considered to be linked with coronary heart disease, heart attacks, hypertension and other disorders. In New York, Los Angeles and other municipalities the relationship between occupational stress and heart attack is so well known that the police officers who suffered a coronary event during or outside work, are considered to have had an accident at work and are paid accordingly.

Some jobs, such as emergency room physician, police officer, firefighter, and airline pilot, expose the people who hold them to high level of stress. Others, such as college professor, janitor, and librarian, do not. This basic fact – that some jobs are generally much more stressful than others – has been confirmed by the results of a survey involving more than 130 different occupations (Greenberg, 2011).

Research has shown that several features of jobs determine the levels of stress they generate. Specifically, people experience greater stress the more their jobs require:

- making decisions;

- constantly exchanging information with others;

- working in unpleasant physical condition;

- performing unstructured rather than structured tasks (Greenberg, 2011).

2.3 Stress side effects

Occupational stress affects individuals in all areas, regardless of social status and financial situation. The effects of stress at work are felt also in other aspects of an individual's life.

Severe stress at work leads to emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, personal achievements decrease, frustration, misunderstanding the problems of others and dissatisfaction with work. They tend to be particular problems among people whose occupations require considerable contact and / or responsibilities to other people: nurses, doctors, social workers, therapists, teachers, policemen and guards (Popescu, 2013).

Studies have shown that those who are stressed at work, have less patience when off duty, and their relationships suffer. A high level of stress leads to burnout and depression.

A study on a sample of 11,000 people showed that individuals who experienced physical and psychological demands at work and had little control over their work showed increase risks of emotional fatigue (burnout), complained about their physical and mental health and reported high levels of dissatisfaction at work (Elizabeth Scott, 2014).

Employees who have high levels of occupational stress are more prone to illness.

According to a study conducted by the British Medical Journal it was shown that chronic stress has a direct connection with the development of heart disease and type 2 diabetes. Researchers found that high levels of occupational stress increases the chance of developing metabolic syndrome in individuals (Elizabeth Scott, 2014).

Stress causes changes in the way a person feels, thinks and behaves and can cause changes in psychological functions (Chraif, Aniţei, 2011).

For some people and in some circumstances stress is associated with poor professional performance, psychological and social problems and even bad health.

The effects of stress, as shown in the table below may fall into several categories:

TABEL. 1: SIDE EFFECTS OF OCCUPATIONAL STRESS

Physical / Medical / Physiological	Cardiovascular disease and stroke ulcers Back pain and arthritis migraine Increased blood pressure and heart rate Hormonal diseases (adrenaline)
Psychological	Exhaustion Depression Anxiety Insomnia Dissatisfaction at work
Behavioral	Absences Delays Abuse of drugs, alcohol and tobacco Violence Decisions/poor information processing poor performance Staff turnover

Source: M. Chraif, M: Aniţei, Metoda interviului în psihologia organizaţională şi a resurselor umane, Editura Polirom, 2011, p. 281

Organizational stress can have profound effects on production and motivation to work. Increases in levels of stress are caused by job insecurity and high volume of work that lead to physical and emotional problems. When stress factors are associated with inefficient management, stress related

problems extend throughout the department or in the entire company. The first step that must be done to combat organizational stress is to identify its associated signs (Jill Leviticus, 2014).

Organizational stress causes many health problems (high blood pressure, palpitations, ulcers, headaches, fatigue, sweat, weight changes, diarrhea, dizziness, dry mouth, impotence, muscle pain and back). People affected by stress are always tired, regardless of how much they sleep or how many sleep disturbances they have during the night. A poor emotional health weakens the immune system, and so the body is prone to colds and infections. These health problems lead to absenteeism, or worse, are common causes for work accidents (Jill Leviticus, 2014).

Stress can have an effect on the activity performed by the individual in the workplace. Because of stress, employees can no longer focus on complex situations, may omit important tasks or overlook different stages of certain procedures. Stress causes feelings of negativity, lack of enthusiasm and apathy, which if not properly managed, lead to loss of interest of employees to their jobs.

Supervision done by employees on their own work plays an important role in removing stress. Thus, if employees feel overwhelmed by the workload, it will be very hard for them to work with deadlines and they will have difficulty in prioritizing tasks. If employees have control over their work and how they are conducting it, as a result, the level of stress experienced by them will diminish.

Occupational stress has direct effects on the organization. Thus, employees who experience high levels of stress will prefer to change job or retire. For the organization the loss of experienced employees leads to decreased production and increased costs for recruiting, hiring and training new employees. For the organization it will be difficult to recruit new employees, if the old ones will spread negative advertise and state that working there is a stressful experience (Jill Leviticus, 2014).

Studies of numerous researchers pointed out the link between work stress and indicators related to the way the organization functions. It has been shown that the employees problems regarding stress lead to absenteeism and medical leave (van der Doef şi Maes, 1999).

Therefore, stress implies high costs for the organization. The costs associated with stress are: the costs associated with mental and physical problems caused by stress, including medical and hospital costs and lost work time. Employers pay about 80% of private health insurance premiums and workers compensation include increasingly more clauses for granting benefits to those who have suffered injuries resulting from workplace stress (Popescu, 2013).

Following the studies, it was shown that 60-80% of accidents at the workplace are caused by stress, thus leading to lower profit for the organization because of the costs associated to stress. Based on this

theory, modern organizations focus their efforts on techniques to reduce stress among employees. To achieve this approach, the first step is to estimate the level of stress in the organization.

2.4 Measuring occupational stress

There are three methods for measuring stress at the workplace: questionnaire-based survey, the "imputation" method and the external method.

The most commonly used method is the questionnaire-based survey because of the relatively low cost it implies and the ease with which it can be administered. In this method each study participant is asked to answer certain questions or to express agreement or disagreement about the existence, nature or frequency of stress factors. Based on the answers given, the employee will receive a score on each dimension of the scale, and then be placed in certain categories of occupational stress - compared to various standards (Avram, Cooper; 2008).

The disadvantage of this method is the subjectivity. Thus, employees will underrate or overrate certain stressors based on the physical condition and health which manifests when completing the questionnaire.

The "imputation" method wants to eliminate subjectivity. The method involves determining the average values of each type of stressor for different jobs. The average levels for each occupational stress's dimension are given to all the subjects that have the given jobs. Finally, the indicators of labor's characteristics are introduced in statistical analysis in order to notice if they predict the indicators of health (Avram, Cooper; 2008).

The third method used in measuring stress is the external method. According to this method, the work characteristics are independently estimated of the employees who are exposed to the root causes of stress. The employees are exposed to the root causes of stress by hazard.

Landsbergis claims that the estimation of the stress level can be done, according to this method, by:

- analyzing the company's documents:

- an evaluation of the working conditions, done by experts, without the employee being directly observed;

- an assessment of job's characteristics done by managers or coworkers;

- a workplace observation, done by trained persons.

The disadvantage of this method consists in the fact that it consumes huge amount of time and money.

For a better precision in the determination of stress, it is better to use all of three methods at once.

2.5 Methods for coping with occupational stress

Coping has been defined as the 'person's constantly changing cognitive and behavioural efforts to meet specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person' (Lazarus, 1998). It has been seen as very important to the extent that 'stress itself as a concept pales in significance . . . compared with coping and without giving attention to coping we cannot understand how stress works' (Lazarus, 1998).

Generally, a distinction is made between two ways of coping. *Problem-focused coping* is 'vigilant coping', aimed at problem solving, or doing something to alter the source of the stress to prevent or control it. *Emotion-focused coping* is aimed at reducing or managing the emotional distress associated with the situation (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984; Carver et al., 1989). The problem-focused coping is usually used when something constructive can be done and it is known as active coping, compared with the latter, which is used when stress should be accepted.

Coping with stress in an emotion-focused way means thinking of a stresfull situation in a more positive way. Examples of this include putting stressful circumstances into a broader and wider perspective (Matteson and Ivancevich, 1987), making positive social comparisons with others in worse situations than oneself (Taylor, 1983) and using humour selectively, sensitively and appropriately (Moran and Massam, 1997; Martin, 2001). Also, by using cognitive–behavioural approaches such as stress inoculation, by preparing for possible stressful situations and rehearsing possible responses (Meichenbaum, 1985) or rational emotive therapy, which, for example, can involve avoiding 'awfulizing' and 'catastrophizing' about demanding events and making positive reappraisals (Zastrow,1984). Acceptance is another important aspect of coping. It is seen as a functional coping response in that a person who accepts the reality of a stressful situation will be willing to be engaged in an attempt to resolve it (Carver et al., 1989).

Positive problem-focused coping strategies include planning, suppression of competing activities, restraint and seeking out social support. Planning involves thinking about how we cope with a stressor, coming up with action strategies, thinking about what steps to take and how best to handle the problem. Suppression of competing activities involves putting other competing information and projects aside, to avoid distractions in order to cope with the stressor. Restraint coping involves waiting for an appropriate opportunity, holding oneself back and not acting prematurely (Carver et al., 1989).

Support is one of the most important strategies involved in coping. Several studies have noted that support is an important factor that mediates the demands of stress. Support has been defined as 'the degree to which the environment makes available resources . . . relevant to the demands made upon the system' (Payne, 1980, p. 284) and 'a resource that helps people cope with job stress through supportive relationships with others' (Thompson et al., 1994, p. 36).

Group support of a formal and informal nature is a vital element which organizations should appropriately facilitate. Also, the organization should ensure better opportunities for education and training of staff in order to better handle stressfull situation (Collins, 2007).

Many researchers focus their attention on the best strategies for coping with workplace stress in order to improve the employees' performances.

A successful strategy for preventing stress within the workplace will ensure that the job fits the person, rather than trying to make people fit jobs that they are not well suited to. Some organisations use individuals approaches for reducing stress. These approaches include: training and one-to-one psychology services—clinical, occupational, health or counselling. They should aim to change individual skills and resources and help the individual change their situation (Michie, 2002).

A wide variety of training courses may help in developing active coping techniques—for example, assertiveness, communications skills, time management, problem solving, and effective management. The individual approach should help individuals to develop new skills and confidence which will help them to fight stress. Also, the organisation should be fully implicated in offering support for its employees in coping proccesses. The organisational support can be structural (for example, staffing levels, work schedules, physical environment) or psychological (for example, social support, control over work, participation) (Michie, 2002).

The Scandinavian organizations are famous for creating creating healthy and safe working environments by: creating working conditions which are adapted to people's differing physical and mental aptitudes, giving to the employees the opportunity to participate in the design of his/her own work situation, and in the processes of change and development affecting his/her work, avoiding or limiting the controlled or restricted work, designing the technology, work organisation, and job content so that the employee not to be exposed to physical or mental strains that may lead to illness or accidents, providing working conditions that offer opportunities for personal and vocational development, as well as for self determination and professional responsibility.

Creating a safe system of work requires targeting equipment, materials, the environment and people (for example, ensuring sufficient skills for the tasks). It also requires having monitoring and review

systems to assess the extent to which prevention and control strategies are effective. A culture of openness and understanding, rather than of blame and criticism, is essential. Building this type of culture requires active leadership and role models from the top of the organisation, the development and implementation of a stress policy throughout the organisation, and systems to identify problems early and to review and improve the strategies developed to address them. The policy and its implementation should be negotiated with the relevant trade unions and health and safety committees (Michie, 2002).

Some researchers explored the influence of the workplace stress on bank officers' job satisfaction (Ayupp & Ngouk, 2011), finding that the majority of the respondents have moderate to high stress levels, often related to the fundamental elements of their banking job (KOZAREVIC E., PERIC A., Delic A., 2014).

Beehr, Johnson and Nieva conducted a study on a sample of police officers and their spouses in order to determine the strategies used for coping with job stress.

Different coping techniques used by pollice officers and their spouses showed that those who form a couple may influence each other when facing a stressfull situation and they tend to adopt similar strategies for coping with stress, even though the same strategy could have different effects on police officers and on their spouses. For example, in the families where spouses of police officers use religion as a coping measure, the police officers use religion as well as a method to fight with stress, even though this method has no result in their cases (Beehr, Johnson, Nieva, 1995).

The police officers and their spouses are using four methods to reduce stress: problem-focused coping, emotion-focused coping, rugged individualism, and religiosity. The study showed that three issues in police strains - drinking, divorce, and suicide- might be reduced by emotion-focused coping strategies. On the other hand, rugged individualism seemed to increase the alcohol consumption for police officers who adopt this strategy (BEEHR, JOHNSON and NIEVA, 1995).

Future research should be done to discover the role of social support in relation with other coping strategies. Also, researchers should focus their attention on measuring techniques of coping strategies, in other words, to pay attention to the level of specificity at which coping should be conceptualized and measured.

Another aspect that should be taken into consideration is that employers should be cautious about aggressively pursuing stress reduction strategies. If personal characteristics predispose an individual to distress symptoms, such environmental interventions as job redesign may have limited value in symptom reduction. Present coping measures should be adapted to the features of the job and

specialists responsible with the job reducing techniques should separate the work stress sympthoms from personal life stressors (Nelson and Sutton, 1990).

Leiter concluded that individuals' coping patterns help to predict the burn out and provide a direction for integrating theoretical developments from general stress and coping research into the development of models of burnout. The practical implication of this approach is that individuals efforts of coping with job stressors could be effective only when they are supported by colleagues from thev work group (Leiter, 1991).

The main coping methods used by supervisors and administrators, nurses, teachers and church ministers are: rational, task-oriented behavior, emotional release, distraction, passive rationalization and social support. Although the studied popullation were different, in each population there was also at least one unique category (Dewe, Guest, 1990).

Medical interns in South India are using the following coping techniques for workplace stress: conversations with colleagues and friends/family, working longer hours and through unhealthy eating habits. Other strategies consist in taking annual leave, pursuing hobbies, taking exercise/sport, learning relaxation techniques, drinking alcohol, smoking cigarettes, taking prescribed drugs (Chandramouleeswaran, Edwin, Braganza, 2014).

Next a case study on job stress and coping measures will be presented.

3. THE METHODOLOGY

3.1 Measuring occupational stress in company X

On this stage, the medium level of stress for the employees who are working on a tourism sector will be calculated (estimated). Then the impact of each root cause of stress will be analyzed. The seven stressors took into consideration were: ***The status and the role of the employee within organization***, ***The task and the work rhythm***, ***The relationships at the workplace***, ***The organization's structure and climate, The career, The working schedule***. The company X is an intermediate between the provider of the tourism services and the clients. The service provider is a tourism club, rated at luxury level that offers its members tourism packages at promotional prices, with lodging at 4 or 5-star hotels (and promotions up to 70%). The customers have the opportunity to choose tourist attraction places and packages well suited for the most demanding tourists. Meanwhile, the vacation packages can be personalized based on each customer's preference.

The main activities on this project are back office activities which include: offering information to clients about changes in the flying schedule, changes concerning accommodation, canceling reservations, handling complaints.

Methodology: The data used for estimating the level of stress were collected from the surveys. The survey had ten questions for estimating the level of stress and 31 questions concerning the root causes of stress. Each question has five answering choices depending on the frequency of occurrence of the analyzed state (never = 1, rarely = 2, occasionally = 3, often = 4, constantly = 5), that (total disagreement = 1, partially disagreement = 2, neutral = 3, partially agreement = 4, totally agreement = 5 – representing the degree of approval with the statements concerning the root causes).

Sample: on this project there are 100 employees, 60 % with full-time work contracts and 40 % with part-time work contracts. 90% of them are women, with ages between 20 and 35 years old, with college degrees (bachelor and master degrees) and 10 % cent are men, aged between 19 and 34. For estimating the level of stress and how influent the root causes are in increasing the stress level in the company X it was chosen a sample, composed of 80 respondents, 9% per cent male and the rest female, with ages between 19 and 34, with college degrees.

In order to keep the confidentiality, the respondents were asked not to give their names.

4. THE FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Based on the result of the study made on the 80 respondents, on the project X, the employees register a high level of stress (35 points out of 50). The causes of this level of stress will next be discussed.

TABLE 2: THE SEVEN STRESSORS WHICH CAUSE JOB STRESS

Current no.	Stressors	Value
1.	The statute and the employee's role within organization	4.42
2.	The task and the work's rhythm	2.6
3.	The relationships at the workplace	4
4.	The organization structure and climate	2.4
5.	The design of the workplace	3
6.	The career	4
7.	The working schedule	3.79

Source: Tabel made by author

For the stressors related with *The status and the role of the employee within organization*, *The task and the work rhythm*, *The relationships at the workplace*, *The organization's structure and climate,* the values between 1 and 3 represent the fact that those stressors have a huge impact on the employee's level of stress. So, as one can notice from the Table 2, the stressors related to *The task*

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and the work rhythm represent an important stress source for the employees on project X. Those who respond to the survey are unsatisfied especially of the huge work volume and of the short time allocated for solving each demand. For each received request, each employee must accomplish the time and quality items established in the company's evaluation standards. For each received demand the employee has three minutes to solve it. In many cases, this time could not be respected because of the high level of complexity of the demands received. The employees who do not respect the allocated time, although they solve the demands in a professional manner, they do not gain the monthly performances bonus. As a result, many try to solve the demands on time by working fast. More, the employees think the deadlines are hard to get, because of the urgency of most of the emails (for example, changes in the flying schedule for the flights with arrivals on the day when the demand is received).

The respondents of the survey say they have a reduce control over the way in which their work is structured. The superiors are the ones who control the way in which everyone is working. This aspect has a certain impact on breaks, because the employees could not take their breaks as often as they want and when they want to. If the manager gives them urgent tasks they have to postpone their breaks.

The stressors linked to *The organization structure and climate* are an important source of job stress for the employees on project X, because they are not asked for opinions when changes are to be made on the project or in the organization, and as one knows the changes generate stress. More, the working rhythm is established from outside, and the employees should respect the items mentioned in the standards of evaluation and in order to do that, they have to work fast.

Concerning the stressors related to *The design of the workplace, The career, The working schedule*, the values between three and five indicate that these stressors have a huge influence on raising the level of stress. As one can see from the Table 2, the respondents are worried of losing their jobs, of the fact that the organization is not interested of the professional development of its employees and it does not offer them the possibility of promotion. This is happening due to the fact that many employees have a part-time determined work contract (40 percent of the employees). Because it is a tourism project, the activities on this project are seasonal. For example, during summer the volume of work is huge and the company hires seasonal workers in order to fulfil the deadlines. In October-November, when the customers and supplier's demand drop off, only the employees with permanent contracts are kept, and some of these are advised to change their work contracts into part-time contracts.

Another important source of stress is the one linked with the working schedule. The respondents are not satisfied of the fact that they are working in different shifts during the same week (the working schedule on this project is Monday to Friday 2 shifts: 8-16, 16-24, Sunday, Saturday from 12 to 20), this means that some days they are working in the morning and in another days they are working in the afternoon. The employees who work full time have many 10-hours shifts per month (8 10-hours shifts). The respondents claimed that due to extra hours of work, they are very tired when they arrive home. Because of the huge work volume from summer, the company prefers to ask their employees to work extra hours in order to reach the deadlines instead of hiring new employees. Working extra hours increases fatigue, depressions and affects the body functions of the employees.

On long term, because of overworking, the employees will get sick, will quit work, and this will cost the company much more than hiring extra employees that will help with the huge work volume.

The other stressors taken into consideration have little impact on job stress, as one can see from the Table 2.

4.1 Measures for coping with job stress

In order the measures for reducing job stress to be efficient, the root causes that have a huge influence on job stress, should be taken into consideration. On the other part, the organization should always be concerned of the wellbeing of its employees and the management, together with its employees, should elaborate programmes for reduction job stress.

A firs step in coping with stress is represented by a evaluation of the level of stress and identifying the sources of stress among employees; this aspect could be done with the data collected from the job stress surveys or via interviews with employees. For a more detailed analysis of the employee's job stress level, the top management should be engaged.

The next step, after identifying the stress causes, further measures will be taken in order to reduce the effects of stress. An example to be analysed is the following: on project X, many employees have complained about the working schedule and overtime. Instead of having two working shifts in the same week, it is recommended for every employee to work two weeks in a row on the same shift. Furthermore the ten-hours shifts should be reduced to four times per month and the part-time employees should do overtime in order to reach the target. Working during the weekends should be implemented for all employees (part-time and full-time employees), regardless of their contract type. As a consequence, the employees will be able to respect their resting schedule and lunch breaks, will be less tired, and their productivity will increase.

Another major root cause of stress is the concern of not having a permanent job (it concerns the employees with determined work contract). Due to the economical situation, the companies prefer to hire inexperienced work force, deciding not to invest in their trainings and hiring them for determined period instead of hire experienced and well prepared workforce. With this strategy the top management aims to reduce the cost with the working force, and when the service's demand start to drop off, the companies no longer requires their services. It should be taken into consideration that this strategy is viable only on short term. On a long term, due to the high turnover rates, the companies' image will drop off, and the future potential employees would prefer to work for other companies which invest in their human resources and which offer them possibilities for promotion. Because of that, the costs for finding the suitable candidates for the company will be higher. In conclusion, the company should invest in its work force, by training them in order to gain new skills and competencies, should implement soft skills trainings (business communication, management of change, time management, negotiation skills and stress management).

Employees with limited work contracts, usually don't have their contracts extended. For better results, a percentage of the employees with limited contracts should have their contracts unlimited. In this way, the employees will be motivated to work better in order to keep their jobs on long term.

The employees should be asked for their opinions when changes which affect them are to be made in the company. The success of a new project implementation is based on the engagement of all stakeholders. Being directly implicated, the employees will feel they are important for the company, they feel like their opinions matter and they will be more engaged. On the other hand, their contributions could be innovative and could make everyone's job easier (both employees and top management).

The company should manifest its concern on the employees' well being and should focus its attention on their lifestyles. Due to high work volumes, the lack of breaks, job description (office activities) and the lack of time, the employees who work on X project have a sedentary lifestyle. In order to promote a healthy lifestyle the company should book a floor and a hire a wellness team. On this floor, it will be also a fitness room with all the facilities. The aim of this initiative is offering to all the employees the possibility to be fit and to relax for free. Also for promoting a healthy diet, the machine vendors should replace their unhealthy snacks with fresh fruits and salads, and the refrigerators should contain fresh juices for free.

A budget should be allocated for outdoors activities: once a month team picnics should be offered by the company to its employees. The purpose of this activity is to create a better network and communication between teams and departments.

In order to cope with the complex work rhythm and the lack of autonomy in structuring employee's work, the time allocated for solving a demand should be increased from three minutes to five minutes. In this way, the quality of the service will improve because the employees will have more time to manage a demand. Also, a certain level of independency will help them to better handle with their tasks and time, by saving the time which was needed before to consult with the manager.

Every employee should take a break any time she/he feels to and during these breaks they should be engaged in recreational activities. The company should offer a recreational room, which will reproduces a natural environment: it will have grass, little trees, a pond, comfortable sofas, headphones which offer the employees the possibility to listen to different types of music. The purpose of this room is to help the employees think at something else not on the job.

The employees on the other hand should be interested in fighting with work place stress, because this is on their own benefit. An advise should be that any time they experience stress, they should take a break and do some breathing exercises for clearing up their minds. It is very important that during this exercises the employees should focus on breathing, without thinking on something else. In addition, the employees should make some arms and legs movements and then to write a list with the tasks pending and their urgency. After finishing a task, they should cut it from the list. In this way, a clear evidence of working will help the workers to see the proof of their work.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Stress is part of today's life, but as every one of us is unique in his/her way so is the manner in which we deal with stress. Not all types of stress have negative effects on humans. A difference should be made between negative stress (distress) which implies intense and prolonged solicitation, overload, which bring to an increase of tensions and anxiety, and positive stress (eustress) which stimulate us, give us the capacity of moving forward and help us to accomplish complex tasks in difficult situations.

Many researchers have focused their attention on studying stress and they chose various stress approaches. The most famous researchers are: Hans Selye, Walter Cannon, Scheuch, Cox şi Mackay, Lazarus.

Job stress appears in the situations when the requirements exceed the employee's resources.

According to The European Agency for Health and Safety, the most important root causes of stress at work are: the status and the role of the employee within organization, the task and the work rhythm, the

relationships at the workplace, the organization's structure and climate, the career, the working schedule.

According to the European survey conducted in 31 UE states, the most common root causes of stress are: the worries for losing the job, overtimes and the harassment at the workplace.

Occupational stress affects people everywhere, no matter the job's descriptions. However, the specialists have shown that some jobs are more stressful than others. Generally speaking, the jobs which require a high level of decision-making engagement, sharing information with others, working in bad conditions, doing unstructured work, are more stressful than the jobs which do not require those.

The stress affects both the employees and the company. The employees which are affected by stress have behavioural problems which affect them when relating to other people. Also, stressed employees have health problems. On the other hand, the companies that have stressed employees have poor performances and higher work accident costs which were caused by stress. Thus, many companies focus their attention in finding the suitable measures for coping with job stress.

A first step in coping with stress is measuring it. There are three measures for measuring stress: questionnaire-based survey, the "imputation" method, the external method. For a better estimation of stress level it is recommended that the three methods to be used together.

The research undertaken on the project X, proved that the employees who are working on this project have a high level of stress caused by the huge work volume and the deadlines difficult to reach, the overtime working hours, the working schedule, the lack of control over working rhythm and the concern for losing their job.

For coping with stress, the alternate shifts should be eliminated, the overtime working hours should be done rationally, all the employees should work by rotation in weekends, the employees with limited contracts should have the possibility to work for the company after their contracts expire, the time allocated for handle the requests should increase from three to five minutes.

Also, it was proposed that a fitness room should be allocated, fully equipped in order for the employees to improve their physical and mental condition; the company should also offer them healthy snacks, a recreational room will be designated and once per month a relaxing outdoor team activity should take place.

Meanwhile, the employees should take their own measures for coping with occupational stress.

We do not need to forget that all people, regardless their job, are affected by stress and it depends on us how do we cope it.

Acknowledgements

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