

## **A Study on Coping Strategies for Management of Stress in select IT Companies**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

This century has belonged to the Information Technology Sector. How organizations are able to leverage IT to get advantage in a highly competitive market will be the key to success. Leading the way would be the organizations that are in the IT industry. The IT boom has brought with it, its own set of challenges to organizations. How to put in place systems and process that are in tune with the IT revolution, how to strategize and compete in the IT era? Etc. The study throws light on the wide spread silent problem by name “Stress”, which gave rise to acute dysfunctions and also the source of many diseases, increased divorce rates, and other harassments. The work stress is found in all professions. IT professionals are much stressed because they are highly target driven and highly pressured on results. Athletes experience the strength that comes from eustress right before they play a big game or enter a big competition. Because of eustress, they suddenly receive the strength that is required to perform to the best of the ability. Stress can make a person productive and constructive, when it is identified and well managed.

Presently the Indian information technology industry employs a little more than half million people and provides indirect employment to over a quarter of a million people (NASSCOM). In today’s world, the degree of stress increased owing to urbanization, globalization that results into cut-throat competition. Stress is inescapable part of modern life, work place is becoming a volatile stress factory for most employees and it is rightly called as the Age of anxiety.

Stress is your body’s way of responding to any kind of demand or threat. When you feel threatened, your nervous system responds by releasing a flood of stress hormones, and including adrenaline and cortisol, which rouse the body for emergency action. Your heart pounds faster, muscles tighten, blood pressure rises, breath quickens, and your senses become sharper. These physical changes increase your strength and stamina, speed your reaction time, and enhance your focus.

This is known as the “fight or flight” stress response and is your body’s way of protecting you. When working properly, stress helps you stay focused, energetic, and alert. In emergency situations, stress can save your life—giving you extra strength to defend yourself. Stress can also help you rise to meet challenges. Stress is what keeps you on your toes during a presentation at work, sharpens your concentration.

### **Review of literature**

Kamala Balu, (2002), most stress management programmes focus attention on the individual either assisting employees or help them to cope with job-related stressors. There is more concern in organizations with coping with the consequences of stress rather than eliminating or reducing the actual stressors themselves. Wide range of stress reducing programmes for employees rather than interventions to change the nature of work which would bring a more effective solution for the problem. Employee assistance programmes such as counseling and support services for employees have shown a promising approach of dealing with stress, however their effectiveness is limited. Training or counseling employees to cope with stress are just short-term solutions but have long-term benefits for mental health and well-being.

Shane Schick, (2007), stressed IT professionals who use a balance of problem-focused coping strategies and emotion-focused coping strategies are most successful in dealing with the stress of staying perpetually up-to-date. The study highlights the importance of monitoring the stress that results from the constant demand on IT professionals to update their technical skills because the threat of technical obsolescence may result in a higher rate of absenteeism, work burnout and a desire to change careers. Managers can help by providing IT professionals with concrete resources such as research time, opportunities to attend courses, and physical facilities that facilitate trial and error. IT professionals who deploy different combinations of coping strategies end up with different levels of distress. They fared best by using a combination of problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping.

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Michael R. Frone (2008), the relationship of work stressors, those work over load and job insecurity, to employees alcohol use illicit drug use resulted, support the relation of work stressors to alcohol and illicit drug use before work, during the workday, and after work.

Shane.

Murali Raj, (2009), Depression is usually related to work and stress these people undergo because of the pressure to perform better, compete with other colleagues and meet tight deadlines. Most of their work is target-oriented and if targets are not met, it can lead to anxiety. Peers are not very supportive as they also competing in the same field. Moreover, insecurity about the job may lead to feelings of expression.

Vasudha Venugopal, (2010), an increasing number of IT professionals have been finding it difficult to handle emotional stress, according to experts. An 'occupational hazard,' the stress related to work needs to be addressed without delay, they emphasize. Coping with stress and striving for mental health welfare should be a matter of concern for all and not treated simply as a lifestyle problem of the 'IT phenomenon', says Nithya Chandrasekaran, a consultant physician for many IT companies in the city. Post-recession, employees feel pressured to perform well. Regular occupational problems such as wrist problems due to constant handling of the mouse, slip disc and eye fatigue are common now, but handling stress that arises owing to fear of losing job or to cope with the increasing competition, affects the employee's performance, eventually, taking a major toll on his health, doctors explain. As if to acknowledge the prevalence of high levels of stress among employees, many IT companies have —help hotlines that provide counseling intervention to their employees who face stress or psychological fatigue. Companies are also trying to help employees to combat their stress better. Companies such as Infosys, Tata Consultancy Services, Cognizant and Wipro have regular —stress breaks intended to help the employees strike a healthy balance between work and fun.

#### Meaning and Definition of Stress

Stress is the way human beings react both physically and mentally to changes, events, and situations in their lives. People experience stress in different ways and for different reasons. The reaction is based on your perception of an event or situation. If you view a situation negatively, you will likely feel distressed—overwhelmed, oppressed, or out of control. Distress is the more familiar form of stress. The other form, eustress, results from a “positive” view of an event or situation, which is why it is also called “good stress.”

Stress is a physical, mental and emotional response to a challenging event — not the event itself. Often referred to as the fight-or-flight response, the stress response occurs automatically when you feel threatened. Stress, whether positive or negative, is a normal part of everyone's life. Negative stress, however, diminishes your quality of life.

Stress management comprises a wide range of approaches to help you better deal with stress and adversity. Stress management might include problem-solving, prioritization and time management. Another approach includes enhancing skills to withstand adverse situations by improving emotional flexibility, finding greater meaning in life, increasing the sense of control and cultivating optimism. A third approach is to practice relaxing techniques, such as deep breathing, yoga, meditation, tai chi, exercise and prayer. Improving personal relationships is an important component of stress management.

Stress management can help you lead a more balanced, healthier life. When channeled positively, stress can lead to growth, action and change.

There are at least three different types of stress:

- Routine stress related to the pressures of work, family, and other daily responsibilities
- Stress brought about by a sudden negative change, such as losing a job, divorce, or illness
- Traumatic stress, which happens when you are in danger of being seriously hurt or killed.

Examples include a major accident, war, assault, or a natural disaster. This type of stress can cause post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

**The Design of Tasks:** Heavy workload, infrequent rest breaks, long work hours and shift work; hectic and routine tasks that have little inherent meaning, do not utilize workers' skills, and provide little sense of control.

**Management Style:** Lack of participation by workers in decision-making, poor communication in the organization, lack of family friendly policies.

**Interpersonal Relationships:** Poor social environment and lack of support or help from coworkers and supervisors.

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Work Roles: Conflicting or uncertain job expectations, too much responsibility, too many “hats to wear.”  
Career Concerns: Job insecurity and lack of opportunity for growth, advancement, or promotion; rapid changes for which workers are unprepared.

Environmental Conditions: Unpleasant or dangerous physical conditions such as crowding, noise, air pollution, or ergonomic problems

### **STRATEGIES ON STRESS**

#### **1: Get Moving:**

Physical activity plays a key role in reducing and preventing the effects of stress, but you don't have to be an athlete or spend hours in a gym to experience the benefits. Just about any form of physical activity can help worries relieve stress and burn away anger, tension, and frustration. Exercise releases endorphins that boost your mood and make you feel good, and it can also serve as a valuable distraction to your daily.

While the maximum benefit comes from exercising for 30 minutes or more, you can start small and build up your fitness level gradually. Short, 10-minute bursts of activity that elevate your heart rate and make you break out into a sweat can help to relieve stress and give you more energy and optimism. Even very small activities can add up over the course of a day. The first step is to get yourself up and moving. Here are a few easy ways:

- Put on some music and dance around
- Take your dog for a walk
- Walk or cycle to the grocery store
- Use the stairs at home or work rather than an elevator
- Park your car in the farthest spot in the lot and walk the rest of the way
- Pair up with an exercise partner and encourage each other as you workout
- Play ping-pong or an activity-based video game with your kids

#### **2: Engage socially**

- Help someone else by volunteering
- Have lunch or coffee with a friend
- Ask a loved one to check in with you regularly
- Accompany someone to the movies or a concert
- Call or email an old friend
- Go for a walk with a workout buddy
- Schedule a weekly dinner date
- Meet new people by taking a class or joining a club
- Confide in a clergy member, teacher, or sports coach

#### **3: Avoid Unnecessary Stress**

While stress is an automatic response from your nervous system, some stressors arise at predictable times—your commute to work, a meeting with your boss, or family gatherings, for example. When handling such predictable stressors, you can either change the situation or change your reaction. When deciding which option to choose in any given scenario, it's helpful to think of the four A's: avoid, alter, adapt, or accept.

##### **Avoid the Stressor**

It's not healthy to avoid a stressful situation that needs to be addressed, but you may be surprised by the number of stressors in your life that you can eliminate.

- Learn how to say “no” – Know your limits and stick to them. Whether in your personal or professional life, taking on more than you can handle is a surefire recipe for stress. Distinguish between the “shoulds” and the “musts” and, when possible, say “no” to taking on too much.
- Avoid people who stress you out – If someone consistently causes stress in your life, limit the amount of time you spend with that person, or end the relationship.
- Take control of your environment – If the evening news makes you anxious, turn off the TV. If traffic makes you tense, take a longer but less-traveled route. If going to the market is an unpleasant chore, do your grocery shopping online.

#### **4: Alter the Situation**

If you can't avoid a stressful situation, try to alter it. Often, this involves changing the way you communicate and operate in your daily life.

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- Express your feelings instead of bottling them up. If something or someone is bothering you, be more assertive and communicate your concerns in an open and respectful way. If you've got an exam to study for and your chatty roommate just got home, say up front that you only have five minutes to talk. If you don't voice your feelings, resentment will build and the stress will increase.
  - Be willing to compromise. When you ask someone to change their behavior, be willing to do the same. If you both are willing to bend at least a little, you'll have a good chance of finding a happy middle ground.
  - Manage your time better. Poor time management can cause a lot of stress. But if you plan ahead and make sure you don't overextend yourself, you'll find it easier to stay calm and focused.

#### 5: Adapt to the Stressor

How you think can have a profound effect on your stress levels. Each time you think a negative thought about yourself, your body reacts as if it were in the throes of a tension-filled situation. Regain your sense of control by changing your expectations and attitude to stressful situations.

- Reframe problems. Try to view stressful situations from a more positive perspective. Rather than fuming about a traffic jam, look at it as an opportunity to pause and regroup, listen to your favorite radio station, or enjoy some alone time.
- Look at the big picture. Take perspective of the stressful situation. Ask yourself how important it will be in the long run. Will it matter in a month? A year? Is it really worth getting upset over? If the answer is no, focus your time and energy elsewhere.
- Adjust your standards. Perfectionism is a major source of avoidable stress. Stop setting yourself up for failure by demanding perfection. Set reasonable standards for yourself and others, and learn to be okay with "good enough."

#### 6: Accept the things you can't Change

Many sources of stress are unavoidable. You can't prevent or change stressors, such as the death of a loved one, a serious illness, or a national recession. In such cases, the best way to cope with stress is to accept things as they are. Acceptance may be difficult, but in the long run, it's easier than railing against a situation you can't change.

- Don't try to control the uncontrollable. Many things in life are beyond our control—particularly the behavior of other people. Rather than stressing out over them, focus on the things you can control such as the way you choose to react to problems.
- Look for the upside. When facing major challenges, try to look at them as opportunities for personal growth. If your own poor choices contributed to a stressful situation, reflect on them and learn from your mistakes.
- Learn to forgive. Accept the fact that we live in an imperfect world and that people make mistakes. Let go of anger and resentments. Free yourself from negative energy by forgiving and moving on.

#### 7: Make time for fun and relaxation

Beyond a take-charge approach and a positive attitude, you can reduce stress in your life by nurturing yourself. If you regularly make time for fun and relaxation, you'll be in a better place to handle life's stressors.

#### Develop a "stress relief toolbox"

Come up with a list of healthy ways to relax and recharge. Try to implement one or more of these ideas each day, even if you're feeling good.

- Go for a walk
- Spend time in nature
- Call a good friend
- Play a competitive game of tennis or racquetball
- Write in your journal
- Take a long bath
- Light scented candles
- Savor a warm cup of coffee or tea
- Play with a pet
- Work in your garden
- Get a massage
- Curl up with a good book

- Listen to music
- Watch a comedy

Don't get so caught up in the hustle and bustle of life that you forget to take care of your own needs. Nurturing yourself is a necessity, not a luxury.

#### 8: Adopt a healthy Lifestyle

In addition to regular exercise, there are other healthy lifestyle choices that can increase your resistance to stress.

- Eat a healthy diet. Well-nourished bodies are better prepared to cope with stress, so be mindful of what you eat. Start your day right with breakfast, and keep your energy up and your mind clear with balanced, nutritious meals throughout the day.
- Reduce caffeine and sugar. The temporary "highs" caffeine and sugar provide often end in with a crash in mood and energy. By reducing the amount of coffee, soft drinks, chocolate, and sugar snacks in your diet, you'll feel more relaxed and you'll sleep better.
- Avoid alcohol, cigarettes, and drugs. Self-medicating with alcohol or drugs may provide an easy escape from stress, but the relief is only temporary. Don't avoid or mask the issue at hand; deal with problems head on and with a clear mind.

#### Conclusion

Stress issue has become contemporary, being an occupational hazard in fast pacing IT profession, needs to be addressed without delay. Hence the importance of the study of stress at various levels, among IT employee is growing. At organizational level, well designed coping strategies have become the attention to overcome stress. Stress can make an individual productive and constructive when it is identified and well managed. In times of great stress or adversity, it's always best to keep busy, to plow anger and energy into something positive. Positive attitude and meditation will be helpful for coping the stress. Having broader perspective of life will definitely change the perception of stress. Let us hope that we will be successful in making distress into eu-stress for our healthy lifestyle as well as organizational well being.

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