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Occupational Stress among Team Leaders Working in IT Companies in Bangalore

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Abstract

The research aims to measure occupational stress of team leaders working at IT companies in Bangalore. The study also focuses on assessing the levels of occupational stress on four socio demographic factors i.e. age, gender, marital status and working hours. A sample of 100 team leaders working in three different IT companies were studied using occupational stress index by AP Singh and AK Srivastava. The results showed that 52% of the respondents have low occupational stress and 48% of the respondents have high occupational stress. There is no significant difference between male and female executions with respect to occupational stress. The team leaders who are above the age of 30 years tend to experience higher occupational stress than the team leaders who are under the age of 30 years. Team leaders who are divorced have higher occupational stress than the others .Team leaders who work more than 10 hours per day experience higher occupational stress than team leaders who work less than ten hours.

Keywords: Occupational stress, team leaders, IT sector

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Introduction

Stress, in general, and occupational stress, in particular, is a fact of modern day life that seems to be on the increase. The topic is, therefore, still popular, although it occupies academics' and practitioners' attention for over a half century (Vokic & Bogdanic, 2007). Occupational stress is inevitable in the field of Information Technology which is highly competitive. IT professionals are under pressure to produce often with demanding deadlines, innovative computer applications which enhance the competitive position of the companies (Kaluzniacky, 1999). In addition, the IT professionals have to cope with rapidly and continuously changing technologies and methodologies, a phenomenon likely not evidenced before in history. While technological change impacts on individuals in many professions, this change is even more immediate and direct for the IT professionals. These professions are compelled often to change working languages, equipment, and even entire development paradigms amidst comprehensive re-structuring with its initial ambiguities and amidst ever increasing demands. The change required in skills and in entire mindset is not a one-time occurrence. Change and uncertainty have undoubtedly characterize the working climate for today's IT professionals. Thus, there is considerable reason to believe that the IT professionals today are significantly more at risk of serious burnout (Kaluzniacky. 1999). Craig Brod (1984) points out that "high performance (requirements) with high technology can exercise a dangerous influence on the human personality . . . anyone who is constantly working or playing with computers is at risk (Kaluzniacky, 1999).

The group which is most vulnerable is the middle management segment. They have increasing work load allotted to them from the senior management and have to delegate work to their team members, making sure targets are reached on time, resolving conflicts in case of any differences within the team, and taking care of other human resource issues. Besides, Team leaders are responsible to the senior management as well as accountable for the work accomplished by the team members (Davidson, M. J. et al 1995)

Occupational Stress

Stress, in general, can be defined as the reaction of individuals to demands (stressors) imposed upon them (Erkutlu & Chafra, 2006). It refers to situations where the well-being of individuals is detrimentally affected by their failure to cope with the demands of their environment. Occupational stress, in particular, is the inability to cope with the pressures in a job, because of a poor fit between someone's abilities and his/her work requirements and conditions. It is a mental and physical condition which affects an individual's productivity, effectiveness, personal health and quality of work (Comish & Swindle, 1994).Occupational stress is a term used to define ongoing stress that is related to the workplace. The stress may have to do with the responsibilities associated with the work itself, or caused by conditions that are based in the corporate culture or personality conflicts. As with other forms of tension, occupation stress can eventually affect both physical and emotional well being if not managed effectively. (S Subramanian and M Vinoth Kumar 2009).Physical or psychological disorder associated with an occupational environment and manifested in symptoms such as extreme anxiety, or tension, or cramps, headaches, or digestion problems(S.Subramanian and M.Vinothkumar 2009). Main components of the work-stress process are potential sources of stress (stressors), factors of individual differences (moderators/mediators), and consequences of stress (strain) (Lu et al., 2003). Stressors (job-related and extra-organizational) are objective events, stress is the subjective experience of the event, and strain is the poor response to stress. Accordingly, the nature and effects of stress might be best understood by saying that some environmental variables (stressors), when interpreted by the individual (cognitive interpretation), may lead to stress (Dua, 1994)

Methods

The purpose of this paper is to measure the level of occupational stress of team leaders working in IT companies undertake an assessment based on four socio demographic factors. Occupational stress is measured in terms of positive and negative dimensions or factors such as role ambiguity, role conflict, role overload,

unreasonable group and political pressures, responsibility of persons, under participation, powerlessness, poor peer relations, intrinsic impoverishment, low status, strenuous working conditions and unprofitability.

In this study, the sample was selected on the criteria based on the position in which the participant works in the company. The participants are to be Team Leaders working in IT companies located in Bangalore. A sample of 100 Team Leaders from three IT companies in Bangalore were selected .The Occupational Stress Index (Srivastava, A.K., and Singh, A.P., 1981) was used to measure occupational stress of the team leaders. It consists of 46 items, each to be rated on a five point scale. A structured questionnaire was used to collect the respondent's socio demographic data.

The Mann Whitney U test and Krushkal Wallis test are used to compare the occupational stress scores with the socio demographic variables (age, gender, marital status, working hours). Descriptive statistics like mean and standard deviation are calculated. These tests were conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

Research Findings

Table 1 showing the distribution of respondents under low and high occupational stress.

Occupational Stress	Frequency	Percent
Low	52	52.0
High	48	48.0
Total	100	100.0

It was found that 52% of the respondents have low occupational stress and 48% of the respondents have high occupational stress. There is an almost equal distribution among the respondents having low and high occupational stress.

Table 2. The distribution of respondents under low and high occupational stress on twelve domains of occupational stress

Occupational stress Variables	**Levels of occupational stress**	
	Low	**High**
	No. (%)	
a)Role overload	52(52%)	48(48%)
b)Role ambiguity	52(52%)	48(48%)
c)Role conflict	52(52%)	48(48%)
d)Unreasonable group and political pressures	52(52%)	48(48%)
e)Responsibility for persons	61(61%)	39(39%)
f)Under participation	52(52%)	48(48%)
g) Powerlessness	52(52%)	48(48%)
h)Poor peer relations	50(50%)	50(50%)
i)Intrinsic Impoverishment	50(50%)	50(50%)
j) Low status	52(52%)	48(48%)
k)Strenuous working condition	52(52%)	48(48%)
l) Unprofitability	52(52%)	48(48%)

The study highlighted that 52% of the respondents have scored low on the occupational stress categories role overload, role ambiguity, role conflict, unreasonable group and political pressures, under participation powerlessness, low status, strenuous working conditions, unprofitability. It was found that 48% of the respondents scored high on the occupational stress categories like role overload, role ambiguity, role conflict, unreasonable group and political pressures, under participation powerlessness, low status, strenuous working conditions, unprofitability. There is an equal distribution of respondents (50%) under low and high occupational stress in occupational stress categories poor peer relations and intrinsic impoverishment. According to the study 61% of the respondents scored high and 39% scored low on the occupational stress category responsibility of persons.

Table 3. Comparison of occupational stress with the socio demographic variables

Variables		N	Occupational stress		P value
			Mean	Std deviation	
a)Gender	Male	47	149.68	60.732	.411
	Female	53	130.64	61.382	
b) Age	<30	68	111.40	54.016	<0.001
	>30	32	199.50	18.159	
c) Marital status	Unmarried	4	89.75	61.198	.004
	Married	90	137.28	66.257	
	Divorced	4	210.25	2.500	
	Widowed	2	202.00	.000	
d)Average daily hours of work	<10	52	81.87	11.862	<0.001
	>10	48	202.13	11.721	

The p value indicates that there is no significant difference between men and women with respect to occupational stress. The mean age has been calculated as 30 years. The team leaders who are above 30 years experience higher occupational stress than the team leaders who are under 30 years. Team leaders who are divorced have higher occupational stress than the others .Team leaders who work more than ten hours per day experience higher occupational stress than team leaders who work less than 10hours.

Discussion

Occupational Stress

In the study 48% of the team leaders experience high occupational stress, it may have to do with responsibilities associated with work itself, or caused by conditions that are based in the corporate culture or personality conflicts. Team leaders are in charge of a team and are accountable for the team members who have to complete projects and achieve targets on time. They work under tight schedules so they undergo occupational stress. Of the team 48% leaders perceive excessive work load, insufficient employees and resources, staff inconsistency, lack of time to care for personal

problems and job dissatisfaction (Subramanian & Vinothkumar, 2009). Another 52% of team leaders may perceive that they are in control of a situation the probability is that he/ she will be less likely to perceive the situation as threatening or stress inducing (Ivancevich & Matteson 1980). Also 48% of the team leaders in the study experienced high role ambiguity where as 52% may experience low role ambiguity. The team leaders with high role ambiguity characterize their work as vague and feel that there is insufficient information related to job role, poor planning of job, vague expectations from colleague and supervisors. On the other hand team leaders with low role ambiguity may perceive that the objectives of their work-role are quite clear and are adequately planned (Subramanian & Vinothkumar 2009). Of the 48% team leaders experience contradictory instructions from senior executives, interference over working conditions, vague instructions and insufficient facilities for new assignments. While 52% of the team leaders have more role clarity and use task oriented coping behaviours (Hurrell and Murphy 1992).

Of the 48% team leaders experience high group and political pressures as they always feel that powerful others- managers, senior executives and colleagues have an influence over a desired outcome and are constantly trying align with them. While 52% connects their own efforts and abilities with the desired outcome so the burden of yielding to group or political pressures is less and therefore they experience less political and group pressures. Similar findings were observed by (Weiner 1970). Majority of the team leaders (61%) in the study have high confidence in their efficiency and also view their team members as having the capability to accomplish their job efficiently so they do not need to micromanage their team members while other team leaders may not have confidence that their team will accomplish tasks as desired so that they may go overboard and take responsibility of the work of their team members (Subramanian & Vinothkumar 2009). Of the team leaders, 48% feel that not much importance is given to their ideas and the efforts they put in. So they lack the enthusiasm to participate and contribute ideas. While 52% have confidence that suggestions regarding their work will be taken into account as they believe that it has a direct impact over the outcome. So they

participation is higher and generate ideas of the existing practices or working systems (Watson, Pennebaker & Folger 2001).

Of the team leaders 48% believe that they do not have the power to influence decisions at work place, where as 52% have a healthy attitude towards their work have confidence that they can influence important decisions at work. Of the team leaders 50% perceive non cooperation by colleagues to solve administrative and industrial problems, and believe that colleagues attempt to defame and malign them as unsuccessful. On the other hand, the other half (50%) seek the support of their peers to increase the efficiency of their team so they have good relationships with their peers. When support from peers is work related it buffers the effects of job stress (Cumins, 1989). Of the team leaders 50% believe that their job does not provide opportunities to utilize their talent and abilities fully, this implies that they blame their job for under performance where as the other half(50%) make full use of the existing opportunities and perform well by (Spector, 1988).

Of the team leaders 52% in the study believe that the nature of their job does not enhance their social status and due significance is not given by higher management to their positions and work but 48% believe that they have higher self esteem and demonstrate job satisfaction and higher performance and so they experience high status. Similar findings were observed by (Kasl, 1989). Of the team leaders 48% perceive the circumstances in which work has to be done as risky and complicated and they are threatened by stressors while 52% are challenged by stressors (Vitalino et al, 1987).48% of the team leaders perceive that they have low remuneration in comparison to their work. This is because they are dissatisfied with their job and therefore all factors associated with their job. While 52% of them have a healthy work attitude and this reflects in their performance so they are remunerated accordingly. (Subramanian & Vinothkumar, 2009).

Occupational Stress and Socio-Demographic Factors

The team leaders, who are above 30 years, tend to experience higher occupational stress than the team leaders who are under 30 years. Usually in Indian culture, marriage takes place between 21-

30 years and couples start a family after 30. This is a phase of life when their career assumes highest priority and employees are seriously involved with their jobs, as they have a family to take care of. Both personal as well as career goals need to be accomplished simultaneously. All this could result in high stress (Sharpely et al.,1996)

Team leaders who work more than 10 hours per day experience higher occupational stress than team leaders who work less than 10 hours. In IT companies the nature of work does not allow an eight hour schedule because of target oriented tasks and increased competition from other companies. The team leaders are accountable to the customers and therefore they are expected to adapt themselves to uncertainties. Long hours of work under high pressure leads to occupational stress (Lu, Kao, Cooper, & Spector, 2000).

It can be seen that there is no significant difference between men and women with regard to occupational stress. Both genders are assigned similar kinds of work. So there is no significant difference in the nature of work assigned to them. Hence both experience similar types of occupational stress (Sharpely, et al.,1996).

Team leaders who are divorced have higher occupational stress than the others. When a working person is divorced either a man or a women they have to take up the responsibility of home and work and it gets more difficult when they occupy higher positions like being a team leader. Single parenting is an additional burden. (Luecken, Suarez, Kuhn, & Barefoot, 2000).

Implications

Organizations and their employees should become more aware of the degree to which stress is an unnecessary cost, and a cost which they must seek to eliminate if their organizations are to survive and grow. This awareness must start at top management level where the estimated cost of stress is sufficient to generate organizational commitment to subsequent action (McHugh, 1993, 31). Training and employee assistance programs dealing with stress should be easily available. Various workshops, seminars and conferences could help increase employees' awareness of the costs associated

with stress, which are aimed to teach them how to cope with stressful situations and states.

Conclusion

Demands on employees to keep up with the ever-quickening pace of change and push levels of productivity besides accuracy ever higher, is bound to stress some of them to the breaking point (Johnson & Indvik, 1996, 26). Unfortunately, at present it still seems that few organisations perceive a direct relationship between employee stress and organizational performance outcomes. Also many organizations fail to recognize that one way of achieving bigger profits is through healthier people. A better understanding of the demographic and work factors that lead to occupational stress should subsequently help managers understand a greater proportion of the variance of employees' satisfaction, performance and turnover, and help them better deal with it (Parker & DeCotiis, 1983)

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