

The Impact of Work Related Stress on Employees' Satisfaction

Irina Leca

Bucharest University of Economic Studies

kristine_leca@yahoo.com

Carmen A. Vranceanu

Bucharest University of Economic Studies

carmenavranceanu@yahoo.com

The aim of the present study is to identify the impact of work related stress events over employees' job satisfaction. The article includes work with primary data collection based on a JSS (Job Satisfaction Survey) questionnaire survey applied in a multinational organization in Romania. The findings of this study may help to stimulate further empirical research on the relationship between managers and subordinates in order to encourage and motivate a career commitment and career satisfaction.

Key words: Organisational culture, Leadership, Work related stress, Job satisfaction

JEL classification: M12, M14, M59

1. Introduction

Globally, stress has become a challenging issue that organizations have to deal so that employee's satisfaction and efficiency to not be affected. Different professional bodies such as the Occupational Safety and Health Agency (OSHA), the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), the International Labor Office (ILO), the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) and the National Health System (NHS), media, trade unions and a growing number of researchers are of the view that occupational stress has a negative impact on employees' job satisfaction and their overall performance affecting the functioning of the entire organization. According to the Health and Safety Executive, in 2014 the total number of working days lost due to stress, depression or anxiety was 11.3 million in 2013/14, an average of 23 days per case of stress, depression or anxiety. More than 40 million European workers report that they are affected by stress at work (EU-OSHA, 2002) and the situation is likely to worsen.

Causes of stress are called stressors and can be represented by several of factors such as: conflict and family demand (Shellenbarger, 1999), workplace conflict (Paul, 2002), role conflict and ambiguity (Addae et al., 2008), workload (Shah et al., 2011), overwork (Anderson & Pulich, 2001), career development barriers (Hellrigel, 2004), managerial bullying, harassment and organizational structure/climate (Raynor & Hoel, 1997; Murphy, 1995; Mayhew & Chappell, 2003) or even by the characteristics of the workers themselves through behavioral patterns like anger, hostility, impatience, aggression etc. (Obiora, 2007).

Individual who works in such a toxic environment characterized by "relentless demands, extreme pressure, and brutal ruthlessness" (Macklem, 2005) have been shown to contribute to health related problems (MacDonald, 2003) or even lead to death (Wilson, 2004).

Living in these modern times named by Coleman (1976) the age of anxiety and stress, stress not only seriously undermines the quality of our life, but the life of the organizations, family and colleagues and indeed the wider community. Link between work related stress and job satisfaction have been presented by many specialists like Beehr and Bhaget (1985), Gherman (1981), Hart & Cooper (2001) and Hart Field (1990). Common sense and scientific research suggest that happy and engaged employees are more productive comparing with the ones lacking energy or other resources (Demerouti et al., 2014). Modern organizations are an important source of stress and generally employees' absence or runaway from employment at the workplaces that are considered to be stressful (Salazar & Beaton, 2000). According to Riggio (2003) range of factors such as unresolved interpersonal conflicts, lack of clearly defined work tasks and responsibilities, extreme over work, lack of recognition of good performances by the organization may lead to job burnout – which is the opposite of job satisfaction. That is why managers play an essential role in identifying problematic areas and have a duty to create optimal working environments.

2. Conceptual explanations

2.1 Stress

The term “stress” does not seem to have a single agreed definition (Kahn & Boysiere, 1992), however recently its use has become increasingly widespread in the context of everyday working life. Accordingly, there are many definition of the concept since stress has been a topic of interest to researchers and practitioners since the Second World War (Newton, 1995). In the 1970’s role stress gathered interest, with 200 articles being written on the topic (Jackson & Shuler, 1985). According to ILO (1986) it is recognized world-wide as a major challenge to individual mental and physical health, and organizational health.

W. B. Canon, an American physiologist, introduce the expression "fight or flight" for describing the reaction one has when meeting a stressor (Avram, Cooper, 2008). Hans Seyle, a pioneer in stress research and business management, defined stress as “a psychological reaction to certain threatening environmental events” (Selye, 1987, 1993). Later theories of stress emphasized the interaction between a person and their environment (Cox, 1978; Cox & Mackay, 1981; Cooper et al., 1988; Riggio, 2003). R. Lazarus (1993), an eminent representative of the latter approach, has added to this by suggesting that an individual’s stress reaction depends on how the person interprets or appraises the significance of harmful or challenging events. As we mentioned, stress is not necessarily bad; it also has a positive value (Robbins & Sanghi, 2006). Rubina et al. (2008) contributed the same “Stress is not always negative or harmful and indeed, the absence of stress is death”. At the same time many researchers have proved that in small doses stress can be an important factor in improving productivity within an organization (Spielberger, 1980; Lazarus and Folkman, 1984; Obiora, 2007).

For making a difference between the stress that stimulate us and improves performance and the stress that demotivates, drains our energy and decreases performance, Seyle introduced the terms eustress (good stress or arousal stress) and distress (bad stress). If stress is viewed on a continuum from good 'eustress' to bad 'distress' what a person experiences as eustress, another might experience as mild or severe distress. In other words, as Merleau-Ponty puts it, we are ‘condemned to meaning’ (Stolz, 2014, pag. 84), hence stress seems to be a production of the mind, a response to people’s perception of reality rather than to reality itself (Lazerus and Folkman, 1984).

“Stress is also related to poor job performance” as suggested by Cohen’s (1980) which means that stress represent as well a capital factor in ensuring the job workers satisfaction or not within the organization. The causes and consequences of work related stress are various and the Japanese have officially recognized as Karoschi, translated by death cause by stress due to overload.

Stress has been associated with decision to retire and worst with depression and anxiety disorders leading to alcoholism and drug abuse. Based on this, undesirable cost in terms of worker’ health compensation, increase absenteeism, increase number of interpersonal conflicts, lower performance and high rate of employee turnover may likely occur in place of work if it is not well manage by the organization.

2.2. Work related stress and Job satisfaction

Today we are spending most of our time and efforts at work and to be happy in work life will reflect on your organization, family, friends and social environment. Work stress is the most commonly studied form of stress and it is the stress that occurs in the workplace. Work stress is by no means a new research topic, being regarded as an occupational hazard since the mid-1950s (Kahn et al., 1964). Although occupational stress does not seem to have a single agreed definition, the concept is often explained from a demand-perception-response perspective (Bartlett, 1998). The Health and Safety Executive (2001) describes stress as the reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed on them, which arises due to their worries of inability to manage. In the same light Palmer et al. (2003) suggests that stress occurs when one’s perceived pressure exceeds one’s perceived ability to cope. Stress at work is acknowledged as affecting a growing range of occupations and it was concluded that some jobs are more stressful than the others, such as doctors, bankers, nurses, police officers, academicians etc. (Krakowski, 1982; Mohler, 1983; Riggio, 2003).

Pflanz & Ogle (2006) and Pawar & Rathod (2007) highlight the impact that occupational stress has on employee in term of reduce productivity, increase mistakes and accidents at work, encourage absenteeism, lower morale, increase conflict with others and cause poor life satisfaction and well - being. High levels of work stress are associated with low levels of job satisfaction (K. Chandraiah, S.C. Agrawal, P. Marimuthu & N. Manoharan, 2003).

Job satisfaction has been the most frequently investigated variable in organizational behavior (Spector, 1997). The concept of the job satisfaction involves feelings and attitudes towards specific facets of the job. These feelings can be positive or negative based on a person's perception and evaluation of his/her job and work context (Locke, 1976). It is widely accepted that positive attitudes of employees towards the whole business environment as a result their experiences of work environment are called job satisfaction. The concept has a direct impact on worker's motivation and activity as stated by Hirszowicz (1981) and Al-Hussami (2008) who affirm that satisfied workers tend to be more productive, effective and committed to their job than the one who aren't satisfied with their job. The feelings and believes of an individual can contribute as describes by Weiss (2002) to an attitude formed toward one's job.

Factors such as company policies referring to staff leave, salary scale and benefits, the perceived fairness of the promotion system, worker's perception of work climate, lack of communication and feedback from other departments, language barriers, managerial style etc can influence a worker level of job satisfaction. Factors contributing to high levels of employee satisfaction have been identified as: supportive colleagues, supportive working conditions, mentally challenging work and equitable rewards (Locke, 1983).

It was concluded that work related stress impact more negatively than positively on the worker's job satisfaction and "leads to poor health as it is believed that one-half of all physical illness is stress related" Riggio (2003). Acting as a silent killer or an invisible disease worker stress has been responsible for 80% of all modern diseases, according to National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH).

In the context of globalization new challenges are becoming increasingly evident that national cultural norms and values have significant influences on employee attitudes and job satisfaction. The most commonly cited cross cultural work on employee attitude is that of Hofstede (1991). According to him there are four major cross-cultural dimensions and the countries systematically varied along those dimensions: individualism – collectivism, masculinity – femininity, uncertainty avoidance, power distance. For example the Romania was found to be high on collectivism, high on power distance and high on uncertainty avoidance. Giving a message to the multinational companies he concluded that the workplace can change people's values to a limit extend and it is unwise to assume that an organizational culture that was successful in one cultural context will be equally successful in a different cultural context.

3. Method

3.1 Sample

The respondents which participated in the survey are all engaged directly as an employee of two multinational companies in Romania. For the confidentiality reasons the name of the organizations were not revealed. Data collection process started on 5th January 2015 and was completed on 30th January 2015. Respondents were informed about the objective of this study and data confidentiality, as well. The survey was applied on a sample of 129 employees, men and women, with ages between 20 and 45 years old (63 from a company and 66 from another). From the sample 11 employees refused to answer the questionnaire and 8 did not answer at all questions. After the exclusion of the 8 respondents with missing answers, the final data set consisted of 110 respondents (53 from the first company and 57 from the other).

3.2 Measuring Job Satisfaction

The respondents were requested to complete the Job Satisfaction Survey developed by Paul E. Spector (JSS; Spector, 1985), a questionnaire available for researchers free of charge for use for non-commercial purposes (Spector, 1997). JSS is a 36 items questionnaire used to evaluate nine dimensions of job satisfaction, including pay, promotion, supervision, fringe benefits, contingent rewards, operating conditions, coworkers, nature of work and communication, to overall satisfaction. The choice for the use of a 6-point scale was made because the items measured opinions and not actual behaviors.

Some of the items are stated in a positive and some in a negative direction. Positively directed items indicate job satisfaction and negatively directed items indicate job dissatisfaction. Negatively worded items must be reversed: score 6 is changed to 1, 5 to 2, etc. (Spector, 1985; Spector, 1997).

Given the JSS uses 6-point agree-disagree response choices, we can assume that agreement with positively-worded items and disagreement with negatively-worded items would represent satisfaction, whereas disagreement with positive-worded items and agreement with negative-worded items represents dissatisfaction. For the 4-item subscales, as well as the 36-item total score, this means that scores with a mean item response (after reverse scoring the negatively-worded items) of 4 or more represents satisfaction, whereas mean responses of 3 or less represents dissatisfaction. Mean scores between 3 and 4 are ambivalence. Translated into the summed scores, for the 4-item subscales with a range from 4 to 24, scores of 4 to 12 are dissatisfied, 16 to 24 are satisfied, and between 12 and 16 are ambivalent. For the 36-item total where possible scores range from 36 to 216, the ranges are 36 to 108 for dissatisfaction, 144 to 216 for satisfaction, and between 108 and 144 for ambivalent.

3.3 Measuring Stress and identifying Stress Factors

The respondents were also asked to answer at two questions, besides the ones from the Job Satisfaction Survey. The first one is: “I am stressed at work”, with 5 point Likert-type responses (from “Strongly Agree” = 2 to “Strongly Disagree” = -2) and the second one requested the respondents to give a grade from 1 to 9 to the subscales from the Job Satisfaction Survey (Pay, Promotion, Supervision, Fringe Benefits, Contingent rewards, Operating conditions, Coworkers, Nature of work, Communication), where 1 = not stressful at all or least stressful factor and 9 = very stressful or the most stressful factor.

3.4. Results

The results indicated that in both companies the employees are neither dissatisfied, nor satisfied regarding their job and work place (Table 1). Regarding subscales results, in both companies the employees are dissatisfied regarding the payment (with the mean scores of 11,404 and 10,547 from a total of 24). Also in both companies the employees are satisfied regarding supervision, coworkers, nature of work, and communication. In what concerns the subscales promotion, fringe benefits and contingent rewards the respondents are ambivalent. Between the analyzed companies only one difference is perceived at the subscale satisfaction level and it is referring to operating condition. In the first company the employees are neither dissatisfied, nor satisfied about the operating condition, while in the second company the respondents are dissatisfied when it comes to this subscale.

Looking at the scores for each item in each subscale (Table 2) we noticed slightly differences between the companies. For example in subscale “pay” at item 19, which is referring to the employees considering that they are appreciated by the company when they think about the salary they receive. In the first company the respondents are ambivalent regarding this aspect, while in the second company the respondents showed dissatisfaction when they answered to this question.

Subscale	Item numbers	Scores		Interpretation	
		Company 1	Company 2	Company 1	Company 2
Pay	1, 10, 19, 28	11.404	10.547	Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied
Promotion	2, 11, 20, 33	13.667	12.377	Ambivalent	Ambivalent
Supervision	3, 12, 21, 30	17.965	17.981	Satisfied	Satisfied
Fringe Benefits	4, 13, 22, 29	14.386	13.717	Ambivalent	Ambivalent
Contingent rewards	5, 14, 23, 32	14.596	14.075	Ambivalent	Ambivalent
Operating conditions	6, 15, 24, 31	14.737	11.623	Ambivalent	Dissatisfied
Coworkers	7, 16, 25, 34	16.912	17.887	Satisfied	Satisfied
Nature of work	8, 17, 27, 35	17.632	17.981	Satisfied	Satisfied
Communication	9, 18, 26, 36	16.368	16.302	Satisfied	Satisfied
Total satisfaction	All 36 items	137.667	132.491	Ambivalent	Ambivalent

Table 1. Subscales and total satisfaction scores

Also, in subscale promotion at item 33 (“I am satisfied about my promotion chances”), in the first company the employees showed dissatisfaction, while in the second one the respondents showed

ambivalence.

Moving forward to subscale “supervision”, we cannot identify important differences in terms of interpretation of the scores. In both companies, the respondents like their superior and consider that he is qualified and responsible for his role. However the respondents from both companies are ambivalent when it comes to being treated unfairly by the superior or when it comes to the superior’s interest in employees. At subscale “fringe benefits”, the respondents from both companies are ambivalent for all items. This means that the respondents are neither satisfied, nor dissatisfied about the fringe benefits that exist in their companies, compared to the ones existing in other companies. Also they are ambivalent when it comes to considering the fringe benefits package just.

Looking at subscale “contingent rewards”, it can be noticed that in both companies the respondents are satisfied about being appreciated when they do well a task (Item 5). An important difference can be noticed at the scores from item 32 between the two companies. This item refers to the fact that the employees are feeling that they do not receive enough rewards compared to the work provided. In the first company the medium score for this item is 4.019, which is equivalent to Satisfied, but is satisfied to a negative question. Therefore it can be stated that the employees from the first company are unsatisfied with the balance performed work – reward. Looking at the medium score for this item in the second company (3.509), it can be stated that the employees are ambivalent regarding this aspect. Some are satisfied, some are unsatisfied with the balance between work and reward.

The most notable differences between scores are encountered at items from subscale “operating conditions” (Table 2). At item 6, “Many of the rules and procedures we must follow are making our work difficult”, in the first company the medium score is 4.264, which means that the employees are unsatisfied about the rules and procedures, while in the second company the respondents are neither dissatisfied nor satisfied regarding this aspect.

Subscales	Items	Scores	
		Company 1	Company 2
Pay	Item 1	3.943	3.316
	Item 10	5.415	4.807
	Item 19	3.981	4.053
	Item 28	2.000	2.947
Promotion	Item 2	3.717	3.158
	Item 11	3.547	3.789
	Item 20	2.679	2.860
	Item 33	2.868	3.175
Supervision	Item 3	4.604	4.754
	Item 12	2.717	2.211
	Item 21	2.585	2.754
	Item 30	4.679	4.175
Fringe benefits	Item 4	3.472	3.316
	Item 13	3.415	3.474
	Item 22	3.660	3.737
	Item 29	3.887	3.509
Contingent rewards	Item 5	4.094	4.070
	Item 14	3.019	3.281
	Item 23	3.981	3.689
	Item 32	4.019	3.509
Operating conditions	Item 6	4.264	3.649
	Item 15	3.774	3.456
	Item 24	4.302	2.825
	Item 31	4.585	3.246
Coworkers	Item 7	4.981	4.632
	Item 16	3.623	3.526
	Item 25	4.981	4.649
	Item 34	2.453	2.842
Nature of work	Item 8	3.358	3.281
	Item 17	4.811	4.877
	Item 27	4.755	4.439
	Item 35	4.774	4.596
Communication	Item 9	4.132	3.860
	Item 18	2.925	2.351
	Item 26	3.094	3.175
	Item 36	2.811	2.965

Table 2: Scores by subscales and items

In what concerns the efforts in doing their work well, in both companies the respondents consider that sometimes their efforts are blocked. Therefore they are ambivalent regarding this aspect. At item 24 (“I have too much to do at work.”), in the first company the medium score is 4.302, which means that the employees are unsatisfied with the workload. In the second company the medium score is 2.825, which means that the respondents are ambivalent (neither dissatisfied, nor satisfied).

Looking in table 2 at the last three subscales it can be noticed that between the scores at each item there are slightly differences which are not influencing significantly the interpretation of the scores. Only at Item 9 (“Communication within the organization seems good”), in the first company the respondents are satisfied, while in the second one the respondents are ambivalent. Also it has to be mentioned that, even though the respondents from both companies are satisfied at the level of subscale “coworkers”, they are ambivalent when it comes to Item 16 (“I believe I must work harder because of the incompetence of the people I work with”) and Item 34 (“There are too many quarrels and conflicts at work”).

Looking in figure 2 it can be stated that in both companies the respondents think that the less stressful factor at work is represented by the fringe benefits with an average grade of 1.6 in the first multinational and 1.8 in the second, where 1 means not stressful at all or least stressful. From the same table

it can be noticed that there are some differences between the two companies regarding the most stressful factors. The most stressful factor in the first company with an average grade of 7.3 is represented by the subscale “supervision”, while in the second company it is represented by subscale “operating conditions”.

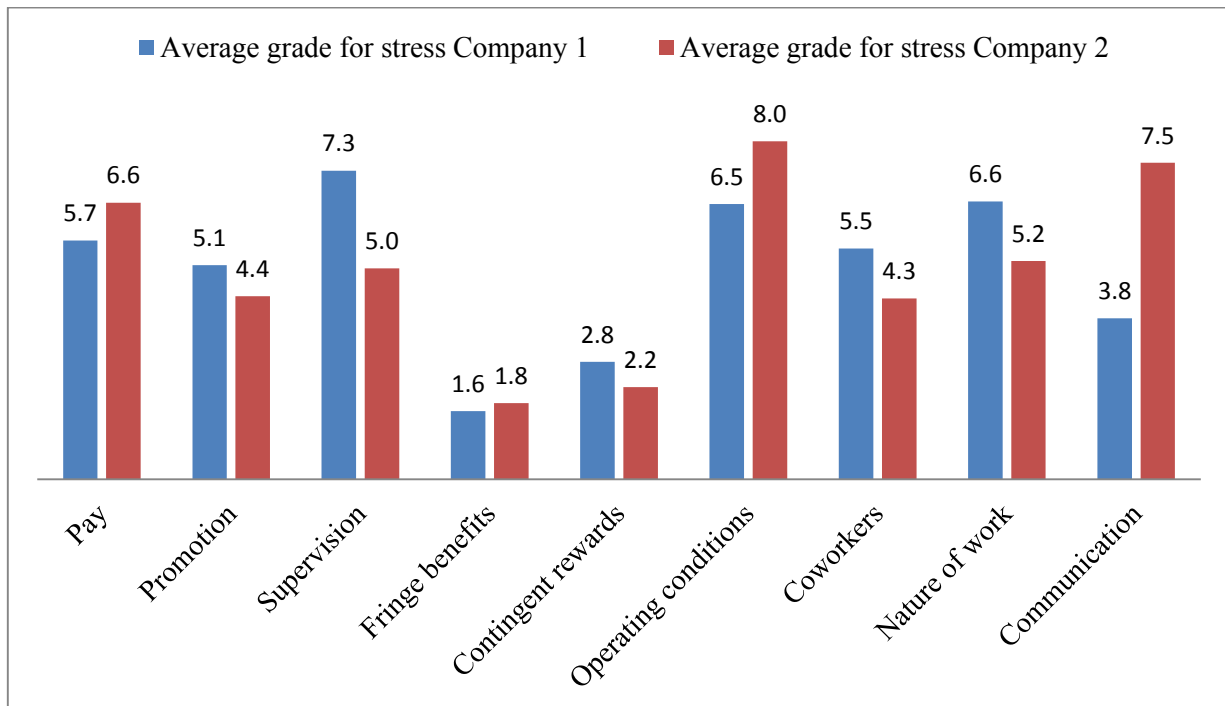


Figure 2: Stress average grades for each subscale

Also it can be noticed that in the first company the second most stressful factor, with an average grade of 6.6, is represented by the subscale “nature of work”. In the other company the second place in the top of most stressful factors is represented by the subscale “communication”, with an average grade of 7.5. In the same top the third place is held by subscale “operating conditions” in the first company and by subscale “pay” in the second one.

4. Discussion and recommendations

Correlating the stress results with the satisfaction ones it can be noticed that in the first company the respondents are neither dissatisfied, nor satisfied regarding their job and they neither disagree, nor agree with the fact that they are stressed at work. In the second company the respondents are also ambivalent regarding satisfaction, but they agree with the fact that they are stressed at work. It has to be mentioned the fact that in the first company the most stressful factor is considered the subscale “supervision”. If we look at the satisfaction values of this subscale we can notice that overall the respondents are satisfied regarding supervision, but they are ambivalent when it comes to being treated unfairly by the superior or when it comes to the superior’s interest in employees. This ambivalence shows that some employees are unsatisfied regarding their superior and this can be a stress factor for them.

Looking at the second company the most stressful factor is considered the subscale “operating conditions”. If we look at the satisfaction values for this subscale we can notice that the respondents are unsatisfied about the operating conditions, and looking at the values of each item for this subscale, we can state that the employees are unsatisfied with the workload, and this can be considered a stress factor. Also some of the employees are unsatisfied with the rules and the procedures, which can also be considered a stress factors.

The authors recommend strongly that tension and stress should be consider a serious issue of concern that need to be manage correctly by the organizations in order to increase employees’ job satisfaction. Research findings suggested several factors which can cause tension in their workplace, such as: nature of work, communication, operating conditions, payment, workload, promotion chances and supervision.

From data analysis we derived the impression that the work climate was directly linked to the

characteristic of the superiors (supervisors, managers), so we recommend an open door policy and use of participative management style which will foster communication, increase employee's motivation and decrease employee's vulnerability to burnout.

Participants perceived inequity exist, conversely they may choose to work harder or to work less or even to quit their job to reduce the inequity. That is why we believe that managers should create an environment that helps employees to motivate themselves and use equity theory as a basis for this.

A common theme surfacing during data analysis was workload. Participants perceived the stress of having to deal with workload while facing demands for greater efficiency and productivity. They also noted that dissatisfaction was strongly linked to the rules and procedure; most of them felt that these are making their work difficult, so changes were silently recommended.

In conclusion, the findings of this study may help to stimulate further empirical research on the relationship between managers and subordinates in order to encourage and motivate a career commitment and career satisfaction.

5. Limitation

Several limitation of the present study should be noted. Firstly, the study should be conducted on a bigger sample and secondly, the present study did not collect informations regarding gender, family structure and education level. Researchers demonstrated that uses of demographical variables are related to job satisfaction. Furthermore to analyze the impact of stress on employee's job satisfaction, factors related to work-family conflict should be considered in future research.

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