Occupational Stress: A Comprehensive General Review

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Abstract
Modern society and the corporate world have become highly competition oriented and everyone is experiencing stress. It is attacking the best and brightest from all walks of life. As Hans Selye says that, “stress is the force, pressure, or strain exerted on a material, object or person which resists these forces and attempts to maintain its original state”. It is the strain within the person due to the pressure, uncontrollable situation extra workload, psychological barriers, emotional factors and many other reasons. People generally come under pressure when they are not able to or are inefficient to cope with the situation. Thus, stress is situation oriented and is more likely in some people than others. It was found that women are more likely to experience psychological stress whereas men experience physical strain. Consequences of stress may be in the areas of Psychology (depression, anxiety, anger, moodiness, isolation, and irritability), Physiology (low energy, headache, insomnia, nausea, constipation, aches or pains) and Behaviour (being demotivated, aggressive, lost, and tearful). Stress is nothing but the reaction of human body, both physical and mental, towards changes, situations and events in their lives. These reactions of human body are the result of attitude and perception which they carry. If a person has a negative vision to a situation, he or she will feel distress i.e. overwhelmed or out of control. On the other hand, if a person has positive vision, he or she will experience Eustress (good stress). Hence, stress is both positive and negative for individuals. So, for any organization, it is important to maintain a healthy environmental culture also known as corporate culture. Another important factor that can control stress is emotional intelligence. It is the ability of the individual to think logically and have a balanced emotional maturity that can influence one’s own as well as other’s emotions too.

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Introduction
Hans Selye first introduced the concept of stress in the life sciences in nineteenth century. We all undergo the feeling of being over-burdened or pressurized whenever we have lots of stuff to do, have a number of things in mind, there are many responsibilities on our shoulders, other people expect or demand unrealistically from us or when situation is not in our control. Stress
is associated with impaired individual functioning in the workplace (Smith, 2000) and a major impediment to organizational success (Noblet, 2003). More recent estimates suggest that around 91.5 million working days are lost each year through stress-related illness (Smith, 2000). Negative effects include reduced efficiency, decreased capacity to perform, dampened initiative and reduced interest in working, increased rigidity of thought, lack of concern for the organisation and colleagues, and a loss of responsibility (Dua, 1994; Fairbrother & Warn, 2003). Stressor is known as, “a chemical or biological agent in environmental conditions, external stimulus or an event that causes stress to an individual”. Consequences of stress can be seen in changing behaviour and attitudes of people and it may be in the areas of Psychology (depression, irritability, anxiety, anger, moodiness, and isolation), Physiology (low energy, headaches, insomnia, nausea, ache and constipation) and Behaviour (being demotivated, aggressive and tearful, lost and having negative attitude). Generally, stress is an outcome of unpredictable, sudden or uncontrollable, uncertain, unfamiliar situations. If stress persists for a long time, it may cause physical and mental illness.

Theoretical Framework

Stress is an unavoidable consequence of modern living. The modern society and the corporate world have become highly competition oriented and everyone is experiencing stress. The employee should either excel in or exit from the organization. With this increasing competition in the market, the occupational stress is also increasing. As a result, more and more employees are showing signs of chronic fatigue and burnout. The dissatisfaction among the employees is the main cause of work-related stress. Stress has both positive and negative impact on the individual or organization. A moderate level of stress can be a motivational factor and can be helpful in achieving a dynamic adaptability to a new situation and environment. But if stress is repeated, continuous and intense or if the individual is unable to cope stress then it can be a negative phenomenon leading to constructive conflicts, competition among colleagues, and failure in performance. It can decrease the productivity and efficiency of employees ultimately hampering the development and working environment of the organization. Different type of stress is experienced at different organizational level. Not only this, different individuals have different capabilities to deal with the stress. The occupational stress is common now a days in the youth. This is a gift of the working scenario. The target which is to be achieved by the employee at the workplace creates a pressure on them which is quite hard for them to handle.

Sources of Occupational Stress

- **A toxic working environment**: A toxic working environment is one which directly influences the working and mental health of the employee as the employee spends near about 12 hours at his workplace. The working culture or the organizational culture is the shared values, thoughts or ideas which are followed by every employee in the organization. If the culture is not good for the employee i.e. if the culture is not friendly and same for every employee then they will lack the feeling of relatedness and hence the environment will become toxic for them which in turn will somehow turn to make a negative impact on them. Hence the toxicity of the environment will bring stress to them.

- **Negative or over workload**: This is the main reason of stress among the youth and freshers as they are not habitual of working under pressure. They are not well familiar with the technique of handling workload. Generally, the target at the workplace builds a negative stress in the form of pressure on the employee which hampers their efficiency of working. This stress encourages a fear within them that they might lose their jobs if they aren’t able to achieve the target within the given time frame.
• **Isolation:** Isolation means setting something apart i.e. if any employee in the organization feels that he is not treated well or he encounters a feeling of being alone then apparently, he will start lacking the feeling of relatedness towards the organization and insecurity may take place within him. This insecurity leads to stress, related to the workplace and occupation.

• **Types of hours worked:** Generally, the person working in night shifts are more prone to stress as they miss their usual social life and are working in odd hours. Thus, the person having night shifts are more addicted to smoking, etc to reduce their tension i.e. the stress. Employees who need to work for long hours without any recreational breaks also feel stressed.

• **Role:** The responsibility and authority one possesses at his or her workplace plays an important role in his or her life. For an instance, “Authority comes with Responsibility”. If an employee has lots of responsibility on his or her shoulders, then a certain level of pressure is built which is related to carrying the responsibility in best possible way and doing justice. On the other hand, if any employee is not happy with his or her responsibility then they feel uneasiness in handling the situation. Thus, stress is there in their life.

• **Conflicts and Role Ambiguity:** It’s very important for any organization to distribute the role and responsibility to the employees clearly so that there is no confusion among the employees regarding the role they need to perform and that each employee performing same role should be addressed equally.

• **Lack of Autonomy:** If one doesn’t have the freedom of self-government then they feel bounded or imprisoned. This lack of freedom results in stress which generally leads to depression, anxiety, etc.

• **Career Development Barriers:** It’s very important for the organization to grant developmental and growth options to the employee. Every employee wants his learning skills to be enhanced which is possible only through development. In case any employee doesn’t get the scope of development in their occupation, then they come under stress which might be injurious to their mental health.

• **Difficult relationship with Co-worker or Administrators or Seniors:** To work freely without any stress, the employee should share a healthy relation with his or her co-worker, seniors or administrators. The fruit of having sound relation is increases in the efficiency of working. The main reason is that a healthy and sound relation at workplace gives birth to understanding, coordination and trust among each other. This is very important for both, the employees and the organization for growth and development.

• **Managerial Bullying:** Managerial Bullying happens when the managerial person mistreats his juniors or subordinate or misbehaves with them. This is an unfair and unethical treatment which makes the junior feel stressed and they build a negative attitude towards their seniors.

• **Harassment:** Harassment is a kind of offensive behaviour which is generally non tolerable. It can be in the form of either mental harassment or sexual harassment. Generally, at workplace, the employees are harassed and if no corrective action is taken on time then the employee feels unsafe and goes into depression.

• **Job Insecurity:** Job insecurity is the main concern of the employee’s occupational life and the main reason behind occupational stress. Now-a-days the supply of human resource is more than demand, so it’s important for the employee to be competent enough at the work and in case if they are unable to perform well for long time then the organization replaces them. So, this pressure to be best and to excel their skills maintained for a long time, turns out to be negative stress for the employee which has adverse effect.
• **Low level of support from supervisors:** For any employee to develop and excel their skills at workplace, it’s very important to get a supportive and good leader, who can mentor and guide them properly. If the supervisor is not supportive then it gets difficult for the employees to perform. For an instance, generally the juniors work according to their supervisor and follow their orders. Their support is the source of motivation for them and if this support is lacking then they lose the motivation and are suppressed at work which creates a certain amount of pressure on them.

• **Dissatisfaction of employees:** Dissatisfaction is a cause of stress at every place and not only at workplace. But the dissatisfaction in work life leads to occupational stress and this might be due to a number of reasons like managerial bullying, lack of support from supervisor, salary issues, unfair treatment at workplace, etc. Dissatisfaction leads to negative attitude and vision. As a result of dissatisfaction, the person becomes aggressive or depressed.

• **Stress experienced by one employee can impact the safety of other employees:** This is not always the case of occupational stress as this is rarely experienced by one. But sometimes if any employee is experiencing stress then his depression and inefficiency at work somehow impacts the other employee as their coordination is impacted. For example, if in the team of two, one person is experiencing stress then his health and well-being will impact the other person also.

• **Targets or Unrealistic Deadlines:** Sometimes organizations set targets which are practically impossible to achieve and thus the concerned employee comes under pressure to complete the given target within the prescribed time frame. For an instance, the marketing and business development jobs are target based and sometimes the targets set are not achieved, and this creates a fear of insecurity of losing the job within the employee and hence he experiences stress which generally impacts psychologically and physiologically.

• **Environmental factors like noise, weather, traffic, etc.:** These factors are external factors and thus are out of control. Generally, these factors cause headache, dehydration, viral fever due to weather change, distraction at work, etc. As per a great saying “health is wealth”. When a person is not physically fit then he cannot be fit in any work as his body won’t support him efficiently like before and thus his working efficiency will decrease.

• **Personal factors like family issues, age, health issues, etc.:** It’s well proven that a successful person must know how to balance his personal and professional life simultaneously. Both professional and personal life are inter-related to each other. If a person has some issues in personal life than it impacts his work proficiency and vice-versa. For example, if a person’s child is suffering from health issues and he is at work then his mind will keep thinking about his child’s health and thus his efficiency and concentration will automatically decrease. In other words, the stress of the family will become the workplace stress indirectly.

### Types of Stress

**Distress:** Also known as negative stress. It is when a person is exposed continuously to pressure or uncontrollable situation. Generally, it’s marked by death of one’s loved one, crises, illness, misfortune, etc.

**Acute Stress:** It is the most common type of stress that comes with day to day things. In other words, it’s the stress experienced while having the things or stuff to be performed list on mind. For instance, to-do list. Some common signs of acute stress are nervousness or butterflies in the stomach, sweating in the palm, etc.
**Chronic Stress:** It is a stress that results from repeated exposure to situations that trigger stress hormones. These are long-term situations where the person has given up trying to find solutions. For an instance, if the efforts of a student to secure good percentage misfires every time.

**Eu-stress:** Also called positive stress. This is for short period and it generally improves the efficiency of the employee. Symptoms of positive stress are being excited, or motivated to do something. For an instance, the stress experienced during exams generally increases the efficiency of the student to study and learn more.

**Hyper Stress:** It is experienced when a person is pushed beyond its comfort zone that is beyond what one can handle. Mainly it occurs due to extra workload, to do stuff in less time and impractical targets.

**Hypo Stress:** Opposite to Hyper Stress. This is when people get bored or have monotonous work to do. For example, when employee does not get any opportunity to learn new things for their development or when there is no change in their routine work life and work then they face Hypo stress.

**Episodic Stress:** It is when acute stress happens more frequently than it should and where there is a little hope of relief.

**Burnout Stage**
- Burnout stage is the last stage of chronic stress which occurs when all the energetic resources like emotions, physical and mental strengths have been used up.
- As defined by Girdin, Everly and Dusek (1996), burnout is, “a state of mental and physical exhaustion caused by excessive and prolonged stress”.
  - Stage 1- Stress Arousal
  - Stage 2- Energy Conservation
  - Stage 3- Exhaustion

![Causes of Occupational Stress Diagram](image)
Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organisational Factors</th>
<th>Socio-Economic Factors</th>
<th>Work-Life Balance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Poor Working Conditions</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Family demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Targets and Deadline</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Support of supervisor at work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work load</td>
<td>Income</td>
<td>Work demand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Insecurity</td>
<td>Family Size</td>
<td>Pressure at work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long Working Hours</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Support of family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role Conflicts</td>
<td>Marital Status</td>
<td>Personal time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relation between Employees</td>
<td>Personality</td>
<td>Socializing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Organizational Factors

- **Poor working condition**: These are the main factors of stress at work place as the working condition impacts on the health of employee both, physically and mentally. For an instance, if an organization does not have safety measures at workplace then the employee will always keep worrying about his safety and this worry will lead to stress.

- **Targets and deadlines**: If the organization sets deadlines and targets which are next to impossible for the employee to achieve then they come under a pressure of achieving the target anyhow. This pressure somehow decreases their efficiency of working, and thus the stress encounters the employee. Generally, now a days jobs are mostly target oriented and hence youth suffers occupational stress.

- **Work-Load**: Mainly the work load at office results in burdened mind full of to do list and this to do stuff in a given time frame generates a pressure on the employee. Continuous exposure to such pressure brings stress to the employee as a gift. In such type of stress which is resulted from work load the employee is not able to cope with the work-life balance.

- **Job Insecurity**: The job insecurity is when a person does not have a secure or permanent job. This insecurity is of losing a job or being replaced whenever the employee is not able to perform well or he is not able to excel himself. Hypo-Stress is experienced under such situation i.e. when employee is exposed to insecurity of losing his or her job.

- **Long Working Hours**: Generally, when an employee is asked to work for long hours i.e. more than 12 hours or over-time, he is not able to manage his work life and personal life properly. As he is not getting enough time in his personal life, he experiences stress as he is incapable of managing things at both levels.

- **Role Conflicts**: For an organization, it’s very important to avoid conflicts arising out of the confusion of role and responsibility at work place. For every employee, it’s very important that their role and responsibility should be dictated or briefed at the time of orientation only. If they are not given the role or responsibility that was promised then they will gradually creep negative attitude towards the organization. This will result in anger, frustration, aggression, betrayal, etc.

- **Relation between Employees**: If an organization has healthy relation sharing among their employees then the organization’s environment or culture is said to be healthy for the employees. On the other hand, if the relation sharing is not healthy among the employees then the organizational culture becomes unhealthy. In an unhealthy organization, the employees
generally feel stressed out due to lack of coordination, cooperation and understanding among each other.

Socio-Economic Factors

- **Age:** Different age group people face different level of stress. The most common age group which is prone to stress is between the age of 30-50 years. As they must manage their work life, personal life, need to do savings, need to do future planning and have to do retirement planning, etc.

- **Education:** Sometimes in an organization, the employees work at the same position with different educational degrees. This difference sometimes brings inferiority complex in the employee. As a result, working capacity of the employees is hampered. This directly or indirectly impacts the growth of the organization.

- **Income:** Generally, one employee can earn more incentives than the other employee and then the employee who is not able to earn enough incentives come under pressure to perform well or to achieve the target to earn more incentives as compared to his or her subordinate.

- **Family Size:** Now-a-days, mostly both spouse in nuclear family are working due to which they are not able to spend quality time with each other and both experience work life stress and personal life stress.

- **Gender:** Females are said to be more prone to hypo stress than men and men faces hyper stress. Generally, female employees face more personal life problems like not getting enough support from family, children’s issues, etc. than men and thus they come under pressure for performing well.

- **Marital Status:** Married person is said to be more stressed out than unmarried person. For an instance, if an organization asks unmarried employee to re-locate, then it’s easy for him or her to re-locate. But at the same time for a married person, it’s difficult to re-locate as there are many responsibilities and family concerns.

- **Personality:** A person or employee with good and healthy personality is less prone to stress than a person or employee with unhealthy personality. A person with healthy personality carries a positive vision which generally calms him down.

Work-Life Balance

- **Family Demands:** If a person is unable to fulfil his family demand, then he feels stressed out of the incapability of not being able to fulfil the demands of his family. For an instance, if an employee is working at executive level in an organization and his family demands of buying a good SUV car, let’s say Brezza (Maruti), then obviously the employee won’t be able to fulfil his family demand immediately as it will take his time and savings both.

- **Work Demand:** Sometimes the organization requires the employees to work overtime or for extra time for completing the planned target and in such situation the employee is neither able to spend quality time with his family nor himself. He has no time to take proper rest. This impacts his health and thus he feels stressed.

- **Support of Supervisor at Work:** It’s important to have cooperative and understanding supervisor or seniors at work as this will help them to cope with the work load and issues at workplace sportingly. If they are not supportive, then they are incapable of maintaining the work-life balance.
• **Support of Family:** The support of family is very much important in maintaining the work-life balance and avoiding the stress as family is the root in building a successful person. For instance, if a family of female employee is supportive in cases like odd working hours such as night shifts or coming home late, etc. then the female employee is stress free and can easily manage work and family both. Support plays a positive and motivating role in one’s life.

• **Pressure at Work:** Generally, the pressure at work affects the personal life of the employees also because they don’t get enough quality time for their family and themselves. Under mental pressure, the thinking capacity of the employee decreases. As a result, the productivity decreases and thus he loses control on work-life balance and hence experiences stress.

**Symptoms of Occupational Stress**

Increased absenteeism, decreased productivity and performance, moodiness, isolation, headache, depression, conflicts with others, lack of interest, behavioral changes, inefficiency, anger, frustration, anxiety, boredom, cowardly behavior, indiscipline, negative attitude, resistant to change or to corporate with the seniors, decreased productivity, no mental peace, etc. All these directly or indirectly impacts the working efficiency of the employee and the environment, growth and development of the organizations.

**Techniques for Managing Occupational Stress**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>At Organizational Level</th>
<th>At Individual Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Job Clarification</td>
<td>Meditation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distribution of Job Responsibility</td>
<td>Physical Activities(sports)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Re-designing of Job Training</td>
<td>Breathing Exercises</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking timely feedback from employee</td>
<td>Stretching Exercises</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workshops on managing job related stress</td>
<td>Music Therapy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintaining Healthy Working Environment</td>
<td>Leading a Balanced Life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recreation Hours</td>
<td>Socializing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**At Organizational Level**

• **Job Clarification:** Job clarification helps in minimizing the role conflicts that arise in an organization due to lack of proper delegation of work and responsibilities. Job clarification means assigning jobs and responsibilities carefully and clearly to the employees.

• **Distribution of Job Responsibility:** The distribution of job responsibility should be according to the position and capabilities of the employees. Then only they will be satisfied and their efficiency to work will increase.
• **Re-Designing of Job Training:** The organization must re-design the training module time to time according to the requirement. The re-designing of the training module must be oriented towards solving problems.

• **Taking timely Feedback from Employee:** The organization should check whether the strategy made and followed by them is acceptable by the employees or not and is it beneficial for the organizational growth or not. Taking timely feedback from employee will make it easier for the organization to know the reason behind the mismatch of plans and real output. And what are the factors that hamper the efficiency and capacity of the employee.

• **Workshops on managing Job related Stress:** To minimize the level of stress within the employee, the organization should conduct workshops on how the employee can avoid the negative stress, what are the symptoms of stress. How one can cope with stress and how stress can be used positively.

• **Maintaining Healthy Work Environment:** An organization can maintain healthy work environment by taking corrective and strict actions against wrong doings, unethical behaviour of senior or employee. The organization should do fair treatment with all by motivating the employees to participate in activities of the organization, by taking into consideration their ideas, suggestions and giving them recognition for the same. Establishing better cooperation and coordination among leaders and subordinates, etc.

• **Recreation hours:** Recreation hour concept was first tried by Google. In this free time is given to employees in which they can do any activity they like such as sleeping, playing, listening to music, etc. By doing this, the efficiency of the employee increases as they feel relaxed while working and as a result, they are less prone to stress.

**At Individual Level**

• **Meditation:** Meditation relaxes the mind and gives positive vibes. For instance, if a person is experiencing stress because of office environment or culture, then meditating will relax their body and soul as it will bring them close to spirituality.

• **Physical Activities:** The employee can try playing indoor games like table tennis whenever they feel overburdened or can try any other activity that relaxes them. The more the employee relaxes, less stressful they will feel.

• **Breathing Exercises:** Employees who try breathing exercises like “breathe in – breathe out” generally overcome fear and the pressure is released. Breathing exercises circulate oxygen to every organ of the body due to which a person feels relaxed.

• **Music Therapy:** Listening to soft music generally calms down the sensory organs of an individual. As a result, the individual feels relaxed and fresh. Music is connected to the emotions of an individual and thus, listening to music when a person is weak generally relaxes them.

• **Socializing:** Now-a-days, socializing has become a habit and without it people are triggered with boredom. So, it’s important to socialize for leading a chill out life. Social media plays an important role in our life such as Facebook, Instagram, Whatsapp, etc.

• **Leading a Balanced Life:** It’s very important for the employee to maintain work-life balance to lead stress free life or to avoid negative stress as both professional and personal life are inter-related to each other. If a person is facing trouble or difficulties in coping with personal life problems like family demand, quality family time, etc. then the person will not be able
to manage his work properly as he’s not focused and vice-versa. Thus, the main aim of any employee should be to balance work and life properly.

- **Acupressure:** This is known that acupressure helps in relaxing and calming person from stress, headache, body-ache, hypertension, etc. by pressurizing certain points or joints of human body.

**Literature Review**

Kavitha, P. (2012) focused on the organizational stress among women employees forming majority workforce at IT sector in Chennai and Coimbatore. She found that women are more likely to experience psychological stress than men and married women are more prone to stress than unmarried women. Swaminathan, P.S. & Rajkumar, S.(2013) conducted a research study that focused on different age groups, professions, jobs and influence of organization’s working environment on the amount of stress faced by the employees. This study indicates that the efficiency of the employees is increased if they are exposed to positive stress (optimum level of stress). Satija, S. and Khan, W.(2013) found that job stress and occupational stress can be used interchangeably and must be controlled. Else it will impact employees’ behaviour and attitude negatively. This study established a relationship between emotional intelligence and occupational stress.

Shani, A. and Pizam, A.(2009) studied the depression among hotel employees of Central Florida by evaluating the relationship between the work characteristics and occupational stress. Vijoen, J.P. and Rothmann, S. (2009) studied the relationship between occupational stress, ill health and organizational commitment. Outcomes of the study were that the occupational stress leads to employee’s ill health and decreased organizational commitment. They also found the five main reasons namely Work-life Balance, Overload, Control, Job Aspects and Pay were responsible for the low organizational commitment and Job Insecurity played a major role in physical and psychological illness.

Agolla, J.E. (2009) conducted the study among the police of Botswana to know the symptoms and coping strategies of occupational stress. He found that the reasons of stress were getting injured on duty, using arms and forces when required. And coping strategies were meditating, exercising and socializing. Khalid, A. (2012) studied that there is a direct relation between degree of stress and level of work performance in any organization. To improve the efficiency and performance of the employee, they must get good support from the leader. A supportive and good leader can create opportunities out of unfortunate situations. Treven, U., Trevem, S., and Zizek, S.S. (2011) found that there is an inverse connection between stress and productivity i.e. how successful the employees are at their work. Increase in stress decreases the productivity of the employees. Hence, making them unsuccessful at work. They suggested strategies like good working environment, good relation among employees. They even categorized stress into three categories 1). Transient Stress 2). Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) 3). Chronic Stress.

Pandy, A. (2016) found that the main cause of stress is dissatisfaction. There is a direct relationship between stress and dissatisfaction. He suggested stress management techniques like Job Clarification, Distribution of job responsibility, Re- Designing of Job Training, etc. Jain, P. & Batra, A. (2015) studied the level of frequency of job stressing factors for the corporate individuals and the distressing factors impacting individuals. This study focused on the area by which HR personnel can reduce the stressors. Emmett, R.(2009) in her book quoted that the key to reduce stress is not “Time Management” but “Stuff Management”. Reza, M., & Mohsen, K. (2011) studied the factors associated with the occupational stress and their relationship with the organizational
performance at university of Tehran. Factors affecting most of the employees included role conflict and role ambiguity, lack of promotion and feedback, lack of participation in decision making, lack of authority, workload, unsatisfactory working conditions and interpersonal relationships.

**Conclusion**

“Your work is going to fill a large part of your life, and the only way to be truly satisfied is to do what you believe is great work. And the only way to do great work is to love what you do. If you haven’t found it yet, keep looking. Don’t settle. As with all matters of the heart, you’ll know when you find it”.

**Steve Jobs**

For every organization, it’s important to manage and decrease the stress among the employees as the occupational stress hampers the growth of the organization directly or indirectly. Occupational stress decreases the efficiency and capability of the employee. This decreased capability affects the growth of the organization directly or indirectly. Stress is both, negative and positive. If stress is at moderate level, then it is positive stress and it makes the employee more productive and constructive. On the other hand, if stress is intense and continuous then it is negative and it makes the employee mentally and physically ill and can lead to depression, anxiety, increased turnover rate and increased absenteeism. Organization should take steps for combating stress like job clarification, distributing job responsibilities, maintaining healthy and good working environment, giving recreation hours, etc. The individual should also try meditation, yoga and breathing exercises to cope with stress at their level. Managing stress is important for both organization and individual for their growth and development. Thus, both i.e. the organization and the employee must try to transform Di-stress into Eu-stress. Eu-stress is the moderate stress which makes the employee work beyond his or her capability and to give his hundred percent in the growth and development of the organization. Motivating and guiding the employee in the right direction is very important as this will help them avoid the stress and maintain a work-life balance.

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**Author’s Profile**

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