



## RESPONSIBILITY OF HR MANAGER IN MANAGING STRESS OF EMPLOYEES IN MANUFACTURING CONCERNS

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### **Abstract**

*Stress has been dubbed the “health epidemic of the 21<sup>st</sup> century” by the World Health Organization. Since early studies, stress was defined as General Adaptation Syndrome (GAS) or the defense response of the body or the psyche to injury or prolonged stress (Selye, 1956). Managing work related stress in employees and responsibility of an HR manager are essential linked. Well organized and efficiently and effectively managed work helps in promoting and maintaining the well-being and physical condition of an employee. But in a scenario where insufficient priority has been given to the work organization, job design, and management, a significant portion of benefits and efficiency can be lost with respect to ‘good work.’ And, one of the most common results of this is stress!!! The first step in helping employees cope is to find out what is causing the most stress and what an employee's idea of a stress-free environment would be. If employees are not comfortable talking to a manager, the manager should make arrangements for the employee to speak to someone else. Managers can reduce stress by setting clear expectations, helping employees prioritize, being available to listen to employee concerns, and not tolerating any workplace bullying or harassing. Organizations should push stress relief by providing a safe and pleasant workplace, a relaxing break room in which to eat, a nutritious selection of food at the cafeteria, access to a gym, and resources to reduce stress for employees.*

### **What Is Work Related Stress?**

Work-related stress is how you feel when you have demands at work that exceed your ability to cope. Almost 12 million working days are lost each year because of perceived work-related stress, and stress can contribute to such conditions as anxiety or depression. And nearly half a million people in the UK have work-related stress at a level that's making them ill. To define the term, stress in an employee arises from the situation where work demands, exceeds the capability and capacity of the individual. In a scenario, where the company is expecting ‘too much’ from the employee, irrespective of their capability and efficiency, it leads to work related stress. Often, unclear goals and duties, and bullying or harassment are related to the causes of work related stress in employees. This is a significant reason behind diseases and illness in employees, and is often correlated with the staff turnover, higher rates of employee absenteeism, and other key indicators of underperformance.

### **Role and Responsibility of HR Manager in Stress Management**

To cope up with stress in employees, it is important to take effective actions. This not only benefits towards promoting the employee performance, but also enhances the scope for team and organizational development. Most importantly, it is a legal requirement for the HR managers to “diagnose, treat, and rehabilitate” the employees who experience stress at workplace. Effective stress management solutions also help in instilling.

### **Corporate Social Responsibility among the Employees and Management**

Different bodies of the organization are responsible towards managing stress at workplace, but an HR manager plays a pivotal role here. They ensure that the procedures and policies are formulated and implemented accurately to manage the work related stress. The HR department works with the Health and safety department to tackle stress by managing how the organization decentralizes responsibilities, and preventing harassments and bullying at workplace. The important roles and responsibilities of an HR manager in stress management include:

1. To understand what work related stress is, what are the causes behind it, and how it can be managed and prevented.
2. To formulate relevant and effective stress management policies to cope with this budding issue in organization.



3. To communicate and engage with the employees regarding this issue, and raising awareness in the way of working with trade unions or other related aspects.
4. To undertake effective Management Standards or other outlook towards identifying the level of stress in the organization and what solutions can be implemented to improve from the current situation.
5. To work with other departments of the organization, including Health and Safety, in formulating and implementing solutions that have been identified by the employees.
6. To review and monitor stress management solutions, along with procedures and policies.
7. To work with other bodies and support line managers to prevent and manage employees experiencing stress, and to help them return back to work.
8. To identify and develop other initiatives and policies that can promote well-being and health of the employees.

### **Role of a Manager in Relation to Work Related Stress**

Structural changes during a recession can often lead to a low morale and in turn a rise in absences caused by health related issues. In times like this it is essential for a HR Manager to know how to support employees and provide an environment of comfort. The CIPD 2009 annual survey on absence management, policy and practice shows that stress is one of the main causes of absence amongst employees, with job insecurity being one of the main causes of work-related stress. Other contributing factors include a

1. Demanding workload.
2. Inappropriate management style.
3. Poor relationships at work.

On the upside, a CIPD absence survey shows 86% of employers are taking active steps in identifying and reducing stress in the workplace.

**Steps Taken to Manage Stress:** The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) provides a framework of six standards to help employers identify and reduce work-related stress. Whilst these are not compulsory, they provide a best-practice approach which has proved effective to many organizations. The standards include identification of main risk factors for work-related stress, surveys to assess the current work situation and bench marking guidance to enable companies to gauge their own performance and address stress issues. The CIPD annual survey report also notes that it is common practice within larger organizations for employers to work in partnership with occupational health departments (OHD) and offer counseling services through employee assistance programmers (EAP).

### **Skills Required By Managers to Manage Stress**

Under health and safety law, managers have a duty to identify and manage stress at work. Addressing areas of poor work design, such as workload, employee control and provision of adequate support and resources, is key in helping to reduce stress and thus increase productivity amongst employees. Line managers play a crucial role in managing stress in the workplace as they are often the first port of call for employees at times of distress. It is therefore important that managers develop the required competencies to enable them to effectively support their direct reports. Skills and behaviors required include:

1. **Ability to Assess and Identify Workplace Stressors** - what are the current demands? Is the work design appropriate? Remember that changes to an open plan environment or lighting, for example, could be a trigger of stress for some people.
2. **Awareness of Signs and Symptoms of Stress** -. Are employees unusually irritable, angry and/or tearful? Are they showing signs of absentmindedness, lack of concentration?
3. **Ability to Build a Good Rapport** - Promote an open and honest environment so that employees feel able to voice their concerns such as conflict issues at work or personal problems at home.
4. Show empathy by actively listening and showing an understanding of challenges faced by individuals both at work and home.
5. Finally, work in partnership with the employee to make appropriate adjustments to work design and implement effective **stress management strategies**.



### **Role in the Management Standards**

1. Human Resource staff members are ideally placed to act as Board level champions or as day-to-day project managers for the Management Standards. Organizing, planning and resourcing such projects is often the responsibility of HR departments.
2. Providing relevant data and feedback to the Board.
3. Engage and communicate with staff about this issue and raise awareness.
4. Engage effectively with Trade Union representatives to ensure appropriate workforce involvement in the process.
5. Supporting line managers in managing individuals experiencing stress and helping them return to work.
6. To work with others, including your Health and Safety advisors and line managers, in implementing solutions identified by staff and monitoring and reviewing their effectiveness.
7. Reviewing relevant policies and procedures.
8. Providing appropriate training in the area of work related stress, mental health and well-being.
9. Liaison with those who may have important data like Employee Assistance Programmes.

### **Role with Individuals**

1. However proactive organizations are with prevention initiatives there will always be individual cases – systems must be in place for early identification and onward referral.
2. HR managers are often responsible for the co-ordination of the organizational response to a potential or actual case of work related stress (see defining a case) usually in conjunction with Occupational Health and line management. They are often instrumental in organizing programmes of rehabilitation and return to work.
3. Some individuals feel most comfortable approaching their union or safety representative but you may be asked for support from individuals especially where the issue is to do with relationships with their line manager.
4. Provide tailored training for individuals and managers.

### **Conclusion**

In general, it can be concluded that work-related stress is not always negative but depends on the intensity, duration and adaptive function of the stress response itself. In addition, since there is a lot of research on this subject, we can proactively use the current knowledge regarding its causes, symptoms and consequences to intervene early and prevent work-related stress from interfering with our physical and psychological health.

The Stress cannot be avoided altogether; in fact, a little bit of stress spurs productivity and innovation. But it must be kept at a Managers are responsible for not overworking or stressing out their employees; they should model good coping skills for their employees. Human resources departments are responsible for making stress management resources available and raising organizational awareness of them. Executives should review current practices to see that they are not causing undue stress on employees and make changes where necessary. They should also advocate making resources on how to handle stress available. Employees who are stress-free are more productive, have a better view of the organization, and are more likely to stay with the organization. Lowered stress leads to fewer accidents, lower healthcare costs, and higher morale. Organizations should seek the welfare of all, and that includes helping employees to cope with stress.



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