

A Comparative Study of Organizational Role Stress (ORS) and its Management among the Top Executives of Indian Public and Private Enterprises

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ABSTRACT

Stress is multi faceted problem and it has been studied by specialists from various disciplines. After the liberalization of Indian economic environment a very high level of competition as emerged among the public and private enterprises. There has been, in recent years, a tremendous interest generated in exploring and understanding the organizational role stress of top executives in various industries. In a national study on 200 top executives of public and 250 top executives of private sector enterprises were used to find out the nature and type of organizational role stress. The results indicate that executives of private sector enterprises suffering with higher level of organizational role stress as compared to their public enterprise counterparts.

Key words: *Organizational Role Stress, Inter-role Distance, Role Stagnation, Role Expectation Conflict, Role Erosion, Role Overload, Role Isolation, Personal Inadequacy, Self - Role Distance, Role Ambiguity, Resource Inadequacy, Stress Tolerance Limit, Depression, Anxiety, Anger*

INTRODUCTION

Since the dawn of the human civilization, mankind has ceaselessly been striving for the goal of happiness, peace and stress-free life. These have been considered as parameters of human well-being and prosperity. The quest has led to a dynamic technological whirl-pool which has spawned mega-bureaucracies, micro-task specialization and greater urbanization and privatization (Pestonjee, 1987).

The 17th century has been called the 'Age of Enlightenment', the 18th 'Age of Reason' the 19th century 'Age of Progress'. The modern world which is said to be a world of achievements is also a world of stress and anxiety. One finds stress everywhere, whether it be a family, a business organization/enterprise or any other social or economic organization. The extent of stress however, is a matter of degree. In India most of the public enterprises are very harmonious whereas private enterprises have greater friction and tension.

During the 1980's changes in economic scene and on the industrial front were taking place in the US, Western Europe, Great Britain etc. For example the Enterprise Culture period was taking shape. By the end of the decade there was a substantial personal cost for many individual employees both at the shop-floor level and at the managerial levels. This cost was captured by a single word, stress. High pressure in the work place was costly to the business in the 1980's. For example in the USA, the collective cost of stress to US organizations for absenteeism, reduced productivity, compensation claims, health insurance and direct medical expenses has been at approximately \$150 billion per year (Karasek and Theorell, 1990). In Great Britain, stress related absence were 10 times more costly than all industrial disputes put together. In Norway, the economic costs of work related sickness and accident amount to more than 10% of the gross national product (GNP), a high proportion of which is considered stress related (Lunde-Jenson, 1994). In Japan it is known as 'karoshi' which means sudden death by a heart attack or stroke triggered by overwork. In a land where 16 hours workdays are common, experts estimate that 10,000 Japanese die each year from 'karoshi'. The Director General of Police (Indian Central Reserve Police Force) in an interview said that 37 CRPF personnel were shot themselves in 1997 only because of extraneous work pressure or stress.

Stress has been approached in at least four different ways. Firstly, as the stimulus or external force acting on the organism; secondly, as the response or the change in physiological function; thirdly, as an interaction between an external force and

the resistance to it; and finally, as comprehensive phenomenon encompassing all the three.

Hans Selye's General Adaptation Syndrome (GAS) has been widely held as a comprehensive model to explain the stress phenomenon. This three stage model states that when an organism is confronted with a threat to the general physiology response occurs in three stages:

(1) Alarm Reaction: The first stage includes an initial shock phase in which resistance is lowered and a counter-shock phase in which defensive mechanisms become active.

(2) Stage of Resistance: Maximum adaptation occurs during this stage. Resistance increases to levels above normal. If stressors persist, or the defensive reaction proves ineffective, the organism deteriorates to the next stage.

(3) Stage of Exhaustion: When adaptation energy is exhausted, sign of alarm reaction reappear and resistance level begins to decline irreversibly, the organism collapses.

The first major shortcoming of this theory according to Pestonjee (1987a) is that, it is based on researches carried out on infra-human subjects. In such experiments, the stressors are usually physical or environmental, whereas the human organism is not always confronted by such stressors.

Secondly, Selye's work on stress depends on the existence of a non-specific physiological response. It has been noted by researchers that there are certain stimuli, for

example, exercise, fasting and heat, which do not produce non-specific response and hence, the GAS does not hold true.

Thirdly, intrapsychic or social (interpersonal/interactional) factors emerge as major stressors in human beings. These have not been given their due place in this approach. Finally, the reactions of infra-human subjects are more directed, perceptible and hence easily measurable. This is not true of human subjects as 'their responses are always mediated through several layers of cultural and social filters'.

As a comprehensive definition stress is a dynamic condition in which an individual is confronted with an opportunity, constraint or demand related to what he or she desires and for which the outcome is perceived to be both uncertain and important.

The nature and consequences of the stress phenomenon have been diagrammatically presented by Pestonjee (1992), there are three important segments of life, in which stress originates:

(i) Job and Organization Sector: This includes work environment and policies, task, responsibilities, power and accountability, working hours and atmosphere, compensation and rewards, subordinates, colleagues and superiors etc..

(ii) Social Sector: This includes political and cultural factors, religion and caste, region and language, civic amenities and recreational avenues, health services and educational facilities etc.

(iii) Intra psychic Sector: The main constituents are person-specific aspects, like temperament, attitudes, values and beliefs, aspirations and desires, health problems and abilities.

It is natural and healthy to maintain optimal levels of stress. Success, achievement, high productivity and effectiveness call for stress (Pestonjee, 1987b). When stresses are left unchecked and unmanaged, they can create problems in performance and affect the health and well-being of the organism.

The present day practitioners and researchers visualize the phenomenon of stress in new perspective. Each individual needs a moderate amount of stress to be alert and capable of functioning effectively in the organization. Stress is inherent in the concept of creativity (Pestonjee, 1992) and entrepreneurship (Pareek, 1995).

One of the major areas of research in India in the field of stress is the organizational role stress. The concept of organizational stress first evolved in the classic work of Kahn et,al, (1964). An organization can be defined as a system of roles. From the point of view of an individual, there are two role systems Role Space and Role Set (Pareek,1993).

Pareek(1983) pioneered research work on role stress by identifying as many as ten different types of organizational role stresses. They are describe here briefly:

(01) Inter-role Distance (IRD): Exists when there is a conflict between the organizational role and other roles eg. an executives not being able to divide his time between work demands and family demands.

(02) Role Stagnation (RS): Exists when there are few opportunities for learning and growth in the organization.

(03) Role Expectation Conflict (REC): Exists when there are conflicting demands made on the role by different people in the organization.

(04) Role Erosion (RE): When an individual feels that some important functions which are related to his work are given to someone else to carry out he/she feels that the job which he/she is doing is not challenging. The stress indicators found to be related to role erosion are a feeling of worthlessness, low self esteem, mood swing, low motivation to work etc.

(05) Role Overload (RO): When there is a feeling that too much is expected from the role than what the occupant can cope with.

(06) Role Isolation (RI): When there is a lack of appropriate linkage of one's role with other roles in the organization.

(07) Personal Inadequacy (PI): When there is lack of knowledge, skills or adequate preparation to be effective in a particular role.

(08) Self - Role Distance (SRD): When there is conflict between one's values and self concepts with the requirements of the organizational role.

(09) Role Ambiguity (RA): When an individual does not have a clear picture of work objectives, co-workers' expectations and the scope and responsibilities of his/her job. The stress indicators found to relate to role ambiguity are depressed mood, lowered self-esteem, low motivation to work and intention to leave the job.

(10) Resource Inadequacy (RIN): When there is non - availability of resources needed for effective role performance.

Stress Tolerance Limit

Pestonjee(1999) is of the view that any meaningful discussion of the stress process and stress affects has to take into account the Stress Tolerance Limit (STL) of the individual. Is the STL something metaphysical or physiological or what? To the present author, the STL is made up of four vital components: (1) Depression Proneness, (2) Anxiety Proneness (3) Anger and (4) Type-A Behaviour Pattern. (Pestonjee,1992). Briefly, these are described below:

Depression

It is an emotional state of dejection, feeling of worthlessness and guilt accompanied by apprehension. Depression can be of two types: endogenous and exogenous. Endogenous depression is self made, largely of one's own making without any apparent reasons. For example, seeing a colleague prosper etc. On the other hand, exogenous or reactive depression is due factors beyond one's control such as noise, environment and so on.

Anxiety

It is a state of emotional tension characterized by apprehension, fearfulness and tension. The most common mental component of harmful stress is abnormal anxiety even though they may seem unpleasant at the time.

Anger

It has received substantial attention in the field of psychosomatic medicine as a predictor of physical health problems. In the case of stress, mild anger on a situation specific basis may increase energy levels and performance through the increased release of adrenaline. However, substantial chronic anger, 'trait anger' may wear down the body by overtaking its systemic resources.

Type-A Behavior Pattern

It is a personality profile, characterized by speed, impatience, desire for achievement and perfectionism. These individuals are likely to create stress for themselves in situations that others may find relatively stress-free.

The study of health and well-being has become an increasingly promising and prolific area of study in organizational psychology. As a part of general impact of work conditions on physical and mental health of the employees, considerable energy has been devoted to increase our knowledge of stress experienced at work (pestonjee, 1985, 1992; Pattanayak, Mohapatra & Nanda, 1995, Srivastava and Singh, 1996). The work place provides an excellent setting for addressing issues of health and this area certainly deserves attention (Rishi and Nigam, 1995; Sayeed, 1991). The increasing potential hazards to the health resulting from unsafe occupational environment are creating an alarming situation and, therefore, promotion of health and well-being needs to be addressed adequately.

The strain caused by stress manifests itself in the form of many psychological and physical problems. For example, an extensive body of research has found job stress responsible for psychosomatic health outcomes like coronary heart disease, stomach ulcers, tension headaches as well as other health outcomes such as depression, anxiety, hopelessness, helplessness and anger.

Personality traits have also been found to be associated with stress. The most widely discussed personal characteristics contributing to stress at work in recent years has been Type-A behavior pattern. There are a large number of studies indicating that type-A behavior pattern causes, predisposes and/or is associated with stress-related disease such as coronary heart disease (Friedman & Rosenman, 1974).

METHODOLOGY

Sample:

The present research was conducted on a sample consisted of 450 **executives** drawn randomly from different Indian public and private enterprises, located mostly in the western part of the country. The age of the executives vary from 29 years to 52 years. All the executives were male and working as either middle or senior level managerial personnel.

Measures:

(a) Organizational Role Stress Scale (Pareek, 1981) consists of 50 items and measures ten types of role stressors. Each

dimension of ORS is measured by 5 questions. The ORS scale has high reliability and validity, and detailed norms have been worked out for different types of organizations. Khanna (1986) has suggested ORS norms for managers. Likewise, Surti (1983) has suggested ORS norms for working women, Sen (1982) for Indian Bankers, Susniati (1986) for Indonesian Salesman, Rieffel (1986) for American Directors of Special Education, Pestonjee and Singh(1982) for Electric Supply managers and EDP managers; Pestonjee (1983) for Civil servants.

(b) Self Rating Depression Scale(Zung, 1965) scale consists of 20 items and provides a brief quantification of depressive symptoms. It covers a broad range of depressive symptomatology dealing with the areas of pervasive effect, physiological equivalents and psychological concomitants.

(c) State-Trait Anger Scale(Spielberger et al., 1983) scale was used for the measurement of executives' state-trait anger. It consists of 30 items and has been divided into two parts. The first part

comprising 15 items measures state anger and the second part consisting 15 items measures trait anger.

(d) Self-Rating Anxiety Scale (Zung & Cavenar, Jr.,1990) scale was used to assess the executive's anxiety proneness. It consists of 20 items, each of which is rated on a 4-point answer scale.

(e) Can You Type Your Behaviou?(Gmlech, 1982) scale was employed to assess the executive's Type-A behaviour disposition. It comprises 20 'Yes-No' type statements. Statements marked under 'yes' category are summed up to get the respondent's score on Type-A behaviour disposition.

Procedure :

All the five psychometric measures were simultaneously administered on the selected respondents and they were asked to read the instructions given in the questionnaires. No set time limit was imposed. It took about 45 to 55 minutes to fill all the instruments.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Table-1: Showing means on Organizational Role Stress Dimensions.

VARIABLES	MEAN	MEAN	CR-VALUE
	(PRIVATE	(PUBLIC	
	ENTERPRISE) N=250	ENTERPRISE) N=200	
INTER-ROLE DISTANCE (IRD)	06.76	06.55	0.42
ROLE STAGNATION (RS)	06.30	04.90	4.05
ROLE-EXPECTATION CONFLICT(REC)	06.30	04.20	5.67
ROLE EROSION(RE)	09.90	08.30	3.55
ROLE OVERLOAD (RO)	04.95	03.90	2.43
ROLE ISOLATION (RI)	07.40	05.30	5.89
PERSONAL INADEQUACY (PI)	05.60	04.40	2.66
SELF ROLE DISTANCE (SRD)	05.80	04.40	3.33
ROLE AMBIGUITY (RA)	05.30	03.40	4.54
RESOURCE INADEQUACY (RIN)	05.70	04.50	2.85
ORGANIZATIONAL ROLE STRESS-ORS	65.01	4 7.85	5.26
HOW LONELY (DEPRESSION)	33.30	31.40	1.29
SELF RATING... ..(ANXIETY)	27.30	26.20	1.86
TYPE YOUR.....(TYPE-A)	10.46	10.16	1.11
SELF ANALYSIS.....I (ANGER-S)	22.60	19.90	2.46
SELF ANALYSIS....II (ANGER-T)	30.60	28.20	2.89

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Table-2: Observed correlation among the executives of private enterprise.(N=250)

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	Type-A	Anxiety	Anger-S	Anger-t	Depression
IRD	.22*	.37*	.35*	.31*	.19*
RS	.06	.15	.12	.14	.18
REC	.29*	.43*	.37**	.31**	.34**
RE	.19*	.11	.23*	.34**	.12
RO	.09	.34**	.43**	.15	.14
RI	.39**	.38**	.23*	.39**	.45**
PI	.09	.12	.27**	-.09	.23*
SRD	-.10	.23*	.23**	.15	.27**
RA	.12	.39**	.30**	.18*	.36**
Rin	.12	.44**	.39**	.25**	.16
ORS(T)	.23*	.42**	.48**	.35**	.35**

Table-3: Observed Correlations among the executives of public enterprise (N=200)

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	Type-A	Anxiety	Anger-S	Anger-t	Depression
IRD	.22*	.24**	.31*	.31*	.19*
RS	.09	.25*	.23*	.16	.15
REC	.27*	.45**	.34**	.33**	.34**
RE	.19*	.13	.23*	.34**	.12
RO	.05	.32**	.43**	.17	.20*

RI	.39**	.36**	.23*	.37**	.45**
PI	.09	.12	.29**	-.09	.23*
SRD	-.08	.23*	.27**	.15	.27**
RA	.13	.35**	.33**	.18*	.35**
Rin	.11	.44**	.39**	.25**	.37**
ORS(T)	.25*	.42**	.45**	.39**	.33**

The data were computed in terms of critical ration and coefficients of correlation.

In order to test the difference between the mean of two groups (private and public enterprise) on all the variables C.R. value were calculated (Table-1). It can be observed that the private group obtained consistently higher scores on all the dimensions of organizational role stress and total role stress as compare to public enterprise group. Significant differences were observed between the two groups on the dimensions of role stress except inter-role distance. In the private enterprise RE, RI, IRD, RS, REC were emerged as a dominant stressors whereas in public enterprise group RE and IRD were emerged as dominant stressors. The higher scores obtained by the private enterprise group may be due to their strenuous work environment and highly ambiguous organizational climate.

While in the case of psychodynamic profile (Stress Tolerance Limit) both the group are showing highly consistent record except anger situational and trait where private enterprise executives are showing higher scores can gain reflects their work environment.

Table-2 showed the correlations among all the variables for the private enterprise group. It can be observed that Type-A behavioral disposition correlated positively and significantly with IRD, REC, RE, RI and ORS. Anxiety was also found to be associated positively and significantly with all the dimensions of organizational role stress except RS, RE and PI. Further Anger-S was correlated positively and significantly with all the dimension of organizational role stress except RS. Anger-T was found to be positively and significantly associated with IRD, REC, RE, RI and total ORS. Depression was also found to be correlated with positively and significantly with all the dimension of ORS except RS, RE and RO.

Table-3 presents the correlation among the different variables for public enterprise group. It can be seen from the table that Type-A behavior was positively and significantly associated with only IRD, REC, RE, RI AND ORS(T). Anxiety was found to be positively and significantly correlated with all the dimensions except RE, and PI. Anger-S was positively correlated with all the dimensions of Ors variables. Also Anger-T was positively

associated with all the dimensions except RS, RO, and PI. lastly depression was also positively and significantly correlated with all the dimension except RS and RE.

Here, we can say that all the factors in the Stress Tolerance Limit profile i.e. Type-A, Anxiety, Anger-S, Anger-T and Depression were associated positively with most of the dimensions of organizational role stress in case of both the enterprises. Further there is a clear need to study further the organizational climate and overall functioning of both the organizations before suggesting any specific remedies for both the enterprises. Though 'Stress Audit' can be one of the important tool to reduce the stressors at organizational as well as individual levels. The stress audit steps can be...

Phase-I : Carrying out an exploration on Stress Tolerance Limit(STL) with the help of psychometric instruments in terms of anxiety proneness, depression proneness, state/trait anger, and type-A orientation, occupational values, dominant motive/need profile etc.

Phase-II: identifying the dominant organizational role stress dimensions.

Phase-III : Collecting qualitative data on stress variables and their effects on individual health and performance by structured interviews.

Phase- IV: On the basis of results obtained in the above three phases, remedial measures are suggested to the organization for implementing suitable modification and changes in activities and practices of the organization.

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