Study on Strategic Importance of High Stress Tolerance Limit among Media Personnel

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In the words of Sir Henry Ford, “Competition is the keen cutting edge of business always shaving away costs”. The modern world is full of stress and it has become snobbery for the executives and the corporate personnel to state that they are under stress. While it is agreed that stress is needed to a particular limit, “what is the limit to which stress must be?” is the big question. Stress in a nominal level is good for everyone and in the field of competition; it is undoubtedly proven that all individuals need to have the minimum level of stress (Neustress). Once the level of stress is on the higher side it leads to burnout thus paving way for loss in production and total imbalance in the organisation.

From the view of a strategic management angle, there needs to be a proper balance for the stress level and in these circumstances, the stress tolerance level has to be maintained. Infact greater the stress tolerance level, lesser is the propensity of being stressed. Once a proper strategic stress tolerance model is developed and put to use, it would help a great deal to maintain the stress level intact and thus enhance organisational effectiveness. The present study focuses its attention on various areas of attention. It includes identification of the stressors - be it the physical, mental or job stressors on the job or off the job, evaluating the stress tolerance level among visual and print media personnel, comparing the tolerance level between print and visual media personnel, charting out a plan of action for improving the stress level as well as developing a strategic model for increasing stress tolerance among media personnel.

Key Words: Stress, Stressor, Stress Tolerance, Strategic Stress Tolerance Limit

Literature Review

The modern world is full of stress, from which there is no escape, and no work environment is an exception to this. Media personnel who work in difficult situation are prone to stress than people of any other occupation. Further, it has been reported that 2007 has been a difficult year for journalist as a record number of personnel had been killed or injured while on duty.

The concept of Stress was first coined by Hans Selye in 1936. Derived from the Latin word “stringere”, stress was used to mean hardship, adversity or affliction. It was used in 18th and 19th centuries to denote force, pressure, strain or strong effort with reference to an object or person (Pestonjee, 1999).

In the modern sense, Cannon (1935) was the first to use the term stress. He viewed stress as a potential cause of medical problems and pointed out that emotional stress cause disturbances of a physiological nature. It can be regarded as a non-specific biological, emotional, and behavioural process that occurs when physical or psychological well-being is disrupted or threatened. It involves heightened psychological arousal accompanied by intense emotion. He defines it as ‘physical and psychological process of reacting to and coping with events and situations that place extraordinary pressure on human being'.

There are two types of stress, namely 'Eustress' and 'Distress'. Eustress is the presence of optimum level of stress in an individual which contributes positively to his performance. This may lead individuals to new and better ways of doing their jobs. It has also been established that a perception of his or her control over the environment has a definite impact on the stress-health relationship (Murphy, 1988). When the level of stress leads to a situation that it affects the body and mind of an individual it is called 'Distress'.

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Job stress or Occupational stress is defined as 'a condition arising from the interaction of people and their jobs and characterized by changes within people that force them to deviate from their normal functioning' (Selye, 1999). One of the most notable contributors to the field of Occupational Stress, Karasek (1990), says that job stress occurs because the 'demands' of employment exceed the 'controls' of the individual needed to interact with those demands. Researchers have linked job stress with higher rates of heart disease and other physical ailments and are now engaged in exploring the psychological effects of working long hours or being disenchanted with a job (Lansbergis, 1992).

An intriguing problem facing stress researchers has been the individual variability of stress reaction. People respond differently to stress, and also not all people are equally vulnerable to its effect. It is also opined that the experience of stress is a very personal matter (Goldberger and Breznitz, 1986), and each person must have developed his or her own coping styles for getting through life successfully and it is the breakdown of these coping patterns that cause stress in a person. Even when exposed to a minor stressful situation, certain people experience high level of stress and become ill, while others experience much less stress and remain calm and composed. Studies have established that perfectionists are more depressed than non-perfectionists when stress is high (Joiner & Schmidt, 1995).

Carroll and White (1984) are of the opinion that work related stress is inevitable and workers vary in their ability to cope well with stress. Further, the ever increasing competition, advancement of technology, demands for transformation in strategies, structure, efficiency, etc. have placed the coping skills of personnel under constant dynamism. Quite a few studies available in the field are worth considering. Dunnette, 1976; Ghosh, 1981; and Mohanthy, 1986 established that job stress factors are related to variables like role ambiguity, role conflict, need for achievement, organizational effectiveness, etc.

Singh (1997) opined that distress symptoms arise only when appropriate coping responses are not forthcoming in the wake of threats or demands. If a person feels that he has enough resources to respond to demands, they may be having control over the environmental demands. So, it can very well be inferred that a person's control or perceived control is directly related to his competence or the perceived ability to respond to stressful demands.

The work of Pestonjree (1999) in the area of Stress Tolerance Limit (STL) is worth noting. While presenting a model with respect to STL, he proposed that stress originates from any of the three areas, namely job and organisation, social sector, and intra-psychic sector. According to him, job and organisations refers to the totality of work environment which includes task, atmosphere, colleagues, compensations, policies, etc. Social sector refers to social/cultural contexts in one's life which includes religion, caste, language, dress, etc. The intra psychic sector includes those things which are innate and personal to the individual which includes temperament, values, abilities, health, etc. An individual is said to be in a balanced state when an individual is able to handle the stress emanating from all the three sectors, and is in consonance with the STL. When stress from any of the three areas are so loaded, become unmanageable, and exceeds the STL, negative consequences become apparent with stress related diseases emerging. If this situation persists, it may further lead to disintegration of personality requiring psychological and medical care.

Research, for example Mesler, (1994) has established that sickness is best understood not in terms of the nature of the stressful events to which an individual is exposed but in terms of the magnitude of the individual's physiological and psychological responses to the stressors. The magnitude of response is said to determine the likelihood of sickness or illness. Further, an individual do not respond to events, but to his perception of events.

Stress research has also significantly added to the medical literature over the past twenty years or so. We now know that work can be an exciting source of challenge where potentials and capabilities of the self are discovered and utilised. This positive stress perspective has been termed 'eustress'. However, work stress is said to lead to one of the most
universal and intense kinds of 'distress'. Distress is often viewed as a malady, needing treatment. Definitions and theories have evolved in the recent past with models in hand explaining the etiology of work related stress and the subsequent negative psychological (anxiety and depression) and physical effects (heart disease and hypertension). One of the most notable contributors to the field of Occupational Stress, Karasek (1990), says that job stress occurs because the 'demands' of employment exceed the 'controls' of the individual needed to interact with those demands.

The Karasek 'Demand-Control Job Strain Model' has highlighted two key workplace conditions that increase hypertension: high psychological demands combined with little control in meeting those demands. People with high job demands describe themselves as "working very fast", "working very hard" and not having "enough time to get the job done". And employees with little workplace controls describe themselves as lacking the ability and/or authority to make decisions or impact their job. In recent studies, this model has included a third factor: the beneficial effects of workplace social support. Simply stated, if the demands placed on a person at work are higher than the perceptions of control, job strain will occur.

The results of job strain are clearly detrimental to both corporations and individuals. In California, for example, job related stress complaints are the number one disability reported, and cost hundreds of millions of dollars annually. Overall, in the United States, the economic costs of job stress, including absenteeism and lost productivity, are difficult to estimate but could be as high as several billion dollars per year.

According to Lansbergis (1992), aside from economic factors, the negative relationship between work and mental and physical health is of great concern. Adding to a growing body of evidence that workplace stress is harmful, researchers have linked job strain with higher rates of heart disease and other physical ailments and are exploring the psychological effects of working long hours or being disenchanted with a job.

One specific physical problem associated with job strain is hypertension. Hypertension is the world's number one disease, with an estimated 500 million people worldwide currently afflicted. In the United States, 50 million have people have high blood pressure and estimates are that another 50 million are on their way to acquiring the condition. Ironically, in 95% of hypertensive cases the cause is unknown (American Heart Association). While estimates of proportion to heart disease, possibly due to job strain, vary greatly between studies, Karasek and Theorell (1990) calculate that nearly a quarter of all heart disease could be prevented if we reduced the levels of job strain.

In one of the most comprehensive studies so far examining the relationship between hypertension and job strain, Schnall (1998) followed nearly 200 men for three years and found that those with the most job strain had significantly higher blood pressure than those with the least. Employees with highly demanding jobs that allow little latitude for making decisions have 3 to 5 times higher blood pressure and are at greater risk of heart disease than workers who do not experience such job strain. Ironically, the study also found that men who were initially in high-stress jobs but moved to low-strain positions saw their blood pressure readings fall over time. In fact, their follow-up blood pressure readings were nearly the same as those who had never been employed in high-stress jobs.

It is not surprising to find that researchers now want to discover whether the effects of job strain are similar for women. Indeed, Blumenthol (1995) demonstrated that the consequences of job strain are more severe for women than for men. Women in this study, who were identified as experiencing job strain, also had higher systolic blood pressure than women with low reports of job strain. Furthermore, women in this study who reported high job strain had higher systolic blood pressure than men in high strain or low strain jobs, and maintained elevated levels even after leaving work. Much of this may be due to the fact that many women who work are also mothers and wives, and therefore continue to `work' after leaving their place of employment, returning home to cook, clean, and work with the children on schoolwork.

Stress tolerance is a term related to effective coping and coping strategies. It is the ability of a person to handle emotionally charged situations and to resist burnout, in demanding environments. Stress
tolerance is defined as the ability to endure stress, strain and pain without serious harm (Carson and Butler, 1998). In the words of Pestonjee (1999), STL is made up of four components namely, Depression proneness, Anxiety proneness, anger and Type A behaviour. The job and organisational loads may at sometimes become unmanageable thus going beyond the STL wherein an individual may face the danger of disintegration of personality. Further, certain personality and attitudinal constructs like self-esteem, locus-of-control, learned helplessness, anxiety, adjustment, etc. have been found to be influential constructs in the area of STL. A person who is not adjusted is likely to be highly stressful even due to the slightest frustration or pressure.

Research Methodology

The data for the research study has been collected by way of reliable and valid Questionnaire. As many as 75 media personnel, consisting of print and visual media who have been accredited to the Press Club, Thiruvananthapuram were subjected to the study.

Sampling

Responses were collected from 75 print and visual media personnel out of the total of 202 accredited members of the Press Club, Thiruvananthapuram. There were 51 Male media personnel and 24 female media personnel. They belonged to the age group ranging from 20 to 50 years. Out of the 51 male respondents, 40 were married and 11 were unmarried while 23 among female respondents were married and just one member belonged to the unmarried category. (Table 1)

Tool used

The tool used for the present study was Stress Tolerance Inventory (Sanandaraj M. S, Reshmi. C.S, 2001, Dept. of Psychology, University of Kerala). The Stress Tolerance Inventory having 30 items was used. Personal Data Sheet was used to collect demographic particulars. Statistical techniques like Correlation analysis, Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), etc. were used to analyze the data.

Limitations

The study was restricted only to the accredited media personnel of Thiruvananthapuram Press Club and more work has to be done to find out the STL among the media personnel in other districts of the State. The study was limited to an experimental group of media personnel alone. Another similar control group was not studied due to the paucity of time, and had it been studied a comparison of the STL could have been arrived at.

Analysis of Data and Results

The data collected was analysed using statistical techniques like ANOVA, t-test, etc. The results are discussed in the following section:

The Mean was found out to be 67.43, median as 65, mode as 62 and Standard deviation as 9.126. (Refer Table 3)

The respondents were first categorised into three groups in the following manner.
1. High group (those having higher STL)
2. Medium group (those with medium STL)
3. Low group (those with low STL)

Those respondents with the numerical value above the score of 71.993 which was arrived at by adding half of Standard deviation with Mean were categorised as High group, the Low group pertains to those respondents who have the numerical value below the score of 62.867, which was calculated by subtracting half of Standard deviation from Mean. All those respondents whose scores fall between the above two scores were pertaining to the middle group. It was found that 20 respondents pertain to the High group, and 25 belonged to the Low Stress Tolerance group and 30 in the middle group.

The total score of the instrument is 150; however, it can be found that the mean score of the entire group studied is only 67.43. In this regard, it is worth noting that the arrived score is just less than half of the total score of 150. This denotes that the media personnel are having low STL in general.

Results

On the basis of the analysis carried out the following
are the results which were arrived at

1. Out of the 75 respondents, there were 51 male journalists out of which 40 were married and 11 were unmarried. Among 24 women respondents, 23 were married and only 1 was unmarried. (Table 1)

2. On the basis of the Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), it is clearly found that there is no significant relation between the age group of respondents considered with the value of 1.834 being not significant.

3. On the basis of the analysis, it is found out that there is a marginal higher level of STL among visual media personnel (the value being 68.98) than that of the Print media personnel (the value being 64.5). The t-value of -2.067 being significant at 0.05 level. This could be mainly because of the fact that of the extreme competition between the visual media personnel owing to the increasing number of television channels.

4. It is also found out that the is not much difference in the level of work being carried out by different age group media personnel and so there could be the same level of STL among the print media personnel.

5. As many as 41% of the respondents belong to the age group of 20-25 years, 25% in the age group of 26-30 years, 24% in the age group of 31-36 years.

6. Further it was found out that a large number of respondents highlighted the fact that they are being subjected to overworking by way of not having proper working hours thus paving way for low STL.

7. While there was higher level of STL among the married groups, the STL was low among the unmarried.

**Strategic Model for Stress Tolerance**

Based on the above study carried out, a strategic model was developed to explain how to cope with stress reactions. The reactions are received and analysed by the environment which, in turn, bounces back signals to the individual to bring about a change either at the organismic level or at the response level. The details related to the model are highlighted in Figure 1.

However, when most of the stress related diseases emerge and this situation persists, we move on to the next stage in which we start operating beyond the STL. Several types of breakdowns and cracks are observable (Fig 2). If this situation is left unchecked, it may culminate in the last and most intense stage wherein complete disintegration of personality takes place. At this stage, the individual requires proper psychological and medical care (Fig 3).

**Recommendations**

Though we know that stress has become an inevitable part of the social functioning of an individual, it cannot be assumed that stress is an unmanageable affair. A planned effort from the part of the individual as well as from the side of management is sure to help a lot in enabling an individual to tolerate the level of stress. Strategies from the part of the organization- Stress can be managed to a large extent at different levels of operation through organizational interventions such as carrying out stress audits.

**Carrying out Stress Audits**- Stress audit, which is a four stage HRD/OD intervention which is utilized by organizations to overcome prevailing stress where in the four phases are as follows:

- **Phase 1**- carrying out an exploration on Stress tolerance limit (STL) with the help of psychometric instruments in terms of anxiety proneness, depression proneness, need profile etc.

- **Phase 2**- Identifying the dominant organizational role stress dimensions, some of the key dimensions being Role stagnation, Role overload, Resource inadequacy, Roe stagnation, Role erosion, Roe ambiguity etc.

- **Phase 3**- Collecting qualitative data on stress variables and their effects on individual health and performance through structured interviews.

- **Phase 4**- Based on the results obtained in the first three phases, remedial measures are suggested to the organization for implementing needed modification and changes in the activities and practices.
The key objectives of stress audit would be mainly to identify the stressors at various levels in
the organization, identifying the dominant personality profile in terms of anxiety, anger,
depression, values, motivation etc and determining remedial measures such as training,
counselling and readjustment to enhance effectiveness of the organization.

**Carrying out Stress Management Training programmes** for workers, counselling services or
Stress reduction or intervention programmes

**Moderating the intensity of job stressors** and the strains caused because of that by way of the
effect of other variables of positive value such as high wages, increments, participative decision
making etc.

**Role efficacy as a Stress reducer** - Role related stress affect the work culture adversely and
increases fatigue and also reduces an individual's potential to work efficiently and reduces the STL.
Enhancing role efficacy would lead to better STL maintenance. Improvement in the quality of
performance is not merely a function of “hardware” improvement but depends to a large extent
on the human side of the organisations.

**Coping strategies such as** Practising yoga, avoiding confrontation, improving self image,
developing the act of patient listening, unwinding and going on a vacation, delegation of authority,
learning to say “No” etc are also some of the ways to maintain better STL.

Better stress tolerance level could be maintained from the part of an individual too. The ways of
coping with stress and maintaining high STL are

? Believe in Bhagavad-Gita philosophy- “Your right is to do the job and not to expect the
fruits thereof” (Karmanyevaadhikaarasthae maa phaleshu kathaachana”

? Accept situations as they are and remind you that work is not everything.

? Rather than thinking of the time you had waste, think of the time that you had spent
fruitfully and how you could convert the remaining time in a fruitful manner.

? Taking excessive demands as a challenge.

? Perceive the stressful job situation as just a
temporary situation.

? Believe that time itself would take care of the situations.

**Suggestions for further research**

The present study being restricted to accredited media personnel, a detailed study has to be carried out with
respect to similar groups such as police personnel, crime reporters, teachers etc so that a comparison
could be made.

**APPENDICES: - TABLES AND CHARTS**

**Table 1:** Classification of Samples Based on Gender and Marital Status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Married</th>
<th>Unmarried</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Primary Data

**Table 2:** ANOVA denoting the age of respondents total

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of Variation</th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>584.681</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>146.170</td>
<td>*1.834</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>5577.665</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>79.681</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>6162.347</td>
<td>74</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* No significant difference

**Table 3:** Mean, Median & Mode

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No. of respondents</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>67.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mode</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Std. Deviation</td>
<td>9.126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variance</td>
<td>83.275</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Source: Primary Data
Table 4: Data and Result of t-test for Comparison of STL of Print and Visual Media Personnel

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>t</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Print</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>64.5</td>
<td>5.101</td>
<td>-2.067*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>68.98</td>
<td>10.379</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: * Significant at 0.05 level
Source: Primary Data

Table 5: (Age wise Classification)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>No.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20 to 25</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 to 30</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 to 35</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36 to 40</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40 to 45</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Age Wise classification

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