

Positive Orientation as an Effective Stress Management Tool

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“A man is but the product of his thoughts. What he thinks, he becomes.”
Mahatma Gandhi, Indian leader

Abstract

Stress is a condition or feeling experienced when a person perceives that demands exceed the personal and social resources the individual is able to mobilize. Generally people use word “stress” in negative sense. In the era of workplace uncertainty and demand for continuous change stress is inevitable. Though there are many approaches which provide prevention against stress, but today is the time to shift from preventive approach towards positive approach, so individuals must try to think positively and keep positive orientation or outlook towards different domains of life to manage stress. Our research contributes in enhancing individual personality traits and inculcating positive attitude towards work and life. Using a Qualitative research methodology our objective is to examine a sample of banking professionals who face stress in their day to day work and its consequences on their life& also the measures they take to manage stress. The study focuses on their orientation towards work and life and tries to determine how positive orientation helps them to overcome stress. When it comes down to it, positive, optimistic people are happier and healthier, and enjoy more success than those who think negatively. The key difference between them is how they think about and interpret the stress in their life. The findings highlight the coping strategies to manage stress positively at individual and organizational level.

Introduction

Stress is a phenomenon which is increasingly affecting all countries and all professions. It has become part and parcel of our lives and moreover it is a consequence of our modern workplaces and modern living styles. Whenever we talk about stress we often talk about its negative consequences which is only one sided. However if we deal with stress appropriately it can also result in positive consequences which are far better than negatives. Basically, stress is divided into eustress and distress. Eustress is positive or good stress, whereas distress is the stress reactions to those events or actions appraised as being negative.

NIOSH National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (part of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services) defines Job Stress as “the harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when the requirements of the job do not match the capabilities, resources, or needs of the worker. Job stress can lead to poor health and even injury.”

Positive Orientation Towards Stress

We often talk about work stress and its negative impact on performance. But today in 21st century stress is inevitable part of work. Learning to manage it positively is the key to success. Positive Psychology is an approach to manage stress which aims at avoiding negative aspects of human behavior.

Indeed, some studies show that personality traits like optimism and pessimism can affect many areas of your health and well-being. The positive thinking that

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typically comes with optimism is a key part of effective stress management. And effective stress management is associated with many health benefits.

“If you tend to be pessimistic, don’t despair - you can learn positive thinking skills.”

Understanding Positive Orientation

Positive Orientation doesn’t mean ignoring unpleasant situations. Positive Orientation just means approaching the unpleasantness in a more positive and productive way. Thinking that best is going to happen not worst. Positive Orientation can be measured through unspoken thoughts that run throughout every day. These automatic thoughts can be positive or negative. Some of your thoughts come from logic and reason. Others may arise from misconceptions that an individual creates because of lack of information. If all the thoughts throughout the day summed up and most of them are negative then it can be said that outlook on life is pessimistic and negatively oriented, similarly if most of them are positive it can be said that outlook on life is optimistic and positively oriented.

The Health Benefits of Positive Orientation

Researchers continue to explore the effects of positive thinking and optimism on health. Health benefits that positive thinking may provide include:

- Increased life span
- Lower rates of depression
- Lower levels of distress
- Greater resistance to the common cold
- Better psychological and physical well-being
- Reduced risk of death from cardiovascular disease
- Better coping skills during hardships and times of stress

People who are positively oriented experience these health benefits. One theory is that having a positive outlook enables you to cope better with stressful situations, which reduces the harmful health effects of stress on your body. It’s also thought that positive

and optimistic people tend to live healthier lifestyles- they get more physical activity, follow a healthier diet, and don’t smoke or drink alcohol in excess.

Significance of Research

The purpose of this study is to determine that stress is an individual phenomenon rather than organizational, so that each and every individual analyses their own approach towards dealing with stress if they are going for preventive measures towards dealing with stress it might be they are complaining the system, underperforming, needs extra time to look for themselves etc. breaking their own ladders of success. But if they try to deal with each and every situation at workplace positively it might be they can analyse their own limitations and try to correct the same rather than blaming the system. Positive people face challenges positively as and when they come and move further breaking all hurdles.

Scope of the Study

The proposed research work is limited to analyzing the role of positive orientation in stress management, though there are many other factors helpful in stress management. The study provides an insight into how optimistic people face less stress as compared to pessimistic and people with negative thoughts.

Review of Literature

A review on the previous studies on stress among the employees is necessary to know the areas already covered. This will help to find our new areas uncovered and to study them in depth. The earlier studies made on stress management among the employees are briefly reviewed here.

- Kumari and Pandey (2011): “A Case Study of Avatar Steel Industries” In this work authors had done analysis on stress management of Avatar steel industries, Chennai. A sample size of 100 was taken for the purpose of analysis And concluded that Almost all the respondents are satisfied with the physical and psychological working condition of the organization It was found that much of the stress at work is caused not only by work overload and time pressure but

also by lack of rewards and praise, and more importantly, by not providing individuals with the autonomy to do their work as they would like.

- Uma Devi .T (2011) : “A Study on Stress Management and Coping Strategies With Reference to IT Companies” Stress has become significant due to dynamic social factor and changing needs of life styles. A survey of 200 IT employees in and around Hyderabad is done. Some of the stress coping strategies identified by this study includes stress management programs, physical activities planned in job design, life style modification programs, finding triggers and stressors, supportive organization culture, stress counseling programs, and spiritual programs.
- Pandey, Satish C. (2005): “Time to Manage Stress Positively”. In this article author proposed Positive mental health (PMH) model and discussed about its benefits and its role in managing stress and concluded that defining and measuring ‘positive mental health’ at the group and organizational levels is the biggest challenge .
- James Campbell Quick, David Mack, Joanne H Gavin, and Cary L Cooper, Jonathan D Quick (2003): “Executives: Engines for Positive Stress”. In this chapter, authors explored a principle-based framework for executive action to create positive, constructive stress for people at work.
- Fred Luthans (2002): Fred Luthans in his book Organization behavior defined positive organizational behavior (POB) as the study and application of positively-oriented human resource strengths and psychological capacities that can be measured, developed, and effectively managed for performance improvement in today’s workplace. The Author identified five major components of POB – confidence (self-efficacy), hope, optimism, subjective well-being (happiness) and emotional intelligence. He

proposed that his positive OB model could be very useful to HR practitioners in developing stress management interventions for organizations.

Research Gaps

Though there are many studies related to stress management giving factors of stress and measures to prevent stress at organizational and individual level, but less research has been found on positive approach on stress management at individual level.

Objectives

- To find out factors which causes stress among banking professionals.
- To find out orientation of professionals towards work and life and how does it help in stress management.

Hypothesis

- H_{01} : Positive orientation does not significantly reduces stress
- H_{a1} : Positive orientation significantly reduces stress

Methodology and Data collection

Sample Size

40 bank employees selected on the basis of convenient sampling

Data Collection

Primary Data was collected using a structured questionnaire. The respondents surveyed with a view to gain information regarding their orientation towards life and how it affects their stress levels. The questionnaire contained questions to know their optimistic and pessimistic reactions towards various situations at workplace.

Statistical Tools

Relation between Orientation of individual and their level of stress is identified using Correlation analysis. Testing of hypothesis is done using Chi-Square test.

Data Analysis & Interpretation

On the basis of questionnaire filled by respondents which consists of questions in two sets to judge there orientation and consequently there stress level and on the basis of answers given by them they were rated and scores were calculated individuals with high scores on first set were judged as highly positive and with low scores were judged as less positive or negative. Individuals with high score on second set were judged as being in high stress and that with low score were judged as less stress or no stress.

Age Wise Stress Level Score of Respondents

The Figure I and Table I shows the stress level of the respondents of different age groups.

Karl Pearson's coefficient of correlation $r = 0.440316$

Inference: The positive value of r proves that Positive correlation exists between Age and stress level of individual as age increases stress level also increases.

Work Experience & Stress level score of respondents

Inference: It is clear from Table II as work experience increases stress level decreases. Out of 40 respondents 10 were found to be optimistic and positive, 5 were found to be trying to be optimistic and positive and 25 were found to be negative and pessimistic

As per orientation of individual ranks are given to them with more optimistic securing highest rank.

Karl Pearson's coefficient of correlation $r = 0.997949$

Inference: Positive correlation between orientation of individual and its stress level. The stress level reduces as individual move from pessimistic to optimistic orientation.

Factors Causing Stress

Factors which causes more stress on an average

Inference: The figure II shows factors reported by employees which cause maximum stress. The most important ones are work load, Organization environment, threat of being in wrong profession and Negative thinking. Table IV Depicts that out of 40 respondent's number of people with negative

thinking are 25 and number of people with positive thinking people are 40-25=15.

Orientation and Level of Stress

Inference: The scores attained from questionnaire shows that from among 40 respondent's positive oriented people are 15 out of which only 5 are in stress i.e. 33 % (approx.) And Negative oriented people are 25 out of which 15 are in stress i.e. 60%. Thus positively oriented people face less stress as compared to negatively oriented people. It is clear from the above graph that In stress people are more among Negative oriented people as compared to positive oriented people. (Table V and Figure III)

Hypothesis Testing

Chi-square Test : The calculated value of chi square 2.667 at 5% level of significance The calculated value is lower than tabular value = 3.84, hence the null hypothesis is accepted.

Thus we conclude that value is greater than calculated value i.e. $3.84 > 2.7$ (approx.) this accept our hypothesis that positive orientation significantly reduces stress.

Recommendations

Stress Management and Coping Strategies

From the above discussion it is clear that stress is inevitable moreover it is a challenge which every individual has to face being in any profession, it depends on individual how he or she is coping with it, however there are many strategies suggested by well-known researchers to prevent from stress and its negative consequences. Two of the most important approaches are

- Stress management programs teach individuals about the nature and sources of stress, the effects of stress on health, and personal skills to reduce stress—for example, time management or relaxation exercises.
- Organizational change to reduce job stress by bringing in a consultant to recommend ways to improve working conditions. This approach is the most direct way to reduce stress at work. It involves the identification

of stressful aspects of work (e.g., excessive workload, conflicting expectations) and the design of strategies to reduce or eliminate the identified stressors.

- Positive Orientation requires individuals to look for their own traits and find out positivity and negativity in them and try to convert all negatives in positives
- Adoption of positive psychology like well-being, contentment and satisfaction (from the past), hope and optimism (for the future); and flow and happiness (in the present) and positive individual traits as courage, interpersonal skill, aesthetic sensibility, perseverance, forgiveness, originality, future mindedness, spirituality, high talent and wisdom move individuals towards better citizenship responsibility, nurturance, altruism, civility, moderation, tolerance and work ethic.

Conclusion

From the above research it is concluded that though the focus was on positive approach towards stress management but there are other factors which seems to be considered while dealing with stress like age and work experience. In our research it is shown that as age increases stress level also increases and stress level decreases as work experience increases similarly there are other demographic variables like gender,

marital status, designation etc. In further research all these factors with positive approach could be taken but our research proves that positive approach is far better than preventive approach as positive approach helps to eliminate stress before it starts whereas preventive approaches are applied when stress is already there or there are some signs of it.

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Table I : Age and Stress Level of Employees

| Age | No of respondents | Stress level Score |
|--------------|-------------------|--------------------|
| 24 | 3 | 10 |
| 25 | 4 | 12 |
| 26 | 8 | 11 |
| 27 | 5 | 13 |
| 28 | 6 | 12 |
| 29 | 2 | 15 |
| 30 | 4 | 17 |
| 31 | 1 | 13 |
| 32 | 1 | 18 |
| 34 | 2 | 12 |
| 35 | 1 | 10 |
| 37 | 3 | 18 |
| Total | 40 | |

Table II : Work Experience and Stress Scores

| Work Experience (yrs) | No of respondents | Risk of being in stress | No stress Scores |
|-----------------------|-------------------|-------------------------|------------------|
| upto 5 | 22 | 8 | 14 |
| 5 to 10 | 9 | 1 | 8 |
| 10 to 15 | 7 | Nil | 7 |
| 15 to 20 | 2 | Nil | 2 |

Table III: Orientation and Stress Level

| Orientation | Rank | Average Stress Level |
|------------------------------------|------|----------------------|
| Pessimistic & negative | 3 | 18 |
| Trying to be optimistic & positive | 2 | 10 |
| Optimistic and positive | 1 | 0 |

Table IV : Factors which Causes more Stress on an Average

| Factors causing stress | No of respondents |
|------------------------|-------------------|
| Work Load | 36 |
| Org environment | 33 |
| Wrong Profession | 22 |
| Negative thinking | 25 |

Table V : Orientation and Level of Stress

| Orientation | Stress Level | |
|----------------------|--------------|-----------|
| | In Stress | No stress |
| Positive Orientation | 5 | 10 |
| Negative Orientation | 15 | 10 |

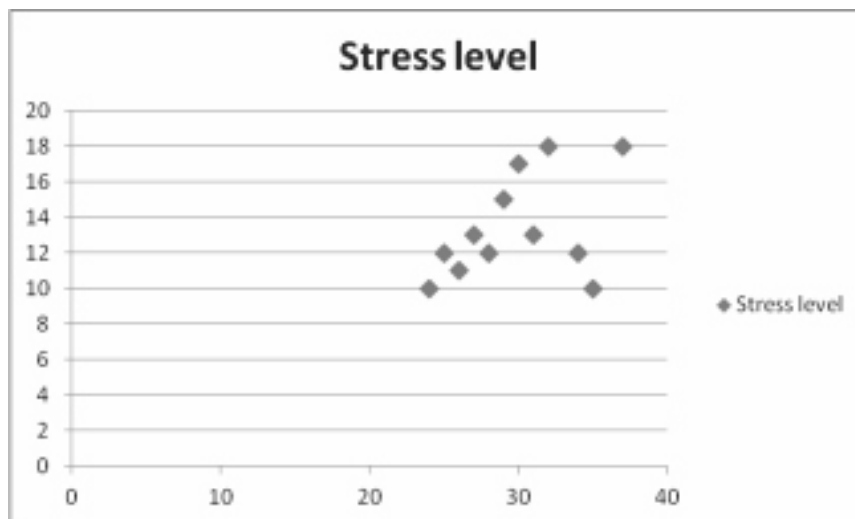


Figure I : Age and Stress Level of Employees

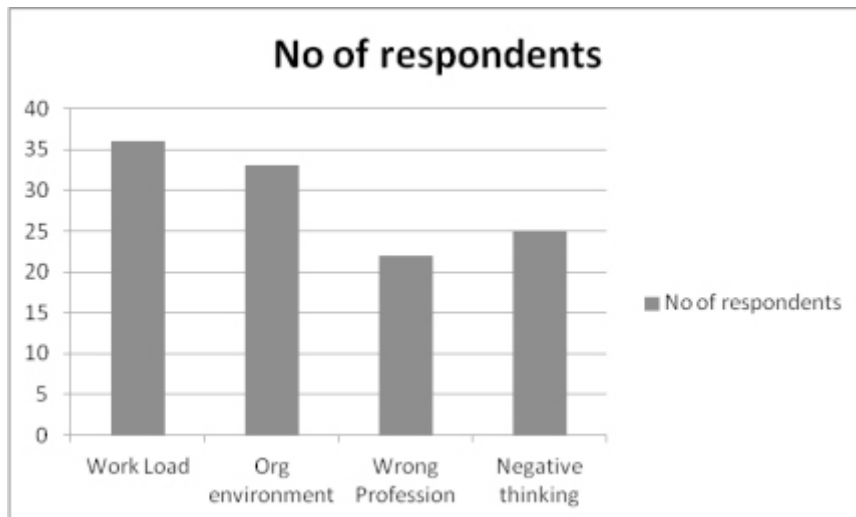


Figure II : Factors which Causes more Stress on an Average

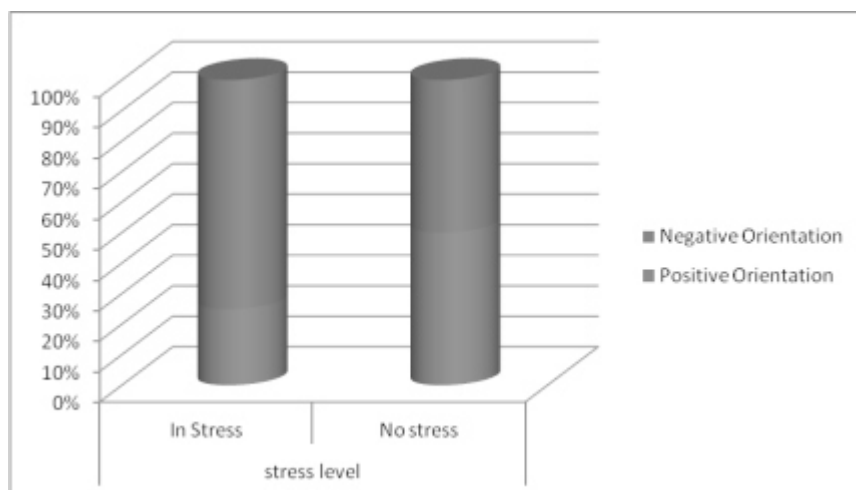


Figure III : Orientation and Level of Stress