Stress Management and psychological aspects of workforces – causes, consequences and Management strategies

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Abstract

Today's workforce has been compressed in a stressful working environment that primarily includes facing deadlines, targets, crammed meetings, unrealistic workloads and other possible stress- causing events. This workplace stress directly affects employees' physical and mental health as well as workplace productivity. Therefore, it is very important that the management address the stress of the work force and implement strategies that help employees in coping up with stress. Stress management is a synergistic approach, where both the management and employees have to collaborate and deal with it for a resulting organizational health. The strategic role of employee management is that it should hold significant power in transforming the organizational culture that constantly supports and facilitates the physical and mental health of the workforce, by taking necessary measures that prioritize employee stress reduction in no time. The psychological well-being of the employees plays a vital role in the organization which leads to employee commitment and improved job performance. This paper discusses the concepts of stress management, the psychological well-being of the work force and the possible stressors and their consequences. It also points out the various strategies for implementation to overcome workplace stress and promote the psychological well-being of the employees.

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Introduction:

The livelihood of individuals depends on the preservation of a complex and dynamic equilibrium known as homeostasis, which is continuously threatened by internal or external forces known as stressors, which can be psychological or physiological in nature. As a result, stress is characterized as a state of threatened or perceived threatened homeostasis, which is re-established by a complex list of responses. According to the World Health Organization, stress is a major issue in today's world, affecting people's physical and mental health. "A situation in which the organism's homeostasis is threatened or the organism perceives a situation as threatening is termed as stress". (Citation missing)

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health of the US defines workplace 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, in turn, lead to poor health and even injury". Professions and population groups have different levels of stress. Some employees are more susceptible to stress than others. Younger workers, women and those in lower-skilled jobs, are the most vulnerable to work-related stress and its consequences.

Review of Literature:

Cam T.H.Tran, Hieu T.M.Tran, Huy. T.M.Nguyen, Dung. N. Mach (2020) in the paper "Stress management in the modern workplace and the role of Human resource professionals", have focused on the management of stress in the workplace especially relevant to the covid-19 era where HR managers have a constant and integral role in framing and implementing policies to safeguard employee's physical and psychological health as well as better working conditions. In this study, the authors aim in identifying and evaluating various potential dimensions of workplace stress. The research has been conducted among five experienced heads and managers of the companies in the Vietnam region. The outcome of the study classified workplace stress into three main categories. They are acute stress, episodic acute stress and chronic stress which are the primary cause of workplace stress. In this study, the authors also proposed three different measures namely, physiological, psychological, and autonomic methods in measuring the stress at the workplace. The paper also reviewed the four important aspects like cognitive, emotional, physical and behavioral symptoms to effectively

evaluate the stress reduction strategy. According to the study, it is found that human resource managers play a major role in managing the stress of the employees in the workplace. They implement primary, secondary and tertiary approaches to stress management strategies. The outcome of the study deals with examining the relationship between individual, organizational and financial impacts of workplace stress. This study also identified four key problems faced by the employees in the workplace that includes identifying the sources of stress, identifying ways to reduce stress, conflict resolution methods and developing recommendations and strategies to reduce stress at the workplace.

Ivana Katic, Tatjana Knezevic, Nennanja Berber et.al. (2019) suggest the guidelines to ensure optimization of effective organizational management style and creating a balancing environment between work life and personal life of the employees to reduce stress at the workplace. The main objective of the paper was to analyze the relationship between managerial styles, working style, the lifestyle of the employees and stress at the workplace. About 618 samples were used for the research and their stress level was determined using a questionnaire; correlation method was used to ascertain the relationship (if any) among them. . This study contributes to analyzing the role of managerial styles as well as personal and working lifestyles in reducing and managing the stress of the employees at the workplace. From the study, it was found that there should be a modification in managerial styles so that it can help employees in balancing their work life and personal life and can help them in coping up with the stress at the workplace. The study points out that a supportive managerial style should be implemented for effective management of stress at the workplace.

Abhijeet Rawal, Sneha Mhatre (2018) state that stress has become an important issue as it may harm the physical and mental well-being of the employee at the workplace. In this work, the authors attempted to identify various reasons for stress among lecturers and suggested various techniques to cope with stress and its impact at the workplace. The study also considers employees' behavior and their attitude towards productivity, while studying the impact of stress at the workplace. The study found that teachers mostly faced stress due to working conditions, they felt overburdened with workload and consequently, they took leave frequently.

Kamaldeep Bhui, Sokratis Dinos, Magdalena Galant et.al (2016) in their paper "Perceptions of work stress causes and effective interventions in employees working in public, private and

non-governmental organizations: a qualitative study", conducted a qualitative interview with 51 employees to identify the reasons of the stress at   the workplace in private and public organizations. The results of the study indicated that   management practices and working conditions are the major reasons for   workplace stress. From the study, it is also found that unrealistic job and task demands, lack of management and leadership support, imbalance in effort and reward, role conflict, communication problem, inequality, lack of motivation were the possible stress-   inducing agents. The authors also discussed two important management interventions as an   attempt in managing stress. They are organizational intervention and individual intervention techniques. Organizational intervention includes prior planning of work tasks, improved styles of management, taking breaks and physical exercise. Individual intervention technique includes   providing complementary therapy, helpline coaching and counseling to the employees.

Vandana (2016)   in her paper "Stress management: Effects and coping strategies at workplace among employees"   , refers to stress as a man's adaptive response to an outward stimulus which leads to physiological, psychological and behavioral changes.   The author also states that stress management is an effective mechanism of reducing stress at the workplace and that stress management techniques help in improving the conditions of the workforce who have been affected by the stress. The author also makes a note that if the stress is identified and well-managed it could make the employee more constructive and productive which is   positive stress or Eustress. In this paper, the author aims to study the different levels of stress of the employees in the workplace and suggests various coping strategies as a way of managing stress. The coping strategies addressed by the author includes   scheduling stress management programs, job redesign, lifestyle modification of the employees, including physical activities and relaxation programs, identifying workplace stressors and taking measures to reduce them, developing supportive work culture, planning for spiritual and stress counseling programs. The author, through this study, concludes that mediation and developing a positive attitude towards the work are the best techniques in managing stress at the workplace.

Smruti Rekha Sahoo (2016) in her paper aims at understanding the various symptoms of stress and developing management strategies to cope up with stress at the workplace. From the study, the author has found that the major reason for work-related stress is the underlying gap between the organization's job demands and the lack of resources as well as capabilities of the

employees in meeting the job demands. Therefore, the author suggests that this gap should be addressed and closed for reducing job-   related uncertainties as a way of reducing stress.

G. Kusuma Kumari, Dr. Sarada devi, (2016)   focused on analyzing stress among working women, who usually suffer from psychological and physical harassment at the workplace apart from stress related to work. In this study, the authors identified four major reasons for stress among working women. They are: workplace culture, job insecurity, higher job demands on job performance, expansion of newer technology and personal problems. The study was conducted among 100 working women in   Telangana state. The   findings of the study state   that lack of family support and inability to balance work and personal life as the major cause of stress.   A   s a result of such stress, it is found that women-   employees are more frustrated than men-employees;   they   express   anger and get involved in conflicts with their co-workers. Therefore, the authors have suggested that working women need family support and the organization should support their women employees to manage their work and personal life and the organization should incorporate the practice of addressing the women issues and complaints through women grievances and redressal cells.

Azman Ismail, Noorshafine Saudin, Yusof Ismail et.al (2015)   examined the relationship between stress at the workplace and employees' job performance. A   survey was   conducted in a private bank for   the study. From the study, it was found that there was   a significant positive relationship between physiological stress and employee's job performance and that psychological stress had   a significant positive impact on   employee's job performance. Therefore, the authors state that physiological and psychological factors are the two strong stressors that have a greater impact on an employee's job performance. The authors suggest that employee competency mapping should be done to reduce job uncertainties and stress at the workplace, so that it can lead to improved job performance.

Soni Kushwaha (2014), in the paper "Stress management at workplace", refers to stress as the reaction that exerts pressure on the individual or other types of demands placed on them. The author also mentioned that the excessive or long-term pressure at   the workplace on the employees can lead to stress. In this article, the author also states that   the organization cannot   remove all the stressors inherent to them but it is the integral role of the organization along with   the employees to identify which aspects of the working environment are creating stress and difficulties. In this regard, the organization should take measures in creating a stress-

free working environment for the welfare of the employees. In this paper, the author discusses various stress management techniques, measures to reduce stress at the workplace and also the various management interventions in eliminating workplace stress. The stress management techniques include awareness towards stress, developing a healthy lifestyle and time management.

Najmoddin Nekzada, Selamakit Fisseha Tekesta (2013) have conducted a qualitative study in Volvo trucks AB, Umea to identify various causes of stress and how the stress is managed and handled by the employees and the organization. In this study, a semi-structured interview is conducted among six employees; out of six one of the employees works as a therapist in the company. The authors found that heavy workload, working environment, workplace conflicts as the major sources of stress at the workplace. The authors also state that the most effective stress management strategies that can be implemented by both employees and organizations were time management, leisure and relaxation activities as well as developing cordial relationships with peers at the working place.

Different Types of Stress

Workplace Stress:

Workplace stress is characterized as a change in one's physical or mental state as a result of working circumstances that are considered to be a burden or a vulnerability to that employee.

Stressors:

Stressors are the stimulus that causes stress. It can be an activity, event, or another stimulus that causes stress and acts as a source of stress. A stressor is a chemical or biological agent, environmental condition, external stimulus or an event that causes stress to an organism. There are number of factors that serve as the reason for the occurrence of workplace stress. These factors are categorized under 3 major components namely, environmental factors, o organizational factors and personal factors.

Environmental Factors:

Environmental factors constitute economic uncertainty, political uncertainty and changes in technology.

Economic Uncertainty is the change   in the business cycle that   may result in uncertainty that people become anxious about job security.

Political uncertainties   are the political threats and changes resulting into uncertain government policy that affects the investment decisions and work climate of the organization at large, which in turn create stress among the workforce involved in the execution of business activities.

Technology changes -   Innovation can make employees skills and experience   obsolete in a very short   period. This gap in knowledge update   is one of the sources of employees' stress.

Organizational Factors:

Organizational factors include 3 aspects: Task demands, Role demand and Interpersonal demand.

Task demands are related to a person's job which includes the design of the person's   job (task variety, degree of automation), working conditions,   physical work layout. For example, over   crowded   room, visible location, noise, interruption and so on increase anxiety   and stress.

Role demand includes role conflict, role overload and unclear role.

Interpersonal demand is the lack of social support from peer groups and also poor interpersonal relationships create stress.

Personal Factors:

Three components under personal factors are, family, Personality and Individual differences

Family factors include Personal relationships with family members, marital difficulties, breaking off of a relationship, discipline issues of   children.

Personality – Type A and Introvert   personality as well as   emotional people   easily get stressed.

Individual Differences: Perception towards laying off   , job insecurity, voluntary retirement service, family commitments make one stressed. Lack of   social and   mutual understanding in   relationship are causes of stress.
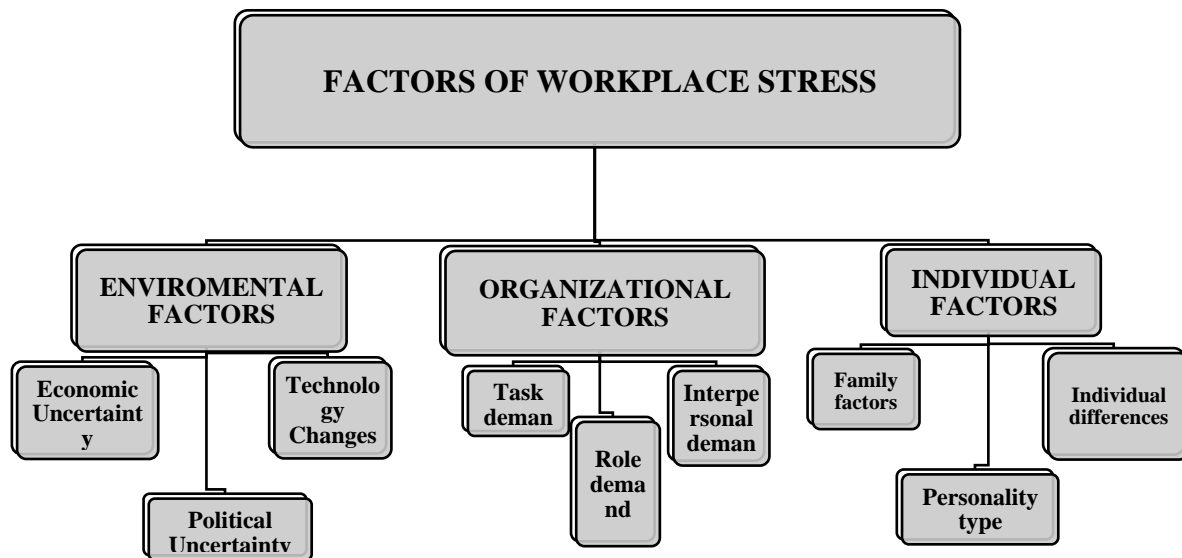
Fig.1 Factors of workplace stress

Types of Stressors:

There are two main types of stressors; they are: e ustress and distress. Eustress is positive stress whereas distress is negative stress.

Consequences of Stress at the Workplace:

Workplace stress shows an adverse effect on two major dimensions namely: Individual dimension and Organizational dimension.

Effects of stress on the individual:

Effects of stress on individuals may again be subdivided into physical, emotional, intellectual and behavioral effects.

Physical effects: This includes

- Body pain, headache
- Migraine
- Increase in blood pressure
- Cardio-vascular disease
- Insomnia

Emotional effects: This includes

- Depression
- Uncontrollable emotions
- Anxiety, fear and fatigue
- Melancholic state and hallucinations

Behavioral effects:

- Consumption of drugs
- Perpetual smoking
- Alcohol   addiction
- Being irregular
- Intellectual effects
- Memory loss
- Poor concentration
- Poor in decision-making
- Lack of motivation
- Poor cognitive ability

Effects of stress on Organization:

Consequently, the individual effects of stress have an adverse effect on the organization which includes the following:

- High absenteeism rate of the employee
- High employee attrition
- Procrastination at work
- Poor time management
- Lower in productivity and performance
- Increased illness, accidents, grievances and complaints
- Lower employee morale
- Increases employee conflicts

- Customer dissatisfaction – Service of a stressful employee leads to poor service quality which in turn results in customer dissatisfaction
- Increased customer complaints
- Problems in service delivery
- Unattained targets
- Missed deadlines

Strategies to Cope Up With Stress:

There is no single method to cope up and manage stress. It is about experiencing and experimenting with different strategies to get relieved from the stress. Some of the individual's strategies for effective management of stress are discussed below:

Strategy 1: Tackling the stressful situations with 4As:

Dealing with stress is an important concern for every individual. Therefore, in a way to tackle stressful situations one should follow 4A's; i.e.: Avoid, Alter, Accept and Adapt . (Citation missing)

Avoid – One should not get trapped into stress-causing situations; it can be avoided before it becomes a large pile.

Alter – If one cannot avoid stressful situations, then one should alter the unpleasant situations that are in one's control into a pleasant one.

Accept – If things are not in one's control and if one cannot alter it, then one must accept what comes in one's way and come out with flying colors.

Adapt – If one cannot change the stressful situations which are not in one's hand, then one can adapt to them by compromising one's level of expectations and developing a positive attitude towards the stress causing event.

Strategy 2: Room for relaxing:

To reduce stress, one can relax and spend time on fun and other favorable activities. This can include going out for a walk, having a chat with friends and family, spending time with nature and pets, reading books, focusing on one's interests and hobbies, listening to music, and watching favorite movies.

Strategy 3: Habitual healthy way of living:

One should do exercise like swimming, walking, aerobics and cycling regularly; should spend some time on Yoga, meditation and other spiritual works; should follow a healthy diet chart; should go to bed early and wake up early in the morning; must avoid excessive sugar and caffeinated food; must avoid substance, drugs; alcohol and other intoxicating drugs; must avoid late-night commitments with work.

Strategy 4: Monitor and regularize your behavior:

One must not procrastinate one's work; one should schedule oneself; one must prioritize the task; one must effectively manage time; one must say 'no' to the task that one cannot do, one should not overpromise and overcommit: one must share one's responsibility with others: one should be optimistic and accept challenges that come one's way.

Profile of Google Inc.

Google is an American - multinational company headquartered in California, US, founded by Larry Page and Sergey Brin. Google is a household name and has become almost equivalent to a verb where people usually refer to "to google" which means to look anything up on the internet. Google Inc. which started from a dorm room now has more than 100 offices around the globe. This multinational company has products that are used by hundreds of people across the globe right from YouTube and Android to Gmail and Google Search. It is well known that Google has consistently bagged the Best employer award on Glassdoor's annual list of 50 best places to work and Fortune magazine's annual list of the top 100 best companies to work for. There are many reasons to quote Google as a Best employer; few of the great practices of Google that makes it best of all are its planning of workspace, creating the most admiring work environment, as well as offering some of the finest employee perks, career development opportunities and work that influences humanity while being innovative.

Work Culture @ Google Inc.

To make work enjoyable, Google offices have various facilities at their workplaces so that the employees can work in a calm and stress-free environment – an ultimate necessity for new ideas to emerge.

1. The workspaces are so made that it creates a pleasant and colorful atmosphere. They have living rooms, cafeterias, (Repeated), restaurants with lavish menus, game rooms and massage centers for workers with free food and drink available round the clock

2. The company has designed a Greenhouse at its headquarters in Pyrmont, Australia where employees can work in total privacy.

3. There is no fixed place to work at Google. A person can do one's work from anywhere, be it indoor/outdoor seating areas in Google. They have sofas, cafes, natural seating arrangements, and whatever vibe the employee chooses, is available at the company.

4. Other amenities which are required after going to one's house are also available at Google. Laundry facilities, capsule pods to take a nap, medical care, fitness facilities are available at Google so that employees can recharge themselves and save time.

5. Google is usually looking out for sanguine people, who are optimists and yet have great ideas and creativity so that the office stays lively throughout the day.

6. Google hires different people by building a network of Culture clubs and locals. This has helped the company build its culture in over 70 offices around the world. The motto of the company is "trust the employees and recruit only those who are better than you while also not confusing yourself with development and managing performance.

Research Methodology

Research Objectives

To know current practices of Google Inc. to manage stress at the workplace

Research Design

The researchers have followed a descriptive research design for this research paper. The researchers have described various initiatives by Google Inc. to reduce stress at the workplace.

Sample

The data for research has been taken from various secondary sources which include research papers, books articles, reports indicating the work culture of Google Inc.

Scope of Research

In the current research work, the researchers have made an attempt to know various practices of Google to reduce stress at the workplace. The researchers have not examined the effect of their initiative on the stress of different employees.

Current Practices of Google Inc.:

1. **The Cool environment at the office:**

   Vibrant colors in office spaces bring out creativity and calmness for employees. It makes them focus their attention on important aspects of the task at hand. Bright Color combinations bring cheer and affect the mood positively for the employees at the workplace which is how usually offices of Google are designed.

(Google office at Zurich which has colors that blend with nature, Source:
Officesnapshots.com)

(Slides at Google offices, Source: Carnews.blogspot.com)

2. **Workout at the Workplace:**

Long office hours often leave no time for employees to focus on their fitness and health which negatively impacts their minds and leads to fatigue and inability to concentrate for long hours. Hence providing medical facilities and gym at the company premises give long benefits along with adequate time to keep oneself fit.

(Google Gym at Hyderabad Office in India, Source:Officesnapshots.com)

3. Stress reliever rather than stress booster

It is bound to be stressful when one has to continuously give his/her best in all the work that he/she does. Many times employees face a high burden of work which calls for short breaks to relax the mind and body. It is important that an employee does not bring his/her work stress at home as it would impact his/her family and social environment adversely. Hence, massage centers, relaxation rooms, gaming areas are some of the many facilities that Google offers to relieve stress which keeps the employees cheerful and their families happy.
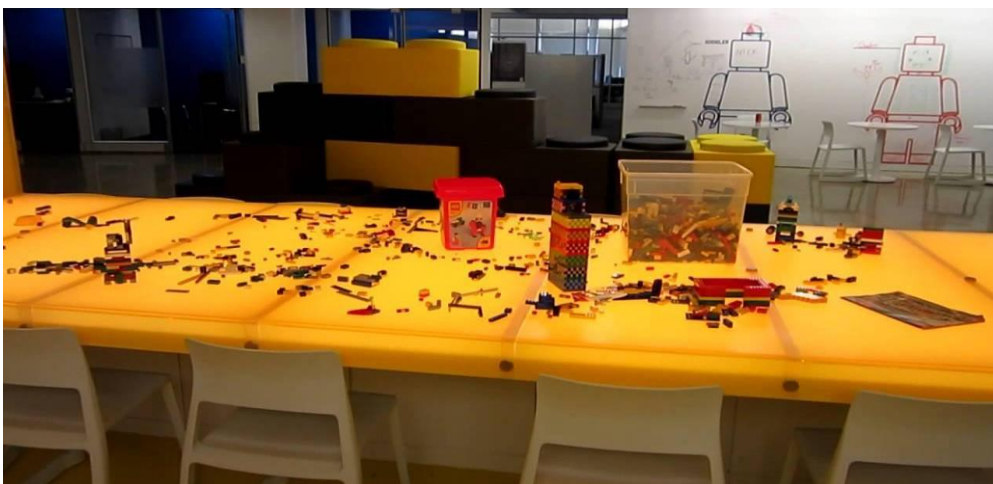

(Google's Massage room, Source: Officechai.com)

(Google's Relaxation Room Source: Officechai.com)

4. Building Trust & Bonding with Colleagues

Team building activities improve relationships among team members, address interpersonal issues and boost critical thinking. Not to mention they are a wonderful way to enhance creativity, boost performance and productivity. It is a great idea when offices have game rooms that have Lego games, video games that not only relieve stress but also engage the brain and help in team bonding. These games often do not require a lot of resources but bring great results.

*(Lego Play Area in Google NYC Office, Source: Youtube.com)*

(Game Room at Google Hyderabad, India, Source: Officechai.com)

5. **Open-minded people at open spaces**

Offices usually have conference rooms or confined desks where employees work all day. While interacting they are limited to their workspaces which sometimes makes brainstorming limited. With mobile workers increasing and many using spaces outside the office to get work done, it would be fruitful to create spaces that follow traditional third spaces within the confines of their office. Hence having additional large or small spaces where employees or a team can leave and have long brainstorming sessions or discussions can yield better results for an increase in productivity and relieving stress.
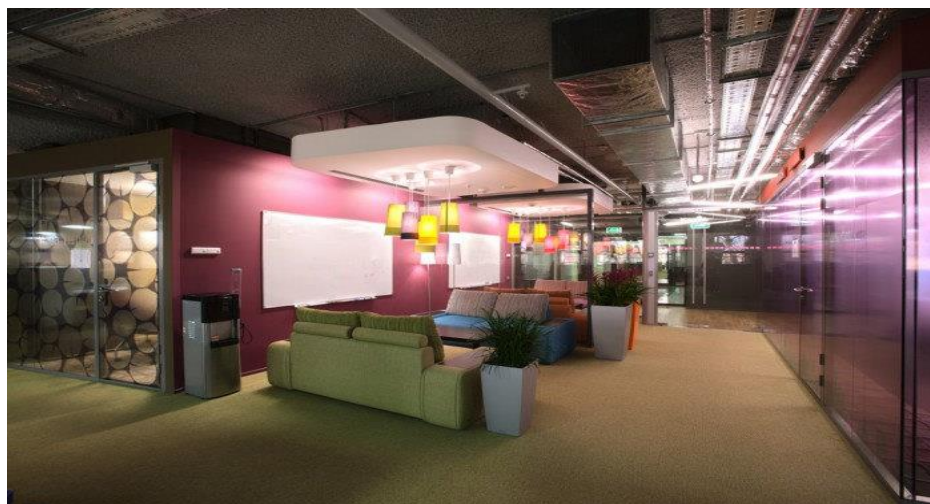
("Third spaces" at Google London, Source: Officesnapshots.com)
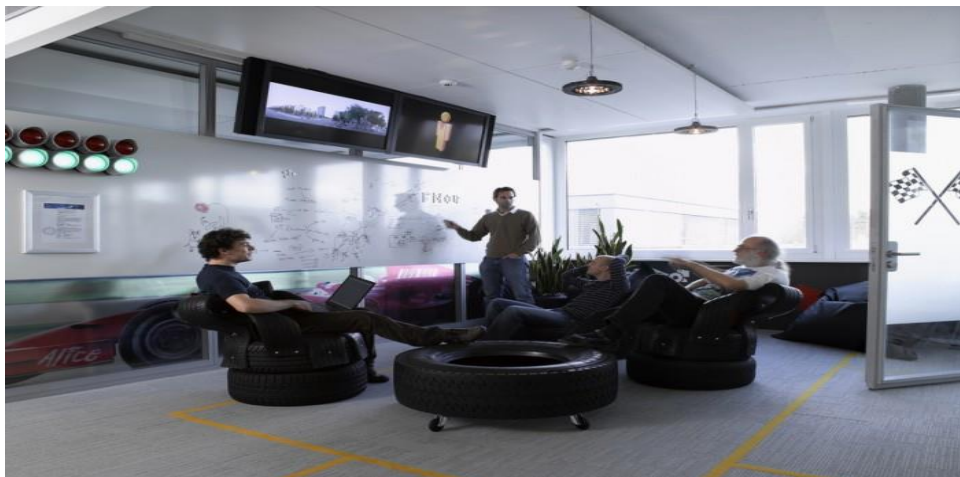
("Third spaces" at Google London, Source: Officesnapshots.com)

6. Furry Companion

Interacting with pets helps countering many physical and mental issues. It helps reduce blood pressure and improves cardiovascular health while releasing endorphin which have a calming effect. (Having pets at almost all workplaces can prove to be a huge blessing as they are the best relievers of anxiety and stress and improve employees' mental health.

(Pet enjoying at one of many Google offices, Source:Officechai.com)

Findings

1. It was found that as comfort level increases, the efficiency and productivity of employees increase. Vibrant colors improve the concentration of employees which in turn helps relieve stress.

2. Colors create positive energy which makes employees positive towards any tasks allotted to them. It helps them begin any work with optimism.

3. With workout facilities in the work premises, employees save time to commute with their zeal and vigor towards the workplace remaining intact. Moreover, having additional facilities in the workplace can always allow the employees avail the benefit of flexibility of time while working. When an employee is facing burnouts or blocks of ideas, he/she can instantly seek an adrenaline rush and recharge himself/herself at fitness centers, yoga studios, swimming pools, gyms at the workplace.

4. Relaxation rooms, meditation centers give immediate relief in stress at the workplace. Meditation is a traditional yet proven way to relieve stress and such sessions organized by companies have healing effects on employees' minds and increase concentration.

5. Large multinational companies have people working from different cultures, countries and backgrounds. It is important to align their mind sets to achieve common organizational goals. Hence, games and activities that bond these individuals into teams and help them cultivate a feeling of oneness towards common goal setting and towards its achievement is a necessity

6. The internal arrangement of how a workspace is organized plays an important role in the mental health of employees. Cluttered and cramped workspace often leads to confusion and delay of work which elevates stress.

7. Workspaces that have synchronized offline and online work facilities are proven to be more effective in managing stress. Allowing   employees to get out of boredom and break the monotony while doing the same kind of tasks is important and hence providing them with areas that liberate   them from this vicious cycle   leads to better results.

8. One cannot always bring family to one's workplace. So, having friendly furry pets who are well behaved and trained are huge stress-relievers. Not all days are the same for employees at the workplace. One might be carrying a burden that   others are unaware of. Having pets in the workplace cheers employees up and it gives them a feeling of

family members accompanying them at work and also leaves them in a jolly mood all day long.

At Google, employees are considered family. It has created such working places where people feel as if they are working in a home-like environment. It focusses on the workplace more in order to bring comfort to its employees - to bring a free flow of creativity and innovative ideas. At Google Inc., right from the founders to its managers, all of them create such a comfortable dynamic space for their employees that they enjoy their work. There are no barriers or hierarchies in the organization between employers and employees and managers and engineers.

Conclusion:

Employee stress is one of the challenging and pressing issues for the management, which has to be addressed for the well-being of both the employees and the employers. Stress and workplace burnout should be managed effectively for the wellness of the worksite teams. It is indeed the responsibility of the management to provide their employee with resources to handle the stressful and pressing situations emerging at the workplace effectively. Workplace stress is a major problem for employees. It affects the physical health, mental health and well-being of the individuals at the workplace. Stress can weaken the emotional equilibrium that can affect the smooth functioning of the personal as well as organizational life.

From this study, it can be said that Google has employed various tools and techniques to reduce or manage workplace stress which, in turn, has helped Google address workplace stress of employees effectively and efficiently. Google has utilized workplace space innovatively to facilitate workers to reduce workplace stress. To manage the most talented and most innovative human resources, such practices are the need of the hour. It can be inferred that the efforts of Google in this direction are remarkable.

The organization's health hinges on employees' happiness and their well-being. Therefore, both the organization and the employees should focus on fostering physical and psychological health of the individuals in order to create a stress-free working environment for organizational growth and employee mindfulness. It is advisable that the organizations implement effective stress management strategies that can create a conducive working environment for its sustainable performance through mindful leadership at the workplace.

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