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**THE STRESS MANAGEMENT AS A STRATEGY
FOR INCREASING OF THE COMPETITIVE
ADVANTAGE OF THE COMPANIES**

Abstract

We all live in time of unpredictable and quick changes. The effective and efficient management with the changes also modifies the working facilities of the companies, management and employees. The traditional way of working is replaced by the modern and variable working conditions. The aim of this work is to show the importance of

introducing the stress management strategies inside and outside the working environment, recognizing the reasons of the stress and stress protection for the employees inside and outside of the companies, as one of the risk factor that influences the working productivity and the efficiency. The building tools for the competitive advantage of the companies are as follows: the understanding and recognizing of the stress condition and individual characteristics helping to control the stress as well as the ability of self-esteeming for the stress level. In conclusions is emphasized the fact that the employees are development force of the company and the strategy for the stress management is to increase the competition advantage of the companies.

Key words: stress management, human resources, competitive advantage

INTRODUCTION

The stress is usual and normal appearance today as a result of the reactions of the threats and changes in our environment as well as from the demands expected to be fulfilled by one person. According to Hans Selye – founder of the modern theory of the stress, the stress is an uncommon respond of our body to the changes demands. (Selye, 1936).

The stress appears as a result of the reaction of the stressor. The stressor indicates the source of the stress, that could be normal event or many events that according to the estimation of one person appears as a danger for this person.

The stress is always a relationship between the person and the environment and not the characteristics of the environment itself nor is characteristic of the person (Lazarus and Folkman, 1986). The symptoms of the stress could be of physical or mental nature as a result of the physiological, emotional and cognitive reactions from the stress. Usually the biologically programmed forms of the stress are not dangerous for the organism. The real problem for the organism of one person is the condition of the increased, long-term stress where the person cannot deal with it and control it. The stress-sources are all around the people. The stress cannot be avoid but can be controlled or manage successfully. The negative stress is a condition that the person cannot control it.

STRESS CONDITIONS AT WORKING PLACE

In the conditions of extreme unpredictable changes at the working environment every company and the employees are influenced on a daily basis to the stress and the stressors. There are number of factors that influence the accelerate changes of the working. The stress appears everywhere in our environment as an element that cannot be avoid but could be controlled. (Lazarus and Folkman, 1986). The condition of stress at work could be defined as an amount of undesired, harmful physiological, psychological and behaviouristic reactions to the conditions where the demands of the company are not in accordance with the capabilities, possibilities and needs of the employee. (Sauter and Murphy, 1995). The stress in the company could appear as follows: As a result of the incompetence between the demands of the environment from the one hand and the possibilities of the employee to fulfil the needs of the environment and the company from the other hand related with negative consequences and appearance of work stress conditions.

- Changes of great importance for the company and the employees are potentially stressed, conditions are forcing the need to adopt to the threats

and challenges,

- Stressed professions with great responsibility towards the material values or responsibility for other people, working close with people or “working under pressure”.

Different professions are exposed to different intensity of risk. Usually as a stressed professional are marked the following: pilot, life-guard, miner, construction workers, flying controller, doctor, prison guarder etc. At the same time, the managers are rated as professions exposed to high-level of stress.

Very important fact for the employees in the company as well as all subjects influenced with the stress is the recognition of the stress reaction, the procedure and the means of acting in the stress condition. The stress at the employee is usually connected with the psychological overloading of the employees. The source of the psychological overloading of the employees can create condition of continuous stress with direct influence to the work responsibilities, good working atmosphere, possibilities for promotion and positive working environment.

The environment of the company and the work organization are of great importance for the psychological condition of the employees. The stressors create permanent tense to the employees, conflict situations and unpleasant working atmosphere. The long-term stress condition or condition of continuous stress influence the health of the employees, the security at work as well as to the efficiency and effectiveness of the company.

REASONS FOR STRESS IN THE COMPANY

The stress could influence every employee regardless of job position in the company. Every employee in the company are equally exposed to the stress due to the fact that every person individually reacts to the stress but is related to the following factors: job position itself, personal characteristics of the employee, of education, sex, age, family status, qualifications and abilities for self-estimation, personal judgment of the situation and ability to control reactions to the changes and behaviour. (Sauter and Murphy, 1995). The stress of the employees in the company appears as a result of deferent factors: internal and external.

The internal factors from the employee himself and contents the underestimate or low estimate personal desires from the job its, high sensitivity for self-responsibility in every segment of the working in the company, identification of the personal with the company condition, inappropriate behaviour regarding the working time, high level of uncertainty, inability and no knowledge for the job duties.

In the outside factors for stress are the factors coming from the following

segments: job organization, structure of the organization process, communication inside the company, working time-schedule, organizing in regular changes of the working time, extra working hours, the environment inside the company and the financial aspects of the working: low pay or no payment hours, inappropriate criteria for the bonus payment, irregular payment time, benefits etc. The challenges of the changes, could produce stress from losing the job posit, decreasing of the salary and the finance benefits, producing conflicts, unprecise job duties, decreasing of the number of the employees etc.

Employees of the company are infected from the stress inside the company but the same times are exposed to the stress coming from different stressors as family, the close relationships with the relatives, friends etc.

STRESS MANAGEMENT AS A PART THE ORGANIZATION CULTURE

The employees in the company are exposed on stress every time when there is unbalance between their personal requirements and the demand expected to fulfil.

The basic goal for every company is to create conditions for growth and development through innovative strategies prediction of future moments that could be sources of stress. In this way the companies could implement different strategies aiming prediction, decreasing and controlling the stress for the employees in normal levels.

The persons-employees are the most important and unique factor that could change aiming to improve the competitive advantage and the respect of the rule: the real person for the real job-position is direction for implementation of the successful strategy for stress management.

Of great importance for the managers of the company and the employees as well is the ability of reducing the intensity of the stressors inside and outside the company. The companies and their managers could apply various measures to decrease the level of stress at the job. The harmony in the working environment usually is a result of good human relations inside the company and care for certain relations between the company and the family of the employee.

The strategies for the stress management are introduced as part of the organization culture. The organization culture of the company is balance of expectations, norms, values and working habits that infects the models of influence and cooperation of the persons, groups and teams in order to fulfil the goals of the organization (Jones and George, 2008). Thus through the organizational culture employees are showing their different ways of behaviour and working manners as well as their interactive relations outside the company. The companies are different in their way

of how weak or strong is their organizational culture. When the employees in the company shows strong connection for the common cultural values, believes and habits then the company has strong organizational culture. On the other hand, when the employees are not strong connected for the common issues the organizational culture is weak. If the organizational culture is strong than everyone is persuaded that inside the company could become a person, because of the influence of the behaviour of all members. (Schneider and Smith, 2004). Organizational culture could be created, maintenance and transfer to all employees in the company, through the values of the manager or the owner of the company. Depends of the type of the organizational culture it should be developed appropriate strategy for stress management because the organizations with strong organizational culture use number of measures to determine the working habits of the employees in their job duties.

The companies with strong organizational culture are resisting the influence of the stress producers different from the companies with weak organizational culture, where the influence of the stress producers is increased. The managers of the company have the biggest role in the process of creation of the organizational culture and the strategy of stress management. The instrumental values influence the work of the managers and their behaviour. The behaviour of the managers is reflected to the working pleasure and connection to the company. The good mood and the positive emotions of the managers is sense or state of mind directly connected with the sources of the concrete situation. The state of mind and the emotion of the manager for the company influence the behaviour of all employees of the company. Managers of different companies develop different strategies of the organizational culture and stress management. The strategies for the stress management are realized by the employees of the company through the values of their manager, owner or the employees and the processes of socialization, ceremonies, rituals, recreate activities and join parties, organized picnics, sport events etc. Manager or owner of the company demands their respect, understanding, tolerance, respect of the rules of working and behaviour, respect of the formal procedures. Many times the personal values of the manager and the employees influence the realization of the competitive advantage. The managers of the companies expect from their employees to work hard, precise and manage all stress situations inside and outside the company. The maximum loyal employees realizes the organizational goals, led by the managers with understanding for the emotions of the employees and control the emotions of their own and are always in front of their competitors.

STRESS MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES IN THE COMPANY

The effective management with the company understands overcoming the different obstacles of the work and creating an appropriate strategy. The managers transfer their own vision of what they want to realize in the company through the strategy. If the employees agree with the vision and create their behaviour to the manager, they take responsibility to work hard, stress work necessary for the creative and risk development of the strategy (Jung and Avolio, 1990). In order to increase the competitive advantage of the company the manager could implement some of the following strategies for stress management:

- Preventive strategy or practicing a strategy to discover the sources of stress before the employees face the real problems,
- Strategy for decreasing the influence of stress after rising the real problems, and
- Management strategy or maintenance the stress to the place where appears.

Formulating each of the above mentioned strategies starts with systematic analyse of the factors inside the company and the outside environment that influence to the realization of the organizational goals of the company.

Of great importance for the company is the manager to foresee the real condition of the employees and analyse detail the factors sources of the stress condition. The contribution of the managers for maintenance and control of the stress in reasonable level contributes to development of the wellness of employees. Human resources are important factor that influence the organizational development. High-motivated human resources develop strong professional values and behaviour norms. In order to be motivated, human resources should be free and capable to control the stress at work and outside.

The preventive strategy or strategy of discovering the sources of stress before employees face the real problem is part of the concept of the organizational culture of the company. This strategy realizes through the principle of good human relations, trust, open cooperation and communication and introduction of the concept of time management. The communication is a condition for increasing of the competitive advantage of the company through which employees learn abilities for work with new processes, spread the own skills, contributing to discover the factors that are sources for stress of the employees. This strategy for stress management is less formal different from the strategy for decreasing the stress influence after real problems appear where managers have certain activities.

The strategy for decreasing the stress influence after real problems appear also present part of the concept of the organizational culture of the company and demands realization of certain activities for overcoming the rising problems.

The open and real communication is pre-condition for overcoming the problem. The stress management realizes through programs for overcoming the negative emotions and problems. Organization of parties in the framework of the company, development and practicing the ceremonies and rituals are part of the program for overcoming the negative effects. The ceremonies and rituals are also formal events for the importance of the company as whole (Berger and Luckman, 1967). As part of the strategy managing the negative events is also the introduction of the sport programs. Practicing one physical activity and sport in appropriate equipped rooms in the frame of the company is one of the forms to manage the negative emotions coming from stress situations.

The managing strategy or maintenance of the stress to the place where appears is realized through programs for controlling the stress and stress factors at the place where it appears. It means that the process of open communication shows the source of the negative events, the company or the environment as family or home. Discovering the location is pre-condition to control the stress and maintenance the condition not to be transferred from one to the other location. The appearance of stress conditions in the company should be solved only in the frame of the company and not to be shared with the members of the family, friends and vice versa. The appearance of stress situation in the family should not be transferred and shared with the colleagues. The ability of self-control and management with negative events is of great importance for the realization of this strategy.

The stress control is base for effective working of the company bearing in mind that controlling the negative emotions (not only the personal characteristics as ability of work, discipline) coming from the activities of the stressors, results with successful realizations.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In order to determine if the companies in the Republic of Macedonia apply certain activities or strategy for stress management for the employees, empirical research was conducted. The questionnaire for this purpose is composed of ten questions and was delivered to 120 companies from the private sector of the Republic of Macedonia. Most of the included companies or 89 of them, showed great interest and answered the questions, while the rest of the companies didn't show any interest and didn't answer the questions.

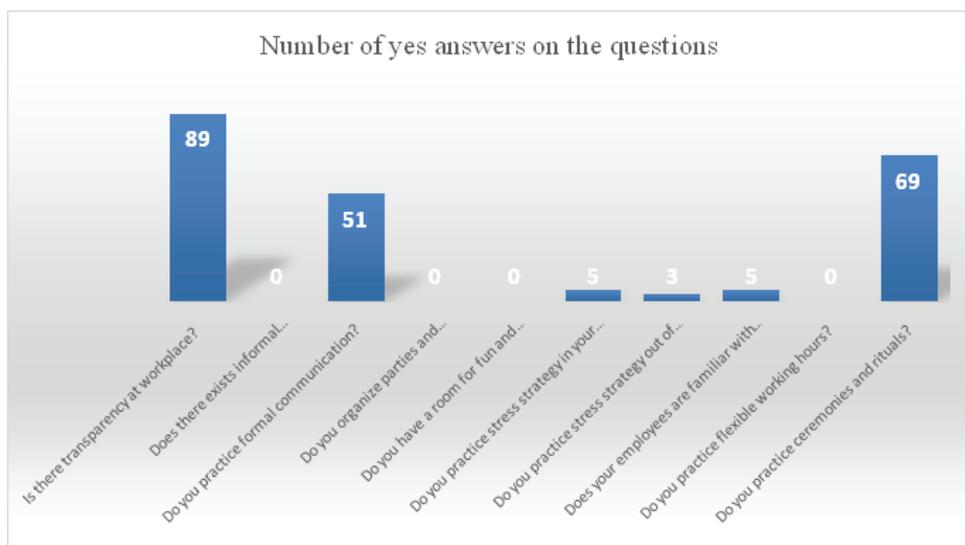
According to the results from the conducted research we could conclude that the first question: *Is transparency exists in the working of your company?* – All of the managers filled this question positive – 100% of them thinks that they work

transparently. For the question No. 3: If they realized formal ways of communication with employees?, - 51 of managers or 57% from the total questioned answered positive and 38 of managers or 43% answered negative. The question No. 10: Do the company has certain rituals and ceremonies? – 69 of managers or 61% answered positive and 20 of managers or 39% answered negative. Only 5 of managers or 4,4% of questioned managers answered positive that they have strategy for stress management and 3 of managers or 2,6% from questioned managers answered positive to the question if they have strategy for stress management outside the company. The biggest part of questioned managers or total of 89 managers answered negative to the rest of the questions and confirmed the theory that they don't have informal communication with employees, does not organize parties in the frame of the company and they don't have flexible working hours. Also, in the frame of their company there is no adequate room for party or sport and only a small part of managers 5 of them or 4,4% from them confirmed that their employees are aware with the strategies of stress management. Received data are processed graphical and tabular.

Table 1. *Obtained data from the conducted research*

Question/answer	Is there transparency at workplace?	Does there exist informal communication at workplace?	Do you practice formal communication?	Do you organize parties and companionship?	Do you have a room for fun and relaxation?	Do you practice stress strategy in your firm?	Do you practice stress strategy out of your firm?	Does your employees are familiar with the stress strategies?	Do you practice flexible working hours?	Do you practice ceremonies and rituals?
Yes	89	0	51	0	0	4	3	5	0	69
No	0	89	38	89	89	84	83	84	89	20

Chart 1. *Obtained data from the conducted research*



According to the received data we could conclude that the companies in the Republic of Macedonia still have not implemented strategies for stress management inside and outside the working environment also don't have provided conditions for places for parties and recreation in the frame of the company. The stress management aims to decrease the stress of the employees especially the permanent stress. The results of the research show that the companies do not have implemented strategies for stress management inside and outside the working environment and their managers cannot recognize nor control the stress of the employees. The stress acts negatively to the employees and could be transferred to the company and its working.

CONCLUSION

One of the most existing problems in the daily working is the stress in the company and the environment. The stress as daily-based appearance in the companies usually is connected to the employees, organizational culture of the company, communication inside and outside the working environment and the form of resolving the conflict situations. The effective and efficient management of the company changes the working conditions and demands introduction of new modern strategies for management of the company in order to improve the competitive advantage. The new forms of working basically express the importance of the employees as unique element that could change itself and adapt

for increasing of the competitiveness of the companies. The stress management skills of the employees are abilities for discovering and controlling the stress. The recognition and controlling of the stress requires introduction of appropriate strategies for decreasing of the stress by the managers inside and outside the working environment. Managers have the possibility to implement strategy for recognition of the sources of stress before employees face the real problem, strategy for decreasing of the influence of the stress after real problem appears and strategy for management or maintenance the stress to the place where started. Managers have to know always that only the satisfied employees are “good employees” like the only way to realize the goals of the company. Due to this fact, managers should know always that the stress management strategy is useful tool with positive influence to the working. But the researching results showed that many companies in the Republic of Macedonia does not have strategy for stress management or other tools, programs for recognition, controlling and managing the stress. The best organization efficiency is the one here the employees come to the work with pleasure and leave the work with satisfaction. The employees are satisfied when they are free of stress inside and outside the working environment. This confirms the fact that the employees are moving force of the company and the recognition and controlling of the stress presents the successful management strategy aiming to increase the competitive advantage of the companies.

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Questionnaire

1. Does transparency exists in the working environment of your company?
a) Yes b) No
2. Do you practice informal communication with employees?
a) Yes b) No
3. Do you practice formal forms of communication with employees?
a) Yes b) No
4. Do you organize parties in the frame of the company?
a) Yes b) No
5. Do you have appropriate place for party or sport in the frame of your company?
a) Yes b) No
6. Do you practice strategies to control the stress at work?
a) Yes b) No
7. Do you practice strategy to control the stress outside the work?
a) Yes b) No
8. Are the employees are introduced with the strategy for stress management?
a) Yes b) No
9. Do you have flexible working hours in your company?
a) Yes b) No
10. Do you practice certain ceremonies and rituals in your company?
a) Yes b) No