

Course Name: Organizational Behaviour: Individual Dynamics in Organization

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Week – 04

Lecture – 04

Lecture 19: Understanding stress

Hello students. Welcome back to the course on Organizational Behaviour, Individual Dynamics in Organization. We move to the fourth lecture of the module four. In the previous lecture if you have looked into, we have actually seen the relevance of emotion, we have actually tried to understand what do you mean by emotional intelligence is. Today we take up another important topic which is stress. Now this lecture should not be stressful to you, it should be about understanding stress.

I am Dr. Abraham Cyril Issac, I am a faculty at the School of Business Indian Institute of Technology, Guwahati.

Straight away moving into our topic today on understanding stress, let us first understand our theme of the lecture today. “Adequate resources help reduce the stressful nature of demands when demands and resources match.”

I would like you to take ten seconds of your time, introspect within yourself with your workplace with the people you see across in your workplace, it could be your boss, it could be your coworker or it could be your subordinate. Think of this particular statement and see how relevant it is in each of your cases. “Adequate resources help reduce the stressful nature of demands when demands and resources match”. You also can introspect within yourself whether this is actually correct. So, this is our attempt to understand a little bit about stress which is I would say a concept or aspect which is not understood that much.

So let us delve deeper into this, what do you mean by stress, what is stress? Stress can impact emotions at workplace to a great extent because our theme lastly hovers around emotion. I do not want to have a disengagement from the main topic but let us look into stress as an unpleasant psychological process that occurs in response to environmental pressures. You would never see an individual who is stressed, who sits alone or maybe who is not in a company or something like that. Stress always emanates from

environmental pressure. Stress always comes from environmental cues or from behaviour of others, from the situations what you are in. It hardly is a problem an individual faces when he is in isolation. Isolation can be a consequence of stress but when you are looking into stress you have to understand it as an unpleasant psychological process that occurs in response to a particular environmental pressure or a set of environmental pressures. So, its repercussions may extend beyond the workplace, it can also go to one's well-being also. This makes stress all the more critical. We might not have taken stress this seriously if we had restricted only stress to workplace.

That is the beauty of this course also. We are not only restricting the course to workplace. Predominantly our discussions, our elaborations are all pertaining to workplace but we are also taking it to an individual level because it is individual dynamics. So, when you are looking into stress as an unpleasant psychological process, it not only pertains or not only restricts itself to the organization, it can have an effect on our well-being also. This makes stress critical.

That is why it is important to understand stress, its sources, consequences and of course the most important aspect, the management of stress. Now let us look into different types of stress. You must have read about eustress, distress, etc. So, I would like to take it in a different dimension altogether. The first and foremost one would be challenge stressors.

When you are looking into challenge stressors, these are associated with workload. So, you have a pressure to complete the task and urgently there is a time urgency associated with the particular task, then you are having challenge stressors because there is time constraint, you have a lot of work in your plate, you cannot finish it within the time. This builds up a certain level of stress and that is a set of challenge stressors.

Another could be hindrance stressors. Hindrance stressors keep you from reaching your goals. So the first one was the lack of let us say availability of the resources maybe in terms of time, maybe in terms of the pressure that is coming from the organization, from your authorities, it is more associated to the workload. Whereas hindrance stressor is something which is blocking you, it is acting as a barrier between you and your goals. Red tape, it could be office politics, it could be confusion over job responsibilities. So, this is where I would like you to think of you as an individual in your workplace and see whether office politics has become one important aspect or one important barrier from you reaching your goal, has it thrived, has it come up as a barrier. You can also think in this dimension that you are not clear about the job responsibility.

There was a group task that was allocated, now you were not individually told or you individual members were not instructed on what to do or what each of your responsibilities were. In that particular case you were not able to do that because there

was lack of clarity and finally when it came to the deadline, the task could not be completed, it had to be a collective responsibility but somewhere you feel the pinch because you have to take the responsibility at individual level also. This is mainly because of the lack of clarity. Had there been clarity, had the job been clearly assigned to you, you had the abilities, you had the resources including time, you had the capability to do that but because the job clarity was not there, because the job responsibility was not there, this came up as a hindrance stressor.

Now let us look into demands and resources in terms of stress. Demands are responsibilities, demands are pressures, obligations and even uncertainties that individual face in the workplace. Sometimes it is not only with respect to the pressures that come from the top or the obligations that sort of come up as a reciprocity angle or come up as a reciprocal work tactic but more than that sometimes there is uncertainty. This is equally applicable to not only the individual task but also combined task. Whether the project will get sanctioned, whether if the project is getting sanctioned, whether the funds will come or whether there is sufficient manpower that will be recruited, if not what will be happening and if the sufficient manpower is not coming, what will be your responsibility? Would I be given an additional responsibility? Would I have to do more than what is required or do I have to extend my work limit? All those aspects can also induce a certain level of stress inside you. Resources are things within an individual's control that can be used to resolve the demands. So, this is where our theme emerges.

If you recollect where I actually put up the theme is mainly with respect to the resources and demands. Studies have revealed that adequate resources help reduce the stressful nature of demands and no doubt demands and resources should match. That is the ultimate criteria. If emotional demands are causing let us say the stress, they are causing resources in form of stress if the demands are there, then social support can act as a buffer, can act as a cushion.

Sometimes you see that individualistic cultural aspects or individualistic cultural context, they suffer because of lack of the social support, because many a time deadline come in and they are not able to cater to the needs. So, you see that the situation is quite detrimental for those individuals, whereas somebody who is having social support, somebody who can fall back, there is some cushion which can take the stress away, then they may be able to at least reciprocate in a desired way.

So, what are the different potential sources of stress? We can see a lot of different factors. I would like you to think again this will not be an exhaustive list. If you are an individual who is having experience in your workplace, you can list maybe couple of them more. So I do not claim that this is an exhaustive list, but these are some of the most prominent culprits when it comes to stress. So potential sources of stress could be one, environmental factors.

When you are looking into environmental factors, it includes economic uncertainties. You know you do not know what is, it happens at a macro level also, it happens as a micro level. When you look into this economic uncertainty specifically, it could be based on how the organization is thriving or maybe the organization is having a change in the business model all together or maybe at a macroscopic level whether the world economy is in a collapse, there is some recession that is happening.

So all those factors will ultimately trickle down to the organization you are working and inevitably it will trickle down to you which will be acting as a stressor. There could be also issues pertaining to technological change. When you are looking into let us say some technology upgradation and there is a lack of knowledge transfer that is happening, there is lack of knowledge transfer that is happening with respect to the change in technology, you tend to feel the stress.

Let us say take an example of a power plant, you are being given a latest machine, let us say a new gas turbine has come up and it has a certain different technology and you need people from let us say GE to train you, but that has not happened because of maybe some procedural delays. Now because of the lack of training, neither you are able to operate it nor even if you operate it, you are not able to operate in a very efficient and effective manner. So technological change can effectively induce or translate as a stressor, there is no doubt about it.

The second critical aspect would be organizational factor. When you are looking into organizational factor some of the important elements are task demands, role demands and interpersonal demands. So, task is not a small aspect. When you are looking into task demands you have to understand some of the critical aspects like the task uncertainty.

Uncertainty of the task is always risky or always dangerous, something which is not known or uncertain is always dangerous for us, is always let us say challenging for us. So, task uncertainty, task complexity, it is not only with respect to uncertainty, it is also with respect to the complex nature of the task. If the task is more complex then, we are in a position not even as a group to solve that particular problem. Those situations will effectively induce a stressor and can be stressful.

Another important aspect could be the way task is being defined. You might be thinking or taking or understanding the task in a different way and the client could have given the task in an altogether different way. So, when you are looking into the final product or the service it is drastically different from the expectation of the particular client or the particular customer. So that will deliver or render a certain level of stress factor.

Another important aspect could be the role demand. What is that particular role demanding? Whether it is, sometimes there are roles which demand you to perform in a

multiple aspect. Sometimes you have to be a reporting authority, sometimes you have to be let us say a validating authority, sometimes you have to be the person who goes to the nuts and bolts and does the job. Sometimes you have to train your juniors, sometimes you have to bring in creative ideas when you are otherwise stressed or emotionally restricted. So, all these aspects could also bring you a lot of stressors which is as part of role demands.

And another important aspect could be interpersonal demands. How you are being treated in the organization that could be a stress factor. There could be situations where there are no good interpersonal relations with a particular employee and you happen to be the team member of the particular team in which he or she is also there. So, such situations, such equations, how to mitigate that, how to solve that, that creates an interpersonal demand, that creates a certain level of, that comes under the umbrella of organizational factor which can induce certain level of stress.

Another important aspect could be personal factor. Personal factor as an aspect is very critical when it comes to two important aspects which is predispositions and personality. Now predispositions could be generally your attitude where you do not have let us say a very open attitude, you are sort of introvert in nature, you do not try to be a person who is learning, who always wants to go to places, understand things, sometimes that could lead to a certain level of stress because the organization would warrant otherwise. The organizational setup you are, the team you are part of would warrant otherwise. Those situations could actually trigger a certain level of stress inside you.

Personality could be a certain factor. There could be personality mismatch, incongruence between what you are and what the organization expects out of you in terms of personality, that mismatch can also be a stressor. So personal factors are also very critical when it comes to a potential source of stress.

Another important aspect could be the additive nature of stress as a factor because stress does not exist in isolation, it builds up. It builds up a lot of pent-up feelings. It builds up a lot of negativity. It builds up a lot of depression or depressive thoughts. So, this is where the additive nature of stress becomes critical or becomes detrimental.

Some total of opportunity stresses, constraint stresses and demand stresses makes it more additive in nature. So, this is what are the potential sources or these are some of the potential sources of stress.

When you look into individual differences in stress experience, that would be more interesting if you look in from different aspects like perception. How you perceive stress? Individual differences, we had detailed discussion on this in our diversity topic if you recollect. When you look into stress, let us say person A and person B within the same

organization, they have a different approach towards stress. They have a different perception towards stress. For some of them it might be a distress. For person B, let us say for person A it might be distress, for person B it might be eustress. Person A might be feeling challenged, might be feeling sad, depressed, but person B might be seeing an opportunity in that particular challenge. So, perception is critically relevant, important when it comes to stress.

Another important aspect is job experience. You have seen this stress earlier also. Past is the key to the present and future. Please recollect that. Please try to connect this. So that is why most of my lectures are interconnected.

So if you see job experience as a certain factor, you have already seen this particular problem somewhere. So, you do not feel or you do not see any stress that is coming because of the particular problem because you have seen this in the past. You were able to resolve it and you are in a position, you have the potentiality, you have the capability to resolve it. So, it is never a stress anymore.

Another important aspect as I have already mentioned is social support. Sometimes there are stressors that come within the organization, but you have a family. That is why aspects like work-life balance is very critical. You have a family to fall upon. You have a social support system whereby you can have your friends; you can have a chat with them. You can always there are avenues to release the pent-up feelings. Always there are situations where you can talk to your friends, relatives, your family members, spend time with them and these all take the stress away.

Another important aspect could be personality. Person A again, the same example I will come back to which we took in terms of perception. Person A might be having a different personality comparing to person B. So, when person A can take this stress very lightly, person B might not be able to because of the difference in personality. So, there are individual differences when it comes to stress experience. The level of stress or the amount of stressors coming in your way might be same to both the individuals, but because of the difference in perception, because of the difference in job experience, because of the social support system, the differences in that and finally the differences in personality, the individual differences do exist in stress experience.

When you look into culture differences, different culture gives rise to different sources of stress. You must have seen that there are certain cultures who are more cultural context which are more collectivistic. So, you tend to have some peer pressure, some family pressure which can be a source of stress inevitably. There are some aspects even individualistic cultural scenarios can bring in some other stressors in terms of lack of social support. Inconspicuously that could be a source of stress. One study revealed that US employees feel stressed by a lack of control whereas Chinese employees feel that the

same by job evaluations and lack of training. So, it is not that one single culture context is the best. They might have certain stressors, another or contrasting culture context might have stressors but from a different dimension. So these, the existence, the coexistence of both of them or the understanding of both of them is vital in appreciating the relevance of cultural differences in stress.

Although stress is bad for employees across culture, the cost and coping may differ due to cultural factors. Sometimes you are in, as I have already mentioned in a collectivistic scenario, you have certain social buffer, you have certain social support system which you can always rely on. Those act as cushion even if there is some stress, they can actually absorb the stress or as an individual you are more capable because of your upbringing, because of your child rearing practices, because of the surrounding you are, the social support system you are, you are able to cope up with the stress. But there are certain individuals who do not have this particular, you know, maybe cultural support, maybe social support. They might feel the stress in extreme mode and their consequences also will happen in an extreme level.

When you look into consequences we have to understand and appreciate that there are certain physiological symptoms. It is not, not just psychology which we come into that in as the next point. When you look into stress you feel depressed, more than that it takes a toll in your health in terms of physiological aspects like you can have, you know, problems with your sleep, you can have problems with your health in terms of, you know, bodily changes. You might have problems with respect to your concentration, your focus.

So all these aspects can have or can be inevitably a consequence of stress. Psychological symptoms are many. When you look into stress you, you tend to, you know, feel depressed. You have lot of stressors coming in way in your organization.

You do not feel like going to organization. Sometimes you do not want to work in the particular team. Sometimes there are, there are organizations which, you would see that they are very rosy in terms of outside appearance. They are very good in terms of the pay structure, very good in terms of what they are offering for the employees as part of the incentives etc. But once you are into the organization, you had a certain hard work, you rendered to get into the organization. Once you are into the organization you understand that the picture is not that rosy inside.

You will feel that there are psychological symptoms that come up as part of the stressors within the organization. You feel sad, you feel depressed, there is a learned helplessness that comes into you. So, all these aspects are certain psychological symptoms which emerge as consequences of stress.

There are also behavioral symptoms. Sometimes, you know, because of the stress you are highly stressed in your workplace and you are going back to your home. And suddenly out of nothing you are frustrated. Sometimes an old person crosses the road, you honk or you sometimes you create unnecessary voices. You sometimes be, you know, rash in terms of driving, in terms of the way you react, in terms of the way you react to your family. Sometimes you try to quarrel with your spouse, sometimes you try to, you know, shout at your children. All these are behavioral symptoms and which are reflected as part of consequences of stress. Now let us also look into the vital aspect because we had a detailed understanding of what stress is, what are the concerns and what are the consequences.

Let us address the inevitable, managing stress. So, there are certain approaches which I classify as individual approaches and organizational approach. When you look into individual approach, we have to take personal responsibility for reducing stress level. Nobody is going to do it for us. We have to understand that in long run stress is going to have not only psychological symptom and problems, it will also cause you physiological aspect as well as change in your behavior.

So you have to take personal responsibility for reducing stress. Things like meditation, things like relaxation, techniques like meditation could actually be handy when it comes to individual approaches in managing stress. You could be with your good company, you could spend time with the near and dear ones, the people who can actually absorb your stress. Many a time it is said that your kids can take away your stress. So, all these aspects take personal responsibility for that.

Another important aspect could be time management techniques. Many a time most of the stressors emanate because of the lack of proper time management, because you are running out of time. Every now and then you see that the deadline is approaching and you are not able to finish your job. This happens to be a stressor every now and then. So, you understand that, you try to mitigate that, you try to work out a schedule whereby you can actually do things in a proper timely manner.

So time management techniques can be brought in. It could be that you finish your task off rather than you are just focused on many things. You try to focus on one particular thing, try to complete it, then move to the next task. That could be a certain approach towards managing stress.

Another could be increased physical exercise. It is always better that not only with respect to your physical fitness, when you do physical exercise, it takes away your mind to all together or different world.

So if you are too much moving around in terms of your mind within the organization, organization politics, organization stressors or the things that have happened which have caused ultimately stress, physical exercise is a certain technique which can take away your thought to a different world. That will make you more calm, that will make you more composed and relaxed. This is yet again another important individual approach towards managing stress.

Another aspect could be relaxation training which I have already addressed in terms of taking personal responsibility for managing stress level. Some relaxation techniques like meditation, this could actually bring in yoga, which could actually bring in a certain level of reduction in the stress levels you are otherwise facing because of your hectic work schedule.

Expanded Social support networks, it is not merely the friends you have in let us say in Facebook or let us say the connections you have in LinkedIn that matter. More than that a few handfuls of your friends to discuss the problems in your organization. A few handfuls of relatives or family members who you can trust, who you are confident with, your spouse or your kids who you can actually discuss the day-to-day problems. It takes away the stress, it ultimately absorbs the stress and that will make you stress free. So, these are some of the individual approaches towards managing stress but then there are certain organizational approaches also which we want to address.

One is improved employee selection and job placement. I have time again emphasized on one point. Right person in the right job is always a must. When you are looking into situations where there is, you know, a person is not happy with his or her job, a person is feeling that he is not the right fit for the job or the organization is not right fit for him. All these situations are emerging out of a poor recruitment and selection because the right person is in the wrong job or the wrong person is in the right job. So, this is the problem that creates stress. So organizational approaches should focus on taking the right person in the right job.

Another important aspect is even if you are a person who has not got the right job, the organization can feel that he or she is not performing better but can be improved. His or her performance can be improved to a great extent if we focus on the training that can be provided to the particular employee and that can make striking differences to that particular individual. Realistic goal setting is yet another important aspect. When you look into organization, people come into organization, they have goals which are drastically difficult or are highly utopian, whereby they do not have the capability to observe that or attend that or work an action plan towards achieving that.

So all these situations will ultimately lead to stress because you have put up a goal which is almost very difficult to attain and you are not putting in effort to achieve that. A time will come when all these factors start compounding and you feel stressed out. So realistic goal setting is yet another important aspect.

Redesign of jobs. Many a time you feel that, I have already emphasized on the problems with the task, the task uncertainty or the task complexity. So redesign the job in such a way that the person who is competent enough to do that particular job will get that particular job and he or she might be able to do it in a much effective and efficient way.

Increased employee involvement. Every single aspect if you are involved in the decision making, if you are involved in the strategy making, all these aspects will give a sense of ownership that you are also part of the game, you are also part of the whole process and you tend to give your 100 percent and it hardly emerges as a stressor. Rather it can act as a motivator, it can help you in actually contributing more towards the organization.

There could be situations where you can improve organizational communication. When there is let us say only top-down communication and there is hardly any feedback system or any feedback loop that goes all the way to the top, those organizations suffer and mainly those organizations are the breeding grounds of stressors. They give you a lot of stress because you do not know who is the right person to address your query to or you have a lot of things which you see at the ground level which does not make sense that comes from the top and the people who are sitting at the top are not able to decipher that or understand that and they are not listening to that. This in itself can create or become a source of stress. So, when you try to re-channelize or improve your organizational communication, it inevitably reduces the stress points that are there otherwise in the organization.

Another important asset could be employee sabbatical. You sometimes are in a mundane in a job which is mechanistic in nature or you are you know for some time you have been doing without any break because you liked it or you enjoyed it but at some point, you feel the fatigue, you feel that there is some burnout that is happening. And then you are taking it to the extreme level whereby you are forced to quit the organization, quit the job because you cannot take it anymore. It is always advisable for the organization to give them some sabbaticals, give the individuals some relaxation in terms of sometime where they can use that particular time in finding themselves, actually doing something which is passionate to them, maybe pursue a hobby or maybe to take up a new task. So, all these things inevitably will actually increase the productivity of the organization and the individual and no doubt that it can curb, it can curtail the stressors that are in action.

Another important aspect could be corporate wellness programs. There could be programs at an individual and the organization level that could be organized whereby individuals can take out their problems or they can actually discuss the issues and they can actually bring in a solution for the issues and it can inevitably bring the stress point or the stress level down.

So let us before concluding let us take a particular case where we look into extreme jobs and stress.

People who spend more than half their time working and commuting to and from work are deemed to be doing extreme jobs. So, this is the understanding of extreme jobs and with this understanding we have to read the case.

Why do people take extreme jobs (or allow their jobs to become extreme)? A 2006 study suggested that for both men and women, the number one reason for working long stressful hours is not pay, rather it is the rush they get from doing stimulating or challenging work. As one Asian manager said, building this business in markets where no one has done anything like this before is enormously exciting and important. We have built distribution centers that are vital to China's growth, they contribute to the overall prospects of our economy. Although this sounds all good, the situation is more complicated when you ask holders of extreme jobs about what their jobs cost them. Among them 66% of men and 77% of women say their job interferes with their ability to maintain a home. For those with extreme jobs who have children, 65% of men and 33% of women say it keeps them from having a relationship with their children and 46% of male and female extreme job holders say the jobs interfere with having a strong relationship with their spouse.

The problem of overwork has become so pronounced in South Korea that many employers are forcing employees to take time off and locking them out of their computer systems during scheduled vacation times. Managers complain that Korean workers have become comparatively unproductive during their work hours, in part because they are so exhausted, they cannot perform effectively. One authority in Korean society opines that employees are worried that if they do not work extreme hours their employers will see them as expendable.

Now when you look into stress what we had based on the analysis or detailed discussion we had, you have to understand that stress could be both you stress as well as distress, it could be positive and negative but mainly it is negative. When you see the consequences you will realize, you see that people within your organization they are depressed, they are sad, they don't know what to do ahead.

There are certain aspects which you can do, we have listed down, we have detail on every single aspect. That said I do not want to repeat but I just want you to take one take away from this lecture and that is nothing but stress has to be controlled. When you are working in an environment which is stressful you are not in a position to bring the fresh ideas. It is not only with respect to the innovative workplace or let's say you are working in some R&D's organization you need fresh ideas nothing like that. Your mind is not there in that particular work then the performance is severely affected no doubt about it.

If your performance is getting severely affected it will have a compounding effect whereby the organization will ultimately judge you as a failure. This is where from the beginning it is always relevant, it is always important that you try to control the stress. We have detail on the individual aspects, we have also detail on the organizational aspects. I hope that as a part of this particular course you will try to understand those different individual as well as organizational aspects which you can use in your own workplace and try to reduce the stress levels.

Stress free employee will be a productive employee.

Thank you for listening to me patiently. See you in the next class. Till then take care. Bye bye.