

## A PROPOSAL APPROACH FOR STRESS MANAGEMENT

Bianca Cirjaliu  
Politehnica University of Timisoara, Romania  
cirjaliu.bianca@yahoo.com

Anca Draghici  
Politehnica University of Timisoara, Romania  
anca.draghici@upt.ro

Alin Jitarei  
Politehnica University of Timisoara, Romania  
tcciacova@yahoo.com

### **Abstract:**

In recent years, the interest for an efficient and strategic organization management have increased a lot. To achieve an efficient organization management, the focus on implementing new human resource management techniques has increased. Therefore, the employees are the key for successful organization, the controversial issue being the workplace conditions for safety, health and well-being. For a harmonic workplace environment, the conditions of work should be adapted to employees' needs and diminishing the stress. The purpose of the paper is to present an approach to identify and analyze the stress factors, in order to mitigate them. The organizational case study encourages the companies to decrease the stress activities, to implement a pleasant and progressive workplace. The paper aims to understand the efficiency of the stress management implementation, in order to increase the professional processes performance and workers health and safety. General conclusions about the research results will be presented in the final part of the paper.

*Keywords: efficiency, employees, stressful factors, stress management*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, more and more companies embraced the need of satisfy and respect of their employees. In every company the risks can appear and change the good way of function. The paper in case analyses the stress factors and shows ways for overcoming.

The organisational changes which involve work time and intensity, type of employment contract, psychosocial factors at work, work life balance, health and safety policies within the organisation, apparently interfere with employee health. To minimize the occupational exposure to stress requires effective risk stress assessment and management programs (d' Ettore G., Greco M., 2015).

Work-related stress is a state which is accompanied by physical, psychological or social complaints or dysfunctions and which results from individuals feeling unable to bridge a gap with the requirements or expectations placed on them (Rondinone M. et.al., 2012).

Around half of European workers consider stress to be common in their workplace, and it contributes to around half of all lost working days. Like many other issues surrounding mental health, stress is often misunderstood or stigmatised. However, when viewed as an organisational issue rather than an individual fault, psychosocial risks and stress can be just as manageable as any other workplace safety and health risk. (EU-OSHA).

For the organization, the negative effects include poor overall bussiness performance, increased absenteeism and presenteeism (workers turning up for work when sick and unable to function effectively) and increased accident and injury rates. Absences tend to be longer than those arising from other causes and work-related stress may contribute to increased rates of early retirement. Estimates of the cost to businesses and society are significant and run into billions of euros at a national level.(EU-OSHA).

## 2. GENERAL ASPECTS OF STRESS

Psychosocial risks arise from poor work design, organization and management, as well as a poor social context of work, and they may result in negative psychological, physical and social outcomes such as work-related stress, burnout or depression. Some examples of working conditions leading to psychosocial risks are: excessive workloads, conflicting demands and lack of role clarity, lack of involvement in making decisions that affect the worker and lack of influence over the way the job is done, poorly managed organisational change, job insecurity, ineffective communication, lack of support from management or colleagues, psychological and sexual harassment, violence.(EU-OSHA)

It is generally known that the stress can have a negative impact on an individual's mental and physical health. There are a number of work related stressors which have been linked to an increasing likelihood of an individual experience negative stress outcomes. Some authors identified 5 sources of stress, with examples of the components of these sources given for each, are:

- Intrinsic to the job including factors such as poor physical working conditions, work overload or time pressures;
- Role in the organisation including role ambiguity and role conflict;
- Career development including lack of job security and under/over promotion;
- Relationships at work including poor relationships with your boss or colleagues, an extreme component of which is bullying in the workplace;
- Organisational structure and climate including less involvement in decision-making and office politics. (Johnson S., et al, 2005).

Stress is also a significant contributing factor to organizational inefficiency, high staff turnover, absenteeism because of occupational stress, increased costs of health care, and decreased job satisfaction.

The common sources of stress at work identified include shift work, long working hours, lack of control and conflicting demands, bad relations with colleagues, low pay, and poor working environments.

Stress is associated with reduced efficiency, decreased capacity to perform, a lack of concern for the organization and colleagues. Aspects of the work itself can be stressful, namely work overload and

role-based factors such as lack of power, role ambiguity, and ~~role~~ ~~threats~~ ~~to~~ ~~career~~ development and achievement, including threat of redundancy, being undervalued and unclear promotion prospects are stressful. (Ayed A, et al, 2014).

It is for real the employer's responsibility and legal obligation to assess and manage psychosocial risks in the workplace. It is essential that managers are committed to tackling stress and involve workers in identifying risks and planning and implementing solutions. Improvements in the work environment must be considered and implemented first, before individual measures. A supportive work environment and an open dialogue between managers and workers, also a continuous feedback is particularly important for psychosocial risks, as this fosters a climate of trust in which workers can feel comfortable raising issues. In addition, an understanding of difficulties outside work, although not a legal responsibility, can help create a good psychosocial work environment. As for all occupational safety and health risks, prevention is the most effective way of dealing with psychosocial risks in the workplace. Once work-related stress and ill health set in, absenteeism is usually already on the increase, and therefore productivity and innovation are already in decline. Therefore, having a plan and pre-empting problems is crucial.

The benefits of psychosocial risk management are wide reaching. For workers, it means improved well-being and job satisfaction. For managers, it means a healthy, motivated and productive workforce. For organizations, improved overall performance, reduced absenteeism, reduced accident and injury rates and greater retention of workers may all come from reducing work-related stress. Finally, reduced costs and burdens on individuals and society as a whole are invaluable benefits (EU-OSHA, 2014).

### **3. THE IMPORTANCE OF MANAGING STRESS**

Nowadays, stress became one of the main sources of occupational risks, aggravating its management.

Psychosocial risks arise from unfavourable work organization and management, as well as a poor social context at work. Risks include excessive demands, job insecurity, harassment and violence, among others. These risks, as well as a lack of adequate resources or support, can result in workers experiencing stress, which leads to a deterioration in their functioning in and outside of work and, if prolonged, can lead to serious mental and physical health problems, such as burnout, depression, cardiovascular diseases or back pain. A recent Euro-barometer survey by the European Commission found that 53 % of workers believe that stress is the main safety and health risk they face in the workplace and 27 % of workers reported experiencing 'stress, depression, anxiety' caused or worsened by work during the last 12 months (EU-OSHA).

A poor psychosocial work environment can also have negative effects on organizations, as well as national economies. Increased absenteeism because of stress-related illness, as well as increased accident and injury rates caused, for example, by working faster under pressure, can lead to significant costs to an organisation. Moreover, there is considerable misunderstanding and sensitivity surrounding psychosocial risks in the workplace, and there is still a stigma around mental health. EU-OSHA's European Survey of Enterprises on New and Emerging Risks (ESENER) found that over 40 % of employers consider psychosocial risks more difficult to manage than 'traditional' occupational safety and health risks (EU-OSHA).

It is true that managing a problem is hard and with two sides, but when the company in case has a good plan, an efficient organization, qualitative information and in the end a correct application, than the problem, in our case study the stress, is remediate or even mitigate.

Stress has become the entire world disease, all the other negative sides coming through this. Speaking from the company side, the employees and the managers should always cooperate and have a continue feedback and evaluation. The huge importance of managing stress comes from the inside to outside, dealing with the employee's adaptation and needs.

## 4. THE PROPOSAL OF STRESS IMPLEMENTATION

After a theoretical briefing, the main part of the paper is presented in this chapter. The case study is made after a qualitative observation in a small construction company (10 workers) from Austria. The objectives of this observation include the main psychosocial risks factors, especially stress factors. The quantification of the risks was made after an evaluation of all the observation papers. Every employee had to answer to some questions and was observed at the working place for one day. In table 1 are classified the main psychosocial risks with their appropriate effect.

**Table 1:** Taxonomy of psychosocial risks

1. Job content Work overload and work pace	Lack of variety, high uncertainty, under use of skills work overload, machine pacing, high levels of time pressure
2. Control Work schedule	Lack of control over workload, low participation in decision making Nights shifts, inflexible work schedule, unpredictable hours
3. Environment Equipment	Poor environmental conditions, inadequate equipment availability
4. Role organization in	Responsibility for people, role ambiguity, role conflict
5. Organisational culture and function	Lack of definition of organisational objectives, poor communication
6. Interpersonal relationships at work Career development	Poor relationships with superiors, bullying, social or physical isolation, interpersonal conflict Job insecurity, low social value to work, under or over promotion
7. Home-work interface	Dual career problems, low support at home

Source: OSHA, 2012

After the observation and some interviews with the workers, the results are quite interesting in the company. The study contained descriptions points about every part from table 1. The construction company is very organized and respects the employee's rights and needs.

**Table 2:** Stress factors in the organization in case

Analysed parts (from table 1 above)	Observations
1	A lot of deadlines, time pressure, sometimes meaningless work and sometimes very hard working Sometimes higher technology than worker's abilities
2	No superior cooperation A lot of supplementary hours Poor yield
3	Always adequate equipment Appropriate and good conditions of work
4	A good and clear role assumption
5	Always with clear and strong objectives Good communication
6	Sometimes interpersonal conflicts Most of the time no promotion Job insecurity
7	No interference and problems in this area

Source: the authors

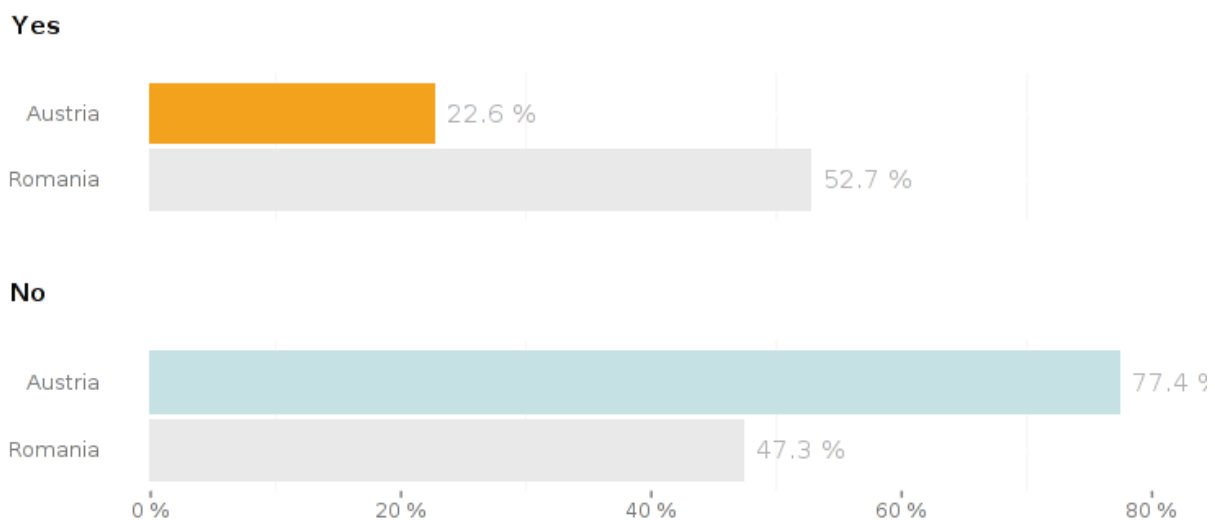
After pointing all the parts with its stress factors, the authors identified that the parts with red (1, 2, 6) present stress factors for the workers. The green parts (3, 4, 5, 7) are in concordance with the workers tasks and needs.

In this way, the real problems, causing stress, are the job content, the work schedule, the control in the organization, the interpersonal relationships at work, the career development. On the other side, the environment, equipment, role organization, the organizational culture and function and the home-work interface are in an acceptable and tolerant limit for an unstressed work.

Some of the possible strategies for eliminate the stressors can be: redesign the tasks and work environment, having a participative management, build appropriate teams, share the rewards, provide feedback.

Although after this results, a comparison between Austria and Romania for the question: “Does your manager have an action plan to prevent work-related stress?” is quite interesting and with a lot of good perspectives. In picture 1 it is shown the percentage of the answers in both countries.

**Picture 1:** Comparison of countries for stress prevention



Source: ESENER-2- Interactive survey dashboard

After a quick observation in a Romanian company with the same objectives, the same question about managing this risk, the stress is present but a lot of beneficial programs and trainings are making the difference. Those are two different countries with different culture, mentality and economy but with this small comparison it can be done visible changes. If Austria has less “Yes” answers than Romania is not that has less actions plan to prevent stress, it is about their organised and shorter program than Romanian one, about their lows. Romania should have more help and real prevention of the stressful ways of work.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

In order to have a healthy and safe workplace, every member of the organisation needs to know all the possible risks and all the work tasks. This factor which is analysed in the paper, the stress, is considered to be the unpredictable and first “hole” which slows down the productivity and prosperity.

With the right approach, psychosocial risks and stress can be prevented and successfully managed, regardless of bussiness size or type. They can be tackled in the same logical and systematic way as other workplace safety and health risks. Managing stress is not just a moral obligation and a good investment for employers, it is a legal imperative set out in Framework Directive 89/391/EEC, supported by the social partners’ framework agreements on work-related stress and harassment and violence at work. Although employers have a legal responsibility to ensure that workplace risks are properly assessed and controlled, it is essential that workers are also involved. Workers and their

managers have the best understanding of the problems that can occur in their workplace. Involving them will ensure that the measures put in place are both appropriate and effective (EU-OSHA).

In our case study the company has become more and more careful to this psychosocial risk in order to minimize the effective cost. The comparison between two different countries shows in a way, the level of implication in stress managing.

In the analysed company the need for stress managing is lower because of the good organization and program, in comparison with the romanian company which has a higher stress prevention, because of the chaotic way of work. This paper point of view is to manage the stress, to find solutions for helping to eliminate the stressful factors. On the other hand, only after a qualitative stress identification a company can think about a action plan and a way of mitigation.

A healthy organisation is defined as one with values and practices facilitating good employee health and well-being as well as, improved organisational performance and productivity.

Employers have a legal responsibility to reduce risks to workers' health and safety stemming from the Framework Directive (89/391/EEC), and this also includes psychosocial risks. Nevertheless, in many organisations there is an erroneous perception that addressing psychosocial risks is challenging and will incur additional costs when, in fact, the evidence suggests that failure to address these risks can be even more costly for employers, workers and societies in general (EU-OSHA, 2014).

## REFERENCE LIST

1. Ayed A, et al, (2014) Exploring the Work Related Stress Sources and Its Effect among the Palestinian Nurses at the Governmental Hospitals, *Journal of Education and Practice*, Vol.5, No.21, Palestine, ISSN 2222-1735, ISSN 2222-288X
2. d'Ettorre, G., & Greco, M. (2015). Healthcare work and organizational interventions to prevent work-related stress in Brindisi, Italy. *Safety and health at work*, 6(1), 35-38.
3. EU-OSHA (2014) Calculating the cost of work-related stress and psychosocial risks- A literature review, Publication office of the European Union.
4. EU-OSHA, European survey of enterprises on new and emerging risks (ESENER) available at <https://osha.europa.eu/en/surveys-and-statistics-osh/esener>
5. EU-OSHA, Healthy Workplaces Good Practice Awards 2014–2015 Managing stress and psychosocial risks at work, available at <http://www.healthy-workplaces.eu>
6. EU-OSHA, Interventions to prevent and manage psychosocial risks and work-related stress, available from <https://oshwiki.eu>
7. EU-OSHA, Psychosocial risks and workers health, available at [https://oshwiki.eu/wiki/Psychosocial\\_risks\\_and\\_workers\\_health](https://oshwiki.eu/wiki/Psychosocial_risks_and_workers_health)
8. EU-OSHA, Work related stress: Nature and management available at [https://oshwiki.eu/wiki/Work-related\\_stress:\\_Nature\\_and\\_management](https://oshwiki.eu/wiki/Work-related_stress:_Nature_and_management)
9. Johnson S., et al, (2005) The experience of work-related stress across occupations, *Journal of Managerial Psychology* Vol. 20 No. 2, Liverpool, UK, pp. 178-187
10. Rondinone, B. M., Persechino, B., Castaldi, T., Valenti, A., Ferrante, P., Ronchetti, M., & Iavicoli, S. (2012). Work-related stress risk assessment in Italy: the validation study of health safety and executive indicator tool. *G Ital Med Lav Erg*, 34(4), 392-9.