Work-Place-Related Stress: Correlates Of Perceived Time Urgency And Challenge In Work

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Work-Place-related stress is the response people may have when presented with work demands and pressures that are not matched to their knowledge and abilities and which challenge their ability to cope. Stress occurs in a wide range of work circumstances but is often made worse when employees feel they have little support from supervisors and colleagues, as well as little control over work processes. There is often confusion between pressure or challenge and stress, and sometimes this is used to excuse bad management practice. Supervisory level of executives of a public sector work organization (N=150) responded to a scale measuring perception of time urgency and challenge in work (PTUCW), and measures of interpersonal relationship, job-person fit, organizational commitment, and locus of control. Results based on correlational analyses showed that respondents high on PTUCW were low on interpersonal relationship, job- person fit, organizational commitment and high on internal control of reinforcement. By way of implication a note of caution was forwarded regarding exercise of PTUCW pattern of behaviour despite its short-term 'positive' consequences.

Keywords: Workplace, Occupational Stress, Time Urgency, Challenge in work, PTUCW.

In the workplace, we set goals, overcome obstacles, and discover our true potential. It is a space where dreams can be transformed into reality. Moreover, work holds immense social significance. It connects us with like-minded individuals who share our professional goals, fostering a sense of belonging and camaraderie. We develop relationships, form lifelong friendships, and create lasting memories through collaboration. The workplace becomes a community where we find support, encouragement, and a shared purpose. It becomes a vital part of our social fabric, adding depth and meaning to our lives.

In the fast-paced, ever-evolving landscape of the modern world, work also acts as a source of stability and structure. It provides a sense of routine and order amidst the chaos. The workplace offers a sense of purpose and direction, allowing us to contribute to something larger than ourselves. By actively engaging in our work, we derive a sense of pride and fulfilment, knowing that what we do impacts society.

The study of stress at work has attracted a considerable amount of interest in behavioral science research. Reasons attributed to such interest include a realization that stress may be related to a number of physical (Caplan, 1972; Ivancevich & Matteson, 1979) and psychiatric (Jenkins, 1976; Kasi, 1974) ailments; it may hinder organizational performance (McGrath, 1976); it may have indirect bearing in terms of financial impact and workers' compensation (Beehr & Schuler, 1980).

Most of the paradigms in stress research employ the conceptual categories of stressors (eg, job context), moderators (eg.. personality, occupation and organization), and outcomes (e.g., performance and absenteeism). It should be noted that such distinctions are made primarily for conceptual clarity; in reality a particular variable may not permanently occupy a fixed position of stressors, moderators, and outcome), and of course, bidirectional causality may always be there.

Among the personality variables studied in stress research. Type A behaviour pattern (Rosenman & Chesney, 1982) has generated special interest due to its positive relationship with coronary heart disease which may be irreversible. Type A behaviour pattern (TABP) is characterized by enhanced hostility, ambitiousness, feeling of time urgency, and competitiveness. Though not without doubts and objections, identification of TABP is considered to be a good forewarning of the related physical ailments which are so much feared in the executive world. TABP has been explored extensively with reference to physical con- sequences; however, relatively less attention has been paid to psychological consequences of TABP.

Moreover, most of the above studies only reported the superficial relationship between stress and thriving at work, while did not explore the underlying intermediate process of the relationship. Previous studies (Lepine et al., 2005; Rodell and Judge, 2009) have shown that motivation and affect are important mechanisms that link stressors and outcomes, such as work attitude. Workplace stressors, both challenge and hindrance, regarded as affective events, may generate affective responses, such as attentiveness, anger and anxiety.

Findings presented in this article are a part of a larger study on antecedents and consequences of organizational stress and coping (Singh &Sinha. 1984). In the present study, the relationship of perception of time urgency and challenge in work, with psychological variables namely, relation- ship with coworkers, job-person fit, organizational commitment. and locus of control was examined.

The following specific hypotheses were framed:

a)   People high on perception of time urgency and challenge in work (PTUCW) are likely to be competitive and ambitious; often preoccupied with deadlines, they would not be liked by their coworkers. Hence high PTUCW subjects would have poor relationship with coworkers.

b)   Since high PTUCW people are challenge seekers, they might have a feeling of being given inadequate responsibilities and being underutilized. Hence, high PTUCW people would perceive a poor fit between themselves and their job.

c)   By virtue of being competitive, impatient, and having a liking for challenging opportunities, high PTUCW people should have high mobility with an eye on quicker career advancement. Hence high PTUCW people would have lower organizational commitment There have been studies reporting that TABP people attempt to control their environment.

d)   Since PTUCW may be thought of as related to or even a part of TABP, it was hypothesized that PTUCW would have a relationship with locus of control similar to TABP. Hence high PTUCW would be positively related to internality.

METHOD

Sample- Participants were 156 male supervisory level executives from a public sector work organization in north India employing approximately 4000 personnel.

Measures-

1.   **PTUCW Measure** A 5-item questionnaire on a 5-point scale with possible score range from 5 to 25 was developed to measure perception of time urgency and challenge in work. The conceptual base was derived from Rosenman's (1978) interview schedule. Cronbach's alpha (Cronbach, 1951) for this questionnaire was 61.

2.   **Relationship with Coworkers Measure** A 2-item questionnaire on a 5-point scale (Cronbach's alpha 54 was used.

3.   **Job-person fit Measure** A single item questionnaire adapted from Sterns et.al (1983) was used. Being a single item questionnaire, it did not yield Cronbach's alpha value.

4.   **Organizational Commitment Measure** A l-item questionnaire on 5 point scale (Cronbach's alpha=52) was used.

5.   **Locus of Control Measure** Internal-external control of reinforcement was measured through a 4-item questionnaire (Tudor, 1972) which has been widely used in organizational settings (King. Murray, & Atkinson, 1982).

Procedure

The questionnaires were tried on a small sample of 30 respondents during a pilot run. The final version of the questionnaires were administered on the sample of 156 respondents, which did not include respondents of pilot run. Data were collected individually and the respondents were contacted in their off-duty hours.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Coefficients of product moment correlation among the variables (Table 1) showed that the hypotheses were confirmed.

Table I

Product Moment Correlations of Variables with Perception of Time Urgency and Challenge in Work Behaviour Pattern

S.N.	Variables	Correlations
1.	Relationship with coworkers	-.21.0
2.	Job person fit	-.31.1
3.	Organizational commitment	-.26.5
4.	Internal control of reinforcement	+.17.3

The perception of time-urgency and challenge in work (PTUCW) was negatively related to perceived measure of good interpersonal relationship with coworkers, job-person fit, organizational commitment and positively related to internal control of reinforcement. The pattern of relationship showed that persons high in PTUCW may not be very desirable inputs for the maintenance of good organizational cli- mate as they lack cordial relationship with coworkers, commitment towards organization, and also they may not feel comfortable themselves due to paucity of the job and their own personal fit. A working style with high emphasis on PTUCW is valued in organizational

settings as key to career success for the simple reason that people high on PTUCW would be likely to accomplish more challenging tasks in less time. The productivity and trouble shooting skills of the high PTUCW executive may sound worthwhile in the short run from the point of view of the organization as well as to the executive, himself: for the organization because executives with high PTUCW behaviour pattern would tend to deliver quick results, and for the executives because this pattern of behaviour would give them more sense of accomplishment, ego strength, and may be direct or indirect material gains. However, as the results showed, this behaviour pattern is negatively related with several variables which contribute to better organizational functioning in the long run as evidenced in organizational behaviour research literature.

Pressure at the workplace is unavoidable due to the demands of the contemporary work environment. Pressure perceived as acceptable by an individual may even keep workers alert, motivated, able to work and learn, depending on the available resources and personal characteristics. However, when that pressure becomes excessive or otherwise unmanageable it leads to stress. Stress can damage an employees' health and the business performance.

Work-related stress can be caused by poor work organization (the way we design jobs and work systems, and the way we manage them), by poor work design (for example, lack of control over work processes), poor management, unsatisfactory working conditions and lack of support from colleagues and supervisors.

Research findings show that the most stressful type of work is that which values excessive demands and pressures that are not matched to workers' knowledge and abilities, where there is little opportunity to exercise any choice or control, and where there is little support from others.

Workers are less likely to experience work-related stress when demands and pressures of work are matched to their knowledge and abilities, control can be exercised over their work and the way they do it, support is received from supervisors and colleagues, and participation in decisions that concern their jobs is provided.

Suggestion: Creating a sense of readiness is important

Developing readiness in your team has many benefits for productivity and morale. Although each team has its own culture, pace, and priorities, it's important to have some degree of readiness to complete tasks and make progress as a group. Some of the main reasons to maintain readiness in your workplace include:

1. **Meeting deadlines:** When everyone on the team has an internal sense of motivation and readiness, it's easier to meet and beat deadlines for deliverables.

2. **Planning ahead**: Having a culture of readiness allows you to schedule your time and make long-term plans for projects.

3. **Increasing productivity:** By developing readiness behavior patterns, you improve productivity and become more efficient at completing tasks.

4. **Improving problem-solving**: A strong sense of readiness allows you to identify potential issues quickly, giving you more time to develop solutions.

5. **Establishing a reputation:** Being able to respond to customers promptly and deliver materials quickly is key to building a positive reputation in your industry.

Developing readiness as a team value while avoiding unnecessary stress is the key to a balanced workplace environment. Here are some ways to promote positive readiness for your team:

1. Focus on a culture of readiness instead of deadlines

Start prioritizing readiness before you have a direct need to deliver immediately. By creating a team culture where everyone values meeting deadlines and reacting quickly to situations, you can put less stress on worrying about specific deadlines and projects. Be consistent about productivity, communication, and how to accomplish goals instead of focusing only on critical deadlines.

2. Establish your reasons for readiness

Make sure everyone understands why readiness is a core value on your team. Have open conversations about the importance of having a readiness mindset. When particularly important projects come up, be direct and honest with your coworkers about how you need to work together and share responsibility for meeting professional expectations. By making sure everyone has the same expectations, you give your team the greatest chance of success.

3. Explain the positive consequences of working ahead

For each project, describe the positive benefits each team member will receive from working with an urgency mindset. Explain both the group benefits and individual rewards to encourage personal motivation from everyone on the team. Maintaining client contracts, meeting performance goals and earning bonuses are great incentives for working with urgency. You can also mention the consequences of falling behind on deadlines, but remember to balance this information with positive reinforcement.

4. Work with intention

Model the behavior you want to see in your team and hold yourself to the same standards of submitting work on time. Work toward project goals, respond to emails promptly and always submit your work before deadlines. It will be easier to encourage your team to take their productivity seriously when they see you upholding those values in your daily behavior.

5. Celebrate further progress

When your team meets or exceeds deadlines, provide positive affirmation and celebrate their success. Offering incentives for following the schedule is a great way to develop positive habits and create a positive aspect of the workplace. Sending a nice email or sharing small rewards can boost the morale of the entire team and encourage immediate momentum to continue.

6. Set stretch goals

Once you've determined the initial deadlines for the project and deliverables, set stretch goals first to encourage your team to complete their tasks with extra time. For example, if a project is due on Friday, suggest that everyone aim to submit their assignment on Tuesday.

If someone tries to meet the Tuesday goal but finds problems or needs additional time, they still have three days to troubleshoot and review their work. Stretch goals also give your team members the opportunity to adjust their priorities based on their workload, while still maintaining a healthy sense of urgency.

7. Be clear about deadlines

Set clear expectations with your team about the schedule of deadlines and send regular reminders. Eliminating confusion about when projects are due can help reduce work-related stress while emphasizing the importance of maintaining a schedule and managing time appropriately. Post important deadlines in a prominent place that everyone can see to provide a passive reminder to work on an upcoming project.

8. Assess KPIs during check-ins

When you meet with team members to talk about their progress, review their key performance indicators to spot any areas of improvement. Looking at measurable metrics can help you determine if they are likely to meet their deadlines or if they might need additional support. Being realistic about KPIs can motivate each team member to maintain or increase their pace to achieve their goals on time.

9. Make yourself available for support

Show the importance of working hard at a steady pace while encouraging a healthy work environment by offering your support regularly. Every time you remind your team members about deadlines or ask them to increase their pace, explain that you are available to help. Facilitate access to resources, share your strategies for completing tasks, and encourage your team members when they are having a tough time.

10. Prioritize efficiency during meetings

A great way to show the importance of urgency is to respect everyone's time during meetings and workplace events.

Some Common Challenges at Work-Here are some common workplace challenges and how you can deal with them:

1. Lack of Communication

Effective communication is essential in every aspect of the workplace. A lack of communication can make it more difficult to deal with other challenges. For example, employees may not understand what is expected of them or problems may go unreported rather than being addressed.

2. Performance Problems

Team members who don't perform well can hurt everyone's performance and put the company's financial well-being at risk. It's important to quickly identify the cause of performance problems while maintaining positive relationships with team members.

3. Lack of Employee Recognition

Employees can feel undervalued when their efforts go unnoticed and, conversely, feel energized when their hard work is externally appreciated. If you publicly acknowledge an employee's excellence or offer performance-based incentives, the entire team can be motivated to do their best work.

4. Lack of transparency in leadership

Transparency is essential to the success of any business. Leaders who do not communicate openly with their employees about changes or problems can create a sense of uncertainty and harm the workplace culture. If you

are honest and open and take responsibility for your decisions, you seem more trustworthy and friendly. This can increase employees' trust in you and this can be reflected in their improved performance.

5. Level of motivation and engagement

There may be times when it is difficult to keep team members motivated and engaged in their tasks. Team members may have bad days, resulting in low productivity or poor performance. They may also feel exhausted after working on a high-pressure project.

6. Conflict management

Disputes may arise between team members with different views and perspectives. While some differences of opinion can help innovation and incorporate diverse ideas in decision-making, uncontrolled conflict can harm team morale and productivity. In extreme cases, team members who conflict with coworkers or supervisors may leave the company.

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