

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

This chapter includes the background, statement and significance of the problem, objectives and scope of the study.

1.1 BACKGROUND

Although stress is a normal part of everyday life, it can lead to psychological strain and difficulty in coping with life's demands. A little evidence shows that symptoms such as a headache, disturbed sleep, depression, anxiety, irritability or substance abuse are direct results of particular stressful events. The issue becomes more complex when the stress occurs in the occupational arena concerning the issues of confidentiality. In addition, organizational problems related to work stress such as high absenteeism, high staff turnover, industrial disputes and poor quality control which lead to inferior products and reduce the competitiveness of the organization may further complicate matters.

A lot of evidence suggests that work is one aspect of life that increases the experience of stress and ill-health e.g., Goldberg & Novack, 1992; Surtees & Wainwright, 1998. According to Selye (1956), discrete, time limited, and life events requiring change or adaptation are associated with the experience of stress and may contribute to a wide range of disorders. There are many attempts to identify and measure such stressful life events (Holmes & Rahe, 1967; Fisher, 1996).

Through a job cycle, a person experiences changes in his or her roles, activities, abilities, and expectations that lead to job stress. Even though stress causes bad health and diseases, it is not always a bad thing. It can stimulate creativity and productivity in one's life. There is a lot of evidence to prove that stress affects each aspect of one's life.

According to Robert Ostermann, a professor of psychology at Teaneck-Hackensack Campus, nobody meets their goals without being stressed. The natural pattern of human behavior is to experience a stress-causing event, react to it with increased tension and then return to a relaxed state. Sources of stress vary tremendously. For factory workers, stress is often related directly to the work situation

such as dealing with dangerous heavy equipment or working in an uncomfortable environment. In contrast, office workers are more likely to experience stress related to inter-personal relationships on the job such as unclear supervision, tension among team members and fear of conflict. Ostermann also adds that things move faster with technology that changes office procedures to work more rapidly in the current information age. Technology in automation enables employers to facilitate many jobs. The employees who keep their jobs must tend to have a higher level of responsibility, hoping that they are not replaced by the machine. Under pressure in the workplace, stress is greater than they have expected (Maxon, 1999).

Joel Harmon, an associate professor of a department at the Florham-Madison Campus says that the greatest cause of stress is workload. Employees work more today than they did 25 years ago. Although staff are being downsized, the workloads are still being upsized as the amount of work remains the same (Maxon, 1999).

Another alarming cause of stress is aggression or violence in the workplace. It is estimated by the U.S. Justice Department that each year more than a million people are the victims of violence at work, accounting for about 15 percent of all violent crimes in the country. This causes a half million workers to miss time on the job at the rate of 1,751,000 working days per year, costing \$55 million in lost wages (Maxon, 1999).

In 1995 survey of Americans in a Gallup poll about vacation experiences, it shows that 23% worked while on vacation and 29% caught up on paperwork. The survey did not report how many took their notebooks on vacation, but from a 2001 survey conducted by travel planner Vacation Coach, 33% of 400 adults polled online felt they had too much work to go on vacation (<http://social.jrank.org/pages/1098/Risky.behavior-Stress-All-Year-Round.html>).

From an international perspective, it was estimated that approximately 550 million working days are lost each year in the United States due to absenteeism (Harris et al., 1985), 54% are thought to be stress-related (Elkin & Rosch, 1990).

Projections from the National Health Interview Survey suggested that 11 million workers in the United States reported “health endangering” levels of stress at work (Shilling & Brackbill, 1987), and it was reported that only loud noise was a more prevalent hazard in the workplace. Stress at work has become one of the main

topics for the occupational health psychology both in the United States and Europe (e.g., Quick et al., 1997).

In Australia, the Federal Assistant Minister for Industrial Relations estimated the cost of occupational stress approximately AUD 30 million in 1994. The rising cost of work related stress are illustrated by a recent study of 126 call centers (Deloitte & Touche, 1999) which revealed that the impact of staff turnover and stress on call centre agents cost organizations AUD90 million a year. They also found that stress-related absenteeism cost AUD150 per agent per year or AUD7.5 million per annum.

In the same direction, telecommunication business is a huge industry, highly competitive, and has rapid movement; therefore, people who work in this industry must confront directly, all the time, job stress which may be the cause of an inefficient job performance.

Hence, this research aims to focus on the job stress in a particular telecommunication company to find out the causal factors of stress at the workplace in 2 separate offices in Nonthaburi and Pathumthani, and the result can be a guideline for the company to develop a strategy in terms of reducing stress and increasing the job performance.

The total number of employees in the telecommunication company is five hundred officers in four main departments: Finance and Accounting Department, Marketing and Sales Department, Engineering and Operation Department, and Administration Support Department. The structure of this organization consists of three levels: the top management level, the managerial level and the staff level. Obviously, most employees have to handle a demanding workload. Working hours are from 8:30 a.m. to 5.30 p.m. but employees in some departments have to continue working after office hours rather than going home or having common activities among employees to enjoy their lives. The assignment is urgent all the time; therefore, the employees have to be alert to face and solve the problems right away and have to be on standby even though they are on vacation.

Apparently, the employees look exhausted and frustrated, and sometimes they are bored with their jobs. The relationship among employees may be unfriendly, and the productivity does not quite meet the target even though they spend long hours at work each day; therefore. The researcher need to know how people experience stress

in the workplace; what the factors causing stress are, and the most important factors the employees use to face stress.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This study aims to answer the following questions:

- 1.2.1 What are the causal factors of stress in the workplace for employees at a telecommunication public company limited to two offices: Nonthaburi and Pathumthani provinces
- 1.2.2 What factors affect the employees' stress?
- 1.2.3 What factor causes the most stress to employees?

1.3 OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this study are as follows:

1.3.1 Main objectives

To find out what type of factors affect the stress of employees at a telecommunication company at two offices: Nonthaburi and Pathumthani

1.3.2 Sub-objectives

To investigate the causal factors that cause stress to employees

To examine the most important factor that causes stress to employees

1.4 DEFINITION OF TERMS

The definition of the terms of the study is as follows:

Employees mean people working in a telecommunication company both in Nonthaburi and Pathumthani offices.

Intrinsic aspects of job refers to the poor physical working conditions, work overload and work pace, time pressures and physical danger.

Relationship at work refers to the poor relationship with boss, subordinates, or colleagues, and difficulties in delegating responsibility.

Organizational structure and environment refers to little or no participation in decision making, major changes in the organization, office politics, lack of effective consultation, and corporate culture.

Role in organization refers to role ambiguity, role conflict, responsibility for people and conflicts reorganizational boundaries (internal and external).

Career development refers to over-promotion and under-promotion, lack of job security, and thwarted ambition.

1.5 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This study focuses only on 2 offices, and can be defined from the sampling size as follows:

1.5.1 Population

Population sampling in this study will be 125 employees selected from a telecommunication company in Nonthaburi and Pathumthani from four main departments: Finance and Accounting, Marketing and Sales, Engineering and Operation, and Administration Support.

1.5.2 Variables

Two types of variables are:

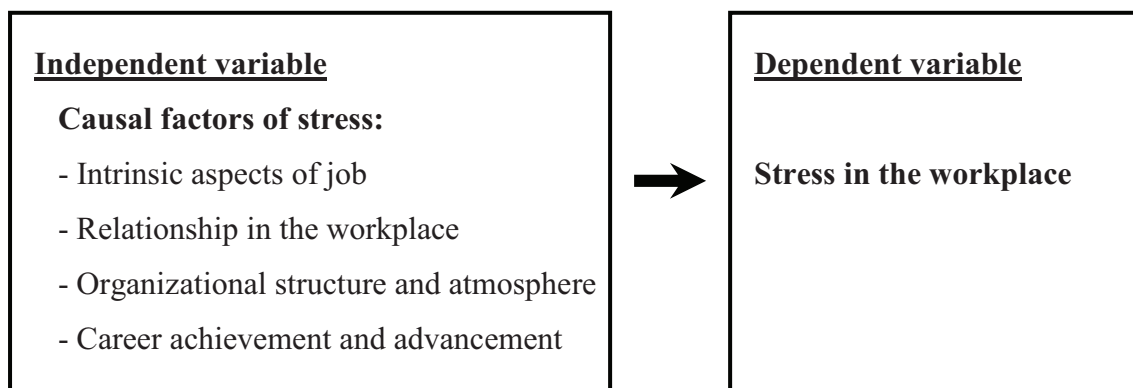
1. Independent Variables

1.1 Causal factors of stress

- Intrinsic aspects of job
- Relationship in the workplace
- Organizational structure and atmosphere
- Career achievement and advancement

2. Dependent Variables

2.1 Stress in the workplace



1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The findings on stress of employees can be a guideline for the managerial level to pay more attention to employees' well-being and consider whether stress in the workplace can cost the company high amounts or not. It can also be data for employees to understand the stresses that could occur in the workplace and will prevent them from experiencing undesirable stress in order to maintain the quality of working life which ultimately results in a better performance.

1.7 ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

The study of causal factors of stress in the workplace of a telecommunication company at two offices in Nonthaburi and Pathumthani is divided into five chapters.

The first chapter introduces the background, statement of the problem, objectives of the study, definition of terms, scope of the study, significance of the study and organizational study. The second chapter describes the review of literature related to the study. The third chapter presents the methodology. The fourth chapter provides results of the research. And the last chapter exhibits all details of the study, summary of the findings, discussion, conclusions, and recommendations for further research.