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Work-Related Stress Among Managers – Implications for Family Life

ABSTRACT

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE: The article addresses important and current issues regarding stress at work of contemporary managers and the implications of stress, including for family life. The purpose of the article is to indicate the causes and effects of managers' professional stress.

THE RESEARCH PROBLEM AND METHODS: The research problem is an attempt to answer the question – how stress affects managers in professional and private life? Based on the literature of the subject and in relation to the results of selected surveys, the authors prove that professional stress in the case of managers adversely affects not only the professional environment in which the manager works, but also has a bearing on the family's functioning.

THE PROCESS OF ARGUMENTATION: Professional stress is an increasingly common phenomenon in modern organizations. In the case of managers, it is usually the result of their weakened resilience in overcoming and solving the difficulties, long-term fatigue and emotional strains they experience at work.

RESEARCH RESULTS: Stress affects the entire manager's surroundings negatively. At work, it is increased absenteeism, more mistakes made, emotional arousal or loss of self-confidence. In family life, this is excessive nervousness, physical and mental tension that acts destructively on family members, lack of interest in the affairs of loved ones and aggression.

CONCLUSIONS, INNOVATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS: Employers and personnel departments in order to level the level and effects of stress should initiate research aimed at identifying the causes of manager's stress. Training in stress management and undertaking activities that reduce the stressfulness of the work environment, such as changing the scope of tasks, goals or responsibilities, are important.

→ **KEYWORDS:** STRESS, SOURCES OF STRESS, EFFECTS OF STRESS, MANAGER, FAMILY LIFE

STRESZCZENIE

Stres w pracy współczesnych menedżerów – przyczyny i skutki (implikacje dla życia rodzinnego)

CEL NAUKOWY: W artykule podjęto ważną i aktualną problematykę dotyczącą stresu w pracy współczesnych menedżerów oraz implikacji stresu, m.in. dla życia rodzinnego. Celem artykułu jest wskazanie przyczyn i skutków stresu zawodowego menedżerów.

PROBLEM I METODY BADAWCZE: Problem badawczy to próba odpowiedzi na pytanie: jak stres wpływa na menedżerów w życiu zawodowym i prywatnym? Na podstawie literatury przedmiotu oraz w nawiązaniu do wyników wybranych badań autorzy dowodzą, że stres zawodowy w przypadku menedżerów wpływa negatywnie nie tylko na środowisko zawodowe, w którym pracuje menedżer, ale ma przełożenie również na funkcjonowanie rodziny danej osoby.

PROCES WYWODU: Stres zawodowy jest coraz powszechniejszym zjawiskiem we współczesnych organizacjach. W przypadku menedżerów jest najczęściej wynikiem ich osłabionej odporności w znoszeniu i rozwiązywaniu trudności, długookresowego przemęczenia oraz obciążeń emocjonalnych, jakich doświadczają w pracy.

WYNIKI ANALIZY NAUKOWEJ: Stres wpływa negatywnie na całe otoczenie menedżera. W pracy to zwiększona absencja, częściej popełniane błędy, pobudzenie emocjonalne czy utrata pewności siebie. W życiu rodzinnym to nadmierna nerwowość, napięcie fizyczne i psychiczne, które działają destrukcyjnie na członków rodziny, brak zainteresowania sprawami najbliższych i agresja.

WNIOSKI, INNOWACJE I REKOMENDACJE: Pracodawcy i działy personalne w celu niwelowania poziomu i skutków stresu powinni inicjować badania mające na celu identyfikację przyczyn stresu menedżerów. Ważne są szkolenia z zarządzania stresem oraz podejmowanie działań, które obniżają stresogenność środowiska pracy, np. zmiana zakresu zadań, celów czy odpowiedzialności.

→ **SŁOWA KLUCZOWE:**   STRES, ŹRÓDŁA STRESU, SKUTKI STRESU, MENEDŻER, ŻYCIE RODZINNE

Introduction

Success of an organization in the dynamically changing present-day market to a great extent depends on its managers' competences and management methods they use. The demands they face grow with every year, which is a direct result of pressure to achieve better results, to maintain the position on the market, and to implement new and innovative solutions.

Functioning in a highly competitive environment leads to various stressful situations managers encounter in their everyday work. Problems and tensions managers experience often lead to long-term stress, which translates into their decreased motivation,

declining engagement, wrong decisions, and frustration. Stress managers experience negatively affects other employees, efficiency of team work, and, consequently, the whole organization, and brings negative results to managers' family life – tension, nervousness, or poor relations with family members.

The aim of the paper is to analyse the causes and effects of stress in managers' work, and to indicate its implications for, among others, their family life. On the basis of numerous sources and referring to the results of studies devoted to stress and based on their own professional experience, the Authors argue that stress experienced by managers affects not only team work, employees' attitudes and behaviours, and meeting the organization's targets, but also has serious implications for various areas of their afterwork life.

The issue of work-related stress in managers' life of is not new or unexplored. It is, however, in the Authors' opinion, an essential and highly topical issue nowadays, thus deserves being monitored, analysed and discussed from the perspective of various disciplines of science.

1. Stress – defining the concept

At the beginning the Authors would like to observe that stress, its causes and effects have been analysed and described by representatives of various sciences and scientific disciplines, including sociology, psychology, medicine and management, which is why one universal definition of this phenomenon simply does not exist.

Subject literature offers numerous definitions of stress. For example, Mechanic and Funkenstein define it as an internal state induced by various environmental factors (Reykowski, 1996, p. 193). Also Selye emphasises the role of internal factors and defines stress as an emotional response which becomes an individual's given experience (Gałuszka, 2005, p. 13).

According to Reykowski, stress is a ratio of external factors and the individual's features and his response to them (Reykowski, 1966). Tomaszewski sees stress in a similar way and defines it using the term 'a difficult situation', which he understands as a situation in which the equilibrium between these elements is disturbed (Tomaszewski, 1963; 1966). In his definition of stress, Hamer lists difficult situations causing stress, which include being threatened, overloaded or hindered, also in one's professional life [the authors' annotation] (Hamer, 1998, p. 168).

Definitions of stress fall into several distinct categories. Schröder and Blank claim that "scientifically stress is defined as a set of specific and non-specific bodily reactions to stimuli which disturb its equilibrium – motivate to action or lead to disorders" (Schröder & Blank, 2008, p. 14). These physical or psychological stimuli are called stressors.

At the beginning, stress was defined within the categories of stimulus, that is a situation or an external event with particular characteristics, which was treated as a stressor. At present researchers perceive stress as a set of complicated relations between an

individual and his environment. They focus on situational and personal determinants of stress and analyse links between these elements (Bargiel-Matusiewicz, Podbielski, & Klasik, 2004, p. 187). The paper focuses on work-related stress. Łodzińska (after Kowal, 2002, p. 12) claims that workplace is an environment with a particularly large number of stressful stimuli (Łodzińska, 2010, p. 126).

The Authors of the paper define work-related stress as a discrepancy between what is required of a given employee and his capability to meet these requirements. Davidson offers an apt definition of stress referring to this understanding of the phenomenon: stress is a "psychological and physiological bodily response to a perceived imbalance between the demands and the ability to meet them" (Davidson, 2000, p. 19).

2. Sources and causes of work-related stress

Nowadays it would probably be very difficult to find a person who has never experienced work-related stress. Work-related stress can be caused by both physical and social conditions of work. Physical ones include, among others, the location of the work environment, temperature, lightning, equipment, kind of work done, and the presence of other harmful factors. Social ones cover e.g. work organization, remuneration schemes, social relations, promotion prospects, or professional development opportunities (Ogińska-Bulik, 2006, pp. 14-15).

Work-related stress occurs in situations when an organization does not provide its employees with resources necessary for fulfilling their duties or when their skills and abilities do not correspond to the roles and duties they perform in a given position (Dollard, 2003, p. 84). Work-related stress can be divided into various kinds of stress, e.g. stress connected with organizational careers and low salaries it offers, the lack of appreciation, unemployment; stress connected with a function or position one occupies, which entails disappointment with one's work, work conditions and duties; or structural stress and its social interactions, isolation and role conflict (Ogińska-Bulik, 2006, p. 15).

As Łodzińska states, so far about 40 work-relates stressors have been listed, five most frequent of them being: organization of work and activities (tasks, duties) performed at work; the scope of professional responsibilities and an employee's position in the structure of the workplace; the course of an employee's professional career; interpersonal relations in an organization; and organizational culture of a company, including the manner and style of human resource management (Łodzińska, 2010, p. 129).

Being overloaded with physical work, too many difficult and demanding tasks, tight deadlines, superiors' unclear orders, or targets that are too complicated and impossible to reach are possible causes of work-related stress. Additionally, monotony, the lack of support and cooperation from other team members, unjust treatment, the lack of challenging goals and the lack of appreciation and respect from co-workers also lead to stress and employees' decreased motivation and efficiency in the work environment (Judzińska, 2013, pp. 188-189).

Cooper and Cartwright provide their own list of work-related stressors, which includes problems with clients/customers (a factor particularly important in managers' work), the need to work overtime, to meet tight deadlines, to deal with problems with employees and teams, to perform too many tasks and duties in a short time, to assume responsibility for the team and the quality of its work, and the lack of co-workers' support in difficult situations (Cooper & Cartwright, 2007, p. 29).

For Dollard et al. important work-related stressors, especially in the service industry, include emotional dissonance, connected with the need to hide negative emotions at work, and social stressors, connected with cooperation and contact with clients/customers (Dollard, 2003, p. 84). Their too high or imprecise expectations, and even aggression, can be a source of stress for managers and affect their attitudes and behaviour.

The results of studies conducted among 70 managers by Ogińska-Bulik reveal that work overload is the most common source of stress for them (Ogińska-Bulik, 2006, pp. 220-221). A similar study conducted among Polish managers by M. Syper in 2007 and 2008 found that "Polish managers feel overtired. 71% of the respondents complain of being overworked" (Bartman, 2008).

3. Stress in managers' work and its effects

Selye divided stress into two types – negative and positive – and called them, respectively: distress (bad, painful and harmful) and eustress (good, healthy, mobilizing for action) (Steciwko & Mastalerz-Migas, 2012, p. 7). The Authors' of the paper focus on negative effects of occupational stress in managers' work.

Wróblewska (after: Tylka, 2002 p. 71) reports that

on the basis of the study they conducted, Waldmann and Schaeffer created a list of etiological factors leading to psychosomatic disorders caused by work-related stress. These factors include: qualitative overload with the requirements of the position – 31%, quantitative overload with the requirements of work, long hours, or exhausting commute – 16%, too many stressful situations caused by conflicts in an organization – 13%, being overloaded with extra tasks – 11%, the lack of ability to perform one's duties – 9%, dissatisfaction with one's profession or workplace – 9%, professional failures – 6%, having to work shifts – 3%, other factors – 2%.

Stress in managers' work results in poor communication, negative relations in teams, conflict situations, tension, lower efficiency (Żemigała, 2011), as well as job burnout. Other negative outcomes of stress cover e.g. diminishing interest in one's work, increased absence, transferring one's responsibility to others, being impolite to clients/customers, and accepting faulty solutions.

In the cognitive area, stress leads to reduced concentration, distraction, reduced capability for long-term thinking, reduced creativity, poor memory, and an increased number of mistakes. As far as emotions are concerned, effects of stress include: insecurity,

dissatisfaction, imbalance, mood swings, apathy and depression. Stress might also lead to heart and circulatory system diseases, heart attacks, sleep disorders, fatigue or dizziness (Litzke & Such, 2006, p. 22). Walczyna points at a harmful impact of work-related stress on employees' mental health, e.g. problems with sleep, depression, chronic fatigue, eating disorders and various somatic complications, such as obesity, diabetes, or irritable bowel syndrome (Walczyna, 2016, p. 291).

The consequences of work-related stress suffered by managers affect not only them but also the organization in which they are employed by e.g.: increased absence, decreased productivity, increased turnover, increased costs of sick leave, and decreased job satisfaction (Terelak, 2007, p. 25).

Work-related stress is at present a serious problem not only for individuals – managers and other employees who experience it – but also for effective functioning of an organization and society. As Kraczla writes "the results obtained in numerous studies are worrying, as work-related stress is a widespread phenomenon and stress indicators increase all the time. The level of occupational stress has grown dramatically in the last several decades" (Kraczla, 2013, p. 72).

It should be mentioned that "new economy favours managers who are stress-resilient, that is possess adequate soft skills (mostly from the area of self-management, motivation, and problem solving), and who know effective techniques and strategies of coping with stress" (Kaczmarek, 2016, p. 104).

4. Impact of stress on family life

"The relations between one's family life and work are characterised by the expansion of the latter, especially with reference to time. There is a growing tendency in the market to treat one's company as a family in the area of emotions and personal relations. However, professional relations (more formal) are appropriate for work, while personal ones (more intimate) – for family. 'Forcing' people to take part in corporate retreats, parties, etc. at the expense of their free time will affect their professional efficiency in the future (Sysko-Romańczuk & Zdrzenicka, 2011, pp. 92-93). The Authors would like to note here that so called 'family relations' encouraged in many contemporary organizations significantly distort and disintegrate normal family life and lead to various problems.

It seems that managers find it particularly hard to reconcile professional and family life. Transferring situations from the stressful professional environment into the family environment leads to a number of negative consequences.

Permanent tension connected with work-related stress is often taken out on family members at home. Coping with the symptoms of stress frequently means reaching for various psychoactive substances, such as nicotine, alcohol and drugs, which, undoubtedly, affects the functioning of a family. Their difficult situation is exacerbated by managers' apathy, isolation, emotional instability and aggression, and might even lead to family break-up.

The results of studies published by Human Power in the report entitled "Work, power, and energy in Polish companies" (*Praca, moc, energia w polskich firmach*) reveal that "over 30% of the respondents do not remember what they did at work the previous day. Over a half of those who work in Polish organizations think about work when they are at home, and 42,2% are aware that their present professional activity has a negative impact on their health (…)". The authors of the publication "Work-related stress and its impact on occupational accidents and employees' health" (*Stres w pracy oraz jego wpływ na występowanie wypadków przy pracy i stan zdrowia osób pracujących*) report the results of studies which show that "every fifth (19.5%) respondent frequently experiences fear and anxiety at work. It is worrying that over 40% admit that they cope with stress and problems at work by taking them out on their family members" (http://bezale.pl/2017/06/29/stres-w-pracy-i-jego-wplyw-na-zdrowie-i-zycie-rodzinne/).

Symptoms of stress in the family environment include: too intensive reactions to family members' behaviour, frequent mood swings, irritability, the lack of control over one's emotions, problems with communicating with family members, not knowing how to spend time and relax together, keeping their distance from family matters and problems, a tendency to postpone family holidays, treating important matters as unimportant, negative opinions of ideas and suggestions put forward by family members, and unwillingness to take part in social life e.g. to spend time with friends.

It should be emphasised here that "employees' families are significant stakeholders of organizations. An employee who is overloaded with work and permanently under stress and pressure is not as effective as his employer might expect" (Sysko-Romańczuk & Zdrzenicka, 2011, p. 93).

5. Counteracting the negative effects of stress (work-life balance)

In order to create a friendly and stress-free work environment, it is important for persons responsible for employees' health and well-being and their work conditions to be aware of the role played by work-related stress (Łodzińska, 2010). Many organizations introduce initiatives aimed at stress prevention among their employees, including, of course, managers, such as matching tasks and duties to individuals' capabilities, competences and experiences, providing objective and constructive assessment of their work, and creating opportunities for learning, development, and promotion.

Contemporary organizations should be open to new knowledge and not rely only on workshops and handbooks, but follow new concepts in management, implement new organizational forms, improve work environment and make it more managers' and employees' friendly (Żemigała, 2011, pp. 58-59).

It is vital to create positive work environment which: reduces stress thanks to effective communication systems, shapes supportive co-workers' attitudes, and promotes employees' well-being. Solutions to be introduced should take into account the causes of managers' stress.

It is necessary to develop and implement organizational and individual programmes of stress management, whose net result should, first of all, counteract negative psychosocial effects of work-related stress and lead to increased efficiency (Molek-Winiarska, 2010a).

On the basis of the studies conducted in Great Britain, Wheatley concludes that organizational culture is not conductive to maintaining work-life balance. People are engaged in their work and neglect family duties (Wheatley, 2012). That is why it is important to shape organizational culture which values and promotes positive interpersonal relations by e.g. offering workshops and trainings from the area of interpersonal skills, conflict solving, effective strategies of coping with stress, and work-life balance.

"Work-life balance means evenly distributed engagement in these two areas of life. The lack of work-life balance means disproportion in time and engagement devoted to them" (Buchelt & Jupowicz, 2008, p. 84). Borkowska observes that "work-life balance is maintained when work does not monopolise after-work life, especially the time which should be spent resting, and vice versa, when after-work life is not led at the cost of one's work" (Borkowska, 2010, p. 3).

According to *Łopatka*,

> work-life balance is a concept of time management which assumes maintaining harmony between professional and private life. Balance between all spheres of life should result in employee's self-actualization, which, ultimately, will allow him to be satisfied with his life (Łopatka, 2017, p. 217).

Work-life balance shapes employees' attitudes and behaviours, the quality of their work, engagement in what they do, and increases productivity and even profits of an organization (Bloom, Kretschmer, & Van Reenen, 2009, p. 24).

That is why it is so important to implement good practices helping to maintain work-life balance, e.g. flexible working hours, part-time work, or child care centres (Doble & Supriya, 2010, p. 331). Similar solutions are also mentioned by Skinner and Chapman, who list such initiatives as: flexible working hours, easier access to part-time work, and paid and unpaid time off (Skinner & Chapman, 2013, p. 2).

The Authors would like to note here that in order to minimize negative effects of work-related stress, employers should consider it a priority to take care of employees' work comfort and well-being, work conditions and relations between people at work.

Conclusions

The Authors are of the opinion that it is necessary to increase awareness of work-related stress, its causes and consequences among employees, managers and executives (Batarowski, 2007, p. 7).

The most frequently mentioned causes of work-related stress among managers stem directly from the nature of their work and its quantity. The nature of work covers

e.g. deadlines, availability, on-the-spot decisions, responsibility and inadequate input data, the lack of opportunities for further development, for using one's talents, for promotion, fear of losing a job in a highly competitive work environment, or a sense of helplessness in face of new and demanding tasks.

How does stress affect managers' professional and private lives? The Authors of the paper focused on negative effects of work-related stress. Chronic stress negatively affects the quality of work of the teams managers supervise, employees' and managers' motivation, and engagement in meeting organizational targets, all of which lead to decreased productivity of the whole organization (Wróblewska, 2013).

Stress also has a negative impact on relations within managers' families. Tension, anxiety, irritability, problems with communication, impulsivity, emotional instability and even aggressive and pathological behaviours become frequent and sometimes even permanent elements of their family life.

Managers are a group of professionals who are particularly exposed to work-related stress due to a quick pace of their work and the salience of and responsibility for their tasks and duties. That is why resilience to stress and ability to manage stress effectively are considered key qualities of a contemporary manager. He should be able not only to cope with his own work-related stress but also know how to reduce its effects among people he works with (Molek-Winiarska, 2010b).

Stress experienced by managers of the 21st century, especially in times of constant changes in the environment and in workplaces, requires continuous and thorough analysis of the phenomenon. These analyses should produce practical guidelines for effective stress management and coping strategies useful for organizations, HR departments, managers, employees and their families, who are exposed to negative effects of work-related stress.

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