

# STRESS MANAGEMENT- THE ROLE IN ITS SOCIAL DYNAMICS

**Roxana MAIER**

Hyperion University, Faculty of Journalism, Psychology and Educational Sciences,  
Bucharest, Romania

Tel: 0040 – 21- 327465 E-mail: roxanamaierpsiho@gmail.com

## **Abstract**

*In most organisations, stress management represents a priority due to its high cost. The lack of solutions towards it leads to demotivation, inefficient work, fatigue, illness and even depletion syndrome. The relation of the employee with stress represents an important aspect in avoiding the tense work situations, failures, lack of performance in terms of results. Going from the study of different dimensions of stress in a speditioner organisation was initiated in a session of stress management trainings. The study brings data about the results obtained after the latter.*

**Keywords: stress, coping, speditioner, training**

## **Introduction**

Professional stress targets stress at the work place and “*is determined by the person’s impact with the process of physical and intellectual work, especially inside an organisation*” (Dinu, 2001:88)

Several benchmarks (after Stora, 1999)

- *the environment conditions that refer to the spatial-temporal organisation of work* - the action exerted by different inadequate factors towards the functions of the one who works in that specific place, and this can generate a state of discomfort which will lead to a decline in performance and will eventually lead to the aggravation of the psychosocial climate of work and to illnesses. In these working conditions one can count the lighting in the workplace, the colours utilised, the noise and the vibrations, microclimate conditions (temperature, humidity and air movement)
- *conditions to organise the work* - the different roles we have in the workplace, the responsibilities taken, time pressure, work schedule, working in shifts. The statutes and the roles that a person occupies are interdependent and fix the rights and responsibilities of everyone in the workplace. Assuming the role represents a complex process, in which the actor anticipates and understands the state, intentions and motivations of those with which he or she enters in an interrelational contact. This process refers to the ideal construction, the imaginary one, about a role which will be transposed into action; it is in fact “an intention, similar to taking a decision, which prefaces the concrete interpretation of a role” (Bogatu, 2002:60) When the personal characteristics match with the particularities of the role, the process will unwind in an innate, cursive manner. However, when the requests of the role do not entirely match with the psychical

aptitudes and motivational particularities of the actor, there is the need of more time and of a more careful adjusting of the personality. In this hypothesis, the role comprises the total of the expected behaviours, an ensemble of regulated conduits and of waiting; the role represents the dynamic aspect of status, i.e. a conduit that validates a given status. Motivation does thus hold an extremely important role in this situation, it being the one which triggers and energetically sustains the person's behaviour, orienting him or her towards a certain goal. A specific role corresponds to each status in a certain culture; each social position has a set of beliefs, values, attitudes, norms and expectations that corresponds to it both from the side of society and from the side of the occupants of other statuses.

- *conditions to develop one's career* - the existence or lack thereof of advancement opportunities, the different ways to advance in position, the uncertainty of the workplace. The realisation level expresses "the result of concrete score which the subject obtains, both at the end of each individual task, and per whole set of given tasks" (Golu, 2002:594). Between the three levels there is a dynamic rapport, which is variable, both on the individual side (different tasks) and in inter-individual plan (one and the same task). Depending on whether the desire to succeed or the fear of failure are dominant, the aspiration level will be propulsed upwards or pushed downwards. The most desirable formula is the one in which the aspiration level is in the superior position, the one of expectation is in the middle position ( at a small distance in comparison to the first one), while on the lowest position, but at a small distance from the expectation level, there is the realisation level.
- *conditions of relationing in the workplace* - the relationships with the superiors, with the subordinates, with the colleagues. The psychosocial ambiance contributes, along with physical ambiance to the structure, functionality and quality of the workplace.
- *conditions connected to the organisational climate* - participation or lack thereof to the point of general political decision of the firm which we may or may not agree with. The evolution of the career represents "more flexibility and larger possibilities to integrate professional, familial, personal in a harmonious whole." (Pânișoară, Pânișoară, 2005:163).
- *work conditions in a determined position* - the work in such a place produces health issues over a period of time. "A study on air traffic controllers evidenced the fact that they suffered gastric ulcers, light diabetes and arterial hypertension, in a proportion four times larger than a control group made up of aerial navigators." (Stora, 1999:19)
- *conditions of overworking* - triggers excess in work - both the one that is a stressing agent, and the one that is simply perceived this way, the impossibility to govern time and personal abilities in the realisation of a task.

Another classification of the agents that can bring in stress at the workplace belongs to Sava(2004) and is comprised of five categories of factors that induce stress, such as: intrinsically factors of the work deployed, the factors that target the structure and the organisational climate, the factors regarding the role in the organisation, the factors targeting the relations at the workplace and factors targeting career development.

Starting from how exactly we perceive stress factors in our lives and from our life experience we can find solutions in stress management. This is possible both in everyday life and at the workplace. The professional activity is ran in complex conditions towards the person working, the organisational individual acting simultaneously and/or successively a multitude of physical, organisational, social and psychological factors.

Thus "...The complexity perceived towards a situation depends in grand terms from our ability to simplify reality, and this ability to simplify depends on the capacity to specify coherently results and explicative variables" (Kind, Keohane, & Vetba, 2000:23)

"Man is part of a social group and from a certain time period, so that his conscious individuality is not shaped from his or her own experiences, but from the experience of others. Each of us feels the constraint that is exerted on his or her inwardly actions by different beliefs and traditions in which he or she was born" . (Rădulescu-Motru C, 1923:9)

Each individual has its own relational space which defines him or her as a person and through which he or she is differentiates him or herself. From this relational place there is also "social support" which can be defined by the profundity and the expansion of autocentric net which helps, through the comfort and the information received through formal and informal contacts, the members of the net.

The study starts from the premises that one of the ways of building a stress management program begins with the knowledge of some of the stress dimensions, but also of ways to react to them. Thus, prior to the proposition of the stress management intervention there were applied a few of the tests that target stress dimensions such as: the scale of stress perception - in order to evaluate the subjective perception of stress, the coping scale - in order to identify the coping patterns predominantly chosen by respondents, the stamina scale , the autoefficacy scale - on order to evaluate some of the sanogenesis factors. Because the intervention was applied both in order to find a solution for stress, but also for making the work more efficient and the augmentation in workplace satisfaction has been applied before and after the intervention, the stress perception scale and the professional satisfaction questionnaire.

### **Objectives**

The objectives of this work are to identify: 1. the starting index numbers in the constitution of a stress management program and 2. the existence of a

difference in terms of the perception of stress, the work efficiency and the work satisfaction after the stress management intervention.

### **The hypothesis of the study**

After the stress management intervention the stress perception values change and the professional satisfaction and work efficiency augments.

### **Participants in the study**

For the verification of the proposed hypotheses in this study there was investigated, through specific psychological assessments a sample of 37 subjects/participants with ages between 25 and 48 years old, the average age being  $m=42,4$  years old, without taking into account the gender and all having a speditioner job. The selection process was undifferentiated according to its definition by Rateau(2004). Form the total of subjects the distribution genderwise is of 17 women and 20 men.

### **Utilized Assessments**

According to the proposed objectives, the investigation of stress dimensions and of certain sanogenesis factors, the assements applied are: Stress perception scale (apud Băban, 1998), Coping scale (apud Băban, 1998), the autoefficiency scale (apud Băban, 1998), The stamina scale (apud Băban, 1998), The professional satisfaction Questionnaire (apud Constantin, 2004).

### **The stress perception scale**

„Perceived Stress Questionnaire” – elaborated Levenstein and colab. and is a relevant instrument in the establishment of the stress management at the start. The scale is comprised of 30 items that describe the possible psychic reactions to the answering capacities demands which exceed the answering capabilities of answering . (apud Băban, 1998)

### **Coping Scale (Cope)**

This questionnaire helps identifying coping strategies and targets 14 types of coping. It was elaborated by Carven, Scheier and Wrintraud and intergrates the stress model alaborated by Lazarus.

The questionnaire is comprised of 53 items, each coping form being evaluated as being found different items with the exception of coping though the appeal to alcohol/medicine - which is measured through a single item. The 14 types of scales corresponding to the coping strategies are: active coping, planning, elimination of concurring action, retention from action, looking for the social instrumental support, the search for social-emotional support, positive reinterpretation, acceptance, denial, emotional discharge, orientation towards religion, mental passivity, behavioral passivity, resorting to alcohol/medicines. (apud Băban, 1998)

### **Hardiness Scale**

The hardiness concept was introduced by J. Cobasa (1979) as being an individual variable with a significance in stress resistance, it is a personality trait manifested on a cognitive, emotional and behavioral level. The trait results from the perception of personal control, of value and the significance of implication even from the perception of events and the life changes as stimulus. According to the author, hardiness implies the following three characteristics: employment control and challenge/stimulus. Control expresses the conviction that events can be fully controlled and influenced; this conviction does not imply naive expectations regarding a full control of the events, but more the perception of one's own capabilities to actively rapport to the environment, to take responsibility for one's own fate. Employment expresses the tendency towards engagement and persistence in the set goal, the conviction that the events have a meaning and significance. Hence, employability refers to the ability to believe in the importance of the actions taken, to have a real interest for the different domains of life: profession, family, interpersonal relationships, social institutions.

The challenge is a characteristic of hardiness which derives from the perception upon change with a normal life aspect which can offer chances of personal development; due to the cognitive flexibility and the tolerance for ambiguity, new experiences are searched for and interpreted as stimulative and benefic situations. The challenge expresses itself also through the tendency to turn towards the future.

The hardiness scale is comprised of 45 items which make reference to hardiness and to the subject who is asked to answer with one of the possible response options, i.e. from 1 to 4 where each4 where each represent:

- 1 – not true at all
- 2 –a little bit true
- 3 – true
- 4 – absolutely true. (apud Băban, 1998).

### **Autoefficacy Scale**

In the social-cognitive personality theory, *perceived autoefficacy* represents a central variable in the auto regulation mechanism the body has to the requests of the medium. The autoefficacy concept, proposed by Bandura is not often utilised and cited in the literature that targets stress problematics. We consider that AW represents a relevant construct for the understanding of stress protecting factors. In the formulation and development of his theory, Bandura was more interested by the principles that govern the human behaviours in situations where tasks need to be accomplished. Stress, as a psychosocial phenomenon, does not enter the sphere of the American author. Subsequently, due to the results which indicated the relationship between the growth in autoefficacy and health, the possible preventive function of AW imposed itself to the author. According to Bandura's definition, autoefficacy refers to convincing a person about his or her capacity to

mobilise his or her cognitive and motivational resources that are necessary for successfully fulfilling his or her given tasks.

The autoefficacy scale comprises 10 affirmations referring to the perceived autoefficacy. The options to answer are from 1 to 4 as follows: 1=never, 2=sometimes, 3=often, 4=always (apud Băban, 1998).

### **Professional Satisfaction Questionnaire**

The Questionnaire comprises a list of 32 affirmations which reflect attitudes and perceptions that people can have towards work in general, but also towards their workplace in terms of satisfaction. The answering options are from 1 to 6, where 1 means “never”, and 6 means “always”. The questionnaire is built in four subscales as follows:

- Remuneration and promotion
- Leadership and interpersonal relationships
- Organisation and communication
- General satisfaction

The Alpha Cronbach internal consistency indices obtained are: for remuneration and promotion 0,820, for leadership and interpersonal relationships 0,760, for organisation and communication 0,738 and the one for the entire questionnaire is 0,872 (apud Constantin, 2004).

### **Procedure**

The subjects were asked to answer individually to the applied assessments, without a time limit and the appliance of the assessments was done in the workplace.

### **Results**

The verification of the first hypothesis:

The starting indices situate the subjects as follows: in terms of subjective perception of stress the obtained values are  $m=64,26$  - moderate stress class, picking activism and planning most frequently in terms of coping options. On the coping options level, the results are predominantly active. In terms of hardiness, the values obtained are  $m=137,5$ , value which situates the subjects in the high hardiness class for this assessment, while for autoefficacy the average obtained is  $m=27,8$ , value which places them in the moderate autoefficacy class. Upon the results obtained to the applied assessments and the probing of the sources of stress in the professional activity the stress management intervention was proposed.

The verification of the second hypothesis:

In order to evidence the results of the second hypothesis we started from the level of professional satisfaction before and after the intervention. The general score results for professional satisfaction before the intervention are  $m=80,3$ , which situates the respondents in the decreased satisfaction class. In terms of work efficiency we have studied the results of work for the finished month having as indices the numbers of finalised transports, as well as the number of new

companies contacted in order to realise transports for them too. The objectives of the training have targeted: time management, identification and solving of stress factors that appear frequently in the workplace, fixing rational objectives with developing a client strategy, making deadline pressured communication more efficient, identifying personal resources, but also the ones of the group which have the role to support in coming up with solutions to stress, identifying and utilising new strategies for solutioning stressful situations at work. In terms of coping mechanisms, depending on the dominant type that is involved, its simple analysis is insufficient and a correct approach would take into consideration orientation and vectorisation of these mechanisms towards the stressful situation. This can be realised with the help of the conceptual pair of confrontation/avoidance of the stress factor. In a succinct definition, Miclea(1997) argues that confrontation is “the totaling of the cognitive or neurobiological behavioural strategies oriented towards the stress factor”(Miclea, 1997:20) In the frame of this intervention, one session centered on utilising the adequate coping mechanisms, on predominantly utilising the active ones, on moving the weight centre from the passive to the active ones. I mention here that the group was predominantly utilising active coping mechanisms, but from the discussions it also resulted the way they were moving from the active to the passive ones and the situations in which teh latter would be used. For some of the respondents, utilising the mechanisms had to be clarified, while for the ones utilising passive mechanisms often we have worked on ways to change thee into active ones. One week upon the completion of the intervention, the scale of stress perception and the professional satisfaction questionnaire were reapplied. The scores obtained for the stress perception scale was now  $m=58,2$ , which means that stress perception values have decreased, while for professional satisfaction the results were of  $,=98,2$ , which indicates an augmentation of the work satisfaction and moving from the reduced professional satisfaction class to a moderate one. Furthermore, in the month preceding the intervention there were two indices followed - the number of finalised transports and the number of new clients acquired and it has been noticed that both indices increased with 40% and 25% respectively.

### **Conclusion**

The study starts from the assumption that in relating to stress, uts dimensions can offer data that bring us to the initiation of an adequate prodrum to manage stress. The training program went to reduce stress, to make the work more efficient and to increase professional satisfaction. Having this as a starting point, it was proposed that the series of trainings is continued on the same theme, but also adding new themes to it which can potentially develop the teams and which could augment work efficiency.

### **Limits of the study**

As a limit of this study we could mention the one related to the relatively small number of meetings. Even though results were immediately seen, it is good

to know that from a simple modification up to actually making it permanent time needs to pass, and as, along the way, the respondents could become demotivated or return to the old ways of managing stress that are dysfunctional. On the same note of the time period of the intervention - the bigger this period is, the more the participants will be in contact with their own resources, their own strategies and will value their potential better.

#### REFERENCES

1. BĂBAN, A., *Stress and personality*, Presa Universitară Clujană Printing Press, Cluj-Napoca, 1998.
2. BOGATU, N., *Role conduit, self and personality*, Granada. Bucharest, 2002.
3. CONSTANTIN, T., *Psychological evaluation of personnel*, Polirom. Bucharest, 2004.
4. DINU V. *The organisational psychology magazine*, vol. I, no. 2, Polirom Printing Press. Bucharest, 2001.
5. GOLU, M., *The bases of general psychology*, University Press. Bucharest, 2002.
6. KING, G., KEOHANE, R., VERTBA, S., *The fundamentals of social research*, Polirom Printing Press, Iași, 2000.
7. MICLEA, M., *Stress and psychic adjustment*, Presa Universitară Clujană Printing Press. Cluj-Napoca, 1997.
8. PÂNIȘOARĂ, G.; PÂNIȘOARĂ, I-O., *Efficient motivation. Practical Guide*, Polirom Printing Press. Iași, 2005.
9. RATEAU, P., *Methods and experimental statistics in human sciences*, Polirom Printing Press. Iași, 2004.
10. RĂDULESCU MOTRU, C. (1923). *Psychology course*, Cultura Națională Printing Press. Bucharest
11. SAVA, F., *Fatigue, stress and work accidents. Organisational and work psychology manual*, volume coordinated by Bogathy, Z. Polirom Printing Press, Bucharest, 2004.
12. STORA, J.B., *Stress*, Meridiane Printing Press, Bucurest, 1999.