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STRESS AT WORK: AN AXIOLOGICAL NARRATIVE IN A WORK PRACTICE

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Abstract: This paper addressed the stress at work issue because of the influence of challenging and stimulating factors that lead to an affective commitment to the organization, in addition to better performance; or of obstructive factors considered to be harmful to the individual. The influence of emotional intelligence and leadership, as elements that define the course of behavior to work situations that the individual faces, were involved, in an underlying manner. Through an approach of the axiological narrative and the perspective of the author, the empirical conception of a work experience is shared, where the stressors were identified, as well as the way to face and reduce them. It was determined that a leader who wants to be successful in his or her influence exercise requires developing emotional intelligence and stress management skills as a challenging perspective to know how to handle conflicts and get better performance in the processes to achieve the goals in an organization.

Keywords: stress at work, emotional intelligence, leadership, job well-being, conflict.

INTRODUCTION

Organizations' current environment requires employees to be responsible, proactive, initiative, and committed to excellence (Salanova & Schaufeli, 2004) because with these qualities, will meet the expectations and challenges that are competitively immersed (Klinar, 2011).

We have reviewed factors that contribute to the development of work well-being, to respond successfully to the current situation. Organizational studies have been oriented towards a positive analysis that promotes a good relationship with work activities, as well as the personal and professional well-being of employees towards them (Blanch, Sahagún & Cervantes, 2010).

In this way, work becomes the most important activity of the human being because, in addition to investing more time in it, it allows the self-realization and improvement of the individual (Polaino, 1998), as well as providing a feeling of social belonging and a sense of identity and self-esteem (Garrido, 2014).

The fair side of work is the moment in which it exists: emotional equilibrium, job satisfaction, sense of utility, recognition, and ability to control, in addition to having productive achievements and success. The opposite extreme is when people take to work as an escape route to hide some situation that unbalances their lives (personal, family, social) and becomes addictive to compensate for the gaps, with a compulsive and extreme workload.

The extreme cases of this situation are identified with stress levels that can cause stressful situations that contribute to generating a negative work environment, where the processes of social, labor, and personal interrelation, are reduced in their quality and performance.

Therefore, to raise the development of emotional intelligence, becomes a pressing need to know how to control emotions, impulses, and individual motivations, to establish a greater likelihood of empathy in front of other people, and even, would favor the effective development of the tasks in the organization (Cortese, n.d.).

On the other hand, one of the aspects to be addressed in leadership is knowing how to deal with conflicts arising from individual, group, and organizational interrelations. Its capability to control and manage emotions contribute to an efficient ability to get a better working environment (Lussier & Achua, 2011).

Then, work scenarios present interrelated variables: emotions, work environment, stress,

capacities to handle conflicts, etc.

To verify these theoretical situations, the purpose of this document is to share from a phenomenological perspective, an experience in which the work process to achieve a task, involved emotional intelligence processes to face the emerging stressors resulting from an interaction among members of a team.

METHOD

Through an approach to the axiological narrative (Naupas, Mejía, Novoa & Villagómez, 2013), it is intended to externalize the conception of the environment through the empirical values arising from the experiences of work activities.

Within a personal narrative (González, Rodríguez, Romero & Hernández, 2013), it will be pointed out, what have been some of the factors generating stress in the author of this work, and how they have been able to face these situations, involving processes of emotional intelligence and conflict management. For this purpose, this work will be structured as follows:

Firstly, with a constructs presentation that is involved in its development, namely: stress, emotional intelligence, and conflict. It will complement, starting from the theoretical perspectives, the factors that generate stress in the workplace, and what are the recommended strategies to handle it.

Afterward, reflection will be made on an event in the personal work environment, which empirically describes how to address a particular situation that caused the stress. It will be related to how these issues were addressed empirically in the situation. Finally, a conclusion about the importance of using emotional intelligence to manage stress well.

The objective of this narrative is to contrast the theoretical constructs with an empirical fact, in which their application in the management of work stress is reflected.

THEORETICAL BASIS

Before starting with the narrative, it is pertinent to make clear the following terms that will be involved in the writing of this document.

OVERVIEW CONSTRUCTS

It is understood that stress is an adaptive response to a stimulus received and perceived as an excessive psychological or physical demand. This can be considered pleasing because it is routed to obtain positive results for the individual (Eustress). Or, it becomes unpleasant (distress), by manifesting excessive pressure or unreasonable demands that cause negative events (Griffin & Moorhead, 2010).

Robbins & Judge (2017), highlight the fact that there are challenging stressors (workload, tasks, time) and obstructive stressors (those that prevent the achievement of goals). The first generates a lower voltage than the latter.

In such a way, that challenging stress or eustress can cause a greater affective commitment to the organization, manifesting in better performance and production of achievements in the work. Otherwise, it happens with distress or obstructive stress.

And a stressor symbolizes an external situation that is potentially harmful to the person (Ivancevich, Konopaske & Matteson, 2017). So, attention is focused on how, from the organizational environment, events originate that, according to the individual's personality, will classify them as challenging or obstructive.

On the other hand, emotional intelligence refers to the ability to identify, recognize and control personal emotions, as well as the ability to recognize and identify the emotions of others, to know how to respond to a situation (Whetten & Cameron, 2016).

According to Daniel Goleman's model of emotional intelligence (cited in Huerta & Rodríguez, 2006), it is composed of five

components, which become a process to achieve emotional maturity, these are self-awareness, mental balance, motivation, impulse control, and sociability.

Those who have a high level of development of this intelligence, reflect a higher work performance and efficiency of their activities (Robbins & Judge, 2017). Above all, in those positions that require a remarkable degree of interpersonal interrelation and that must influence the work of others, in other words, it is basic for those who exercise leadership (Griffin & Moorhead, 2010).

Finally, a conflict in the work arises now when there are differences or disagreements between individuals, for the simple fact that each person has different ways of perceiving things (Lussier & Achua, 2011).

Conflicts can be functional when they are focused on solving them since the objectives that are shared between the discordant parties are put before them, and, therefore, they worry about knowing how to decide in a group and accept the changes. Everything that cannot be effectively resolved, and negative consequences are obtained, is classified as dysfunctional conflict.

Some various strategies and activities seek to prevent stress and reduce levels of stress, which is called conflict management. Mochón (2014), raises these options: evasion, adaptation, imposition, commitment, and collaboration, which range from minimizing the conflict to involving all those affected so that jointly it is solved.

CAUSATIVE FACTORS OF JOB STRESS

According to Robbins & Judge (2017), several factors cause work stress. In Figure 1, a graphic model of the causes and consequences of stress is transcribed.

The authors catalog them as follows:

a) *Environmental factors.* - It

contemplates the uncertainty perceived in the environment for economic, social, political, technological reasons, etc., which have an impact on the strategic activities of the organization. This situation induces changes in the company's operations, which can generate insecurity in the workplace and instability.

b) *Organizational factors.* - They originate when there are different demands on tasks, in the role of the position they occupy, and in interpersonal relationships. In such a way that they manifest themselves in situations such as greater pressure to avoid mistakes or finish tasks in a certain time, work overload, demanding leadership, and a negative work environment.

c) *Personal factors.* - Includes contextual aspects (family, economic, personality) that a worker lives outside of the workplace, but impact on their work performance.

d) *Individual and cultural differences.* - Each person has different capacities to face stressful situations: perception, work experiences, social support, and personality. In such a way that each one will have different conceptions of their environment. Likewise, concerning their beliefs, traditions, rites, and customs of society, the meaning of work can be conceived differently.

On the other hand, Ivancevich et al. (2017), distinguish the group-level factor as another source of stress. Here there are intrusive aspects that govern the group's life, the leadership's style, and social condition. And according to their attention degree, they become potential stressors in individuals. Among the most representative are:

a) The participation level for expressing

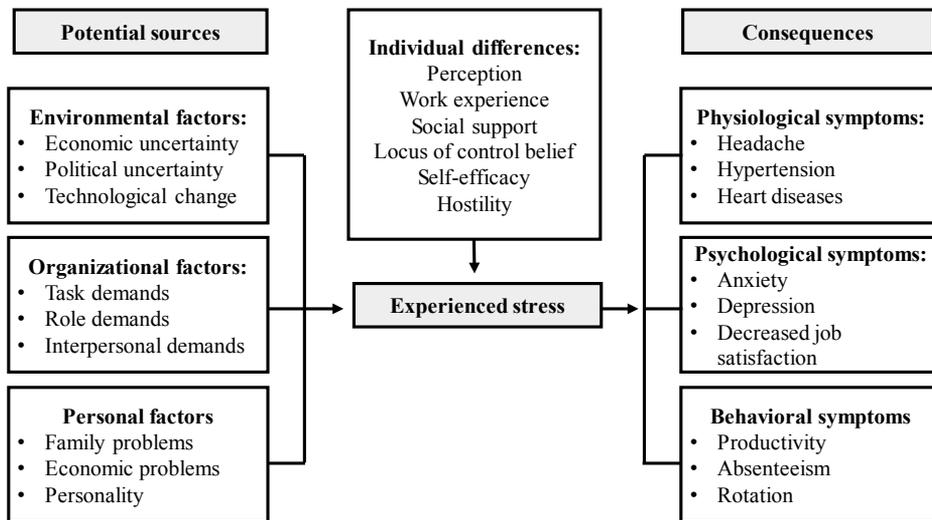


Figure 1 A model of work stress. Source: Based on Robbins & Judge (2017).

ideas and opinions and sharing knowledge and making decisions.

b) Quality in intergroup and intra-group relationships, which are reflected in the degree of trust, cohesion, support, interest, and communication between individuals.

c) The organizational policies rigidity and existing power games in how to operate the company.

d) The personality that represents its organizational culture, to practice processes and driving and working methods.

e) The performance feedback level and communication systems used for communication.

f) The perceived quality and progress opportunities for professional development.

WAYS TO COPE WITH STRESS

Velázquez (2013) argues that there are several ways to cope with stress and control their effects. What is important, first, is to recognize it and then make a diagnosis to determine its proper handling.

Moreover, Griffin & Moorhead (2010), commented that various strategies have been established that help manage stress in the workplace, classified as individual and organizational. The following describes the individual strategies:

a) *Exercise* – the authors emphasize that exercising regularly induces a lower probability of suffering heart attacks, in addition to having less tension and developing more optimism and self-confidence.

b) *Relaxation* – considered an effective way of adaptation, this action can be manifested by taking vacations regularly,

taking regular breaks in the workday, isolating oneself for a short time to stay away from the noise, getting to read something light not related to work, listen to music, etc.

c) *Time management*. – Pressures can be eliminated if the times are administered, by making lists in which the activities are classified in order of importance: crucial, important, and optional.

d) *Managing roles*. – It is to focus on actively working to avoid overload, ambiguity, and conflicting responsibilities. So, it is recommended assertive communication efforts clarify doubts and enable energy to fulfill things.

e) *Support groups*. – make alliances and maintain a formal and informal relationships with the members of the group, contributing to support when required.

About organizational strategies to cope with stress, the authors stress that companies have realized the need to contribute to stress management of their employees to have them productive and healthy. These are the following:

a) *Institutional programs*. – they are applied through mechanisms established by the organization, they are represented, for example, with the work schedules, the design of the positions, the organizational culture and its norms and policies to follow during their working days, etc.

b) *Collateral programs*. – organizational programs specifically instituted to help manage the stress of their employees. These programs may include health, stress management, conditioning, and career development, among others.

Finally, Ivancevich et al. (2017, p.289) comment that there are “two ways of coping with stress”:

a) *Focused on the problem.* – it means directly facing the source of stress, among the relevant actions: time management, working with a mentor, and training to improve their skills.

b) *Focused on emotion.* – shows the steps to manage feelings and stressful emotions, among the most common actions mentioned: meditation, exercise joining a work support group, and taking personal days.

NARRATIVE

SITUATION OF EXTREME STRESS IN WHICH HE HAS BEEN INVOLVED IN THE WORK AND WHAT SOLUTION WAS GIVEN TO IMPROVE THE WORK ENVIRONMENT

The main activities to which this author is dedicated is the teaching, research, consulting, and academic management within one of the units belonging to the Tecnológico Nacional de México.

The work relationships are focused more on the students and the eight colleagues who make up the team of the academic research body of which they are an active part as leaders of one of the research lines.

Remembering an extreme situation that has been faced, was the occasion when the working group was assigned the responsibility of organizing, coordinating, and hosting the “Fourth National Meeting of Academic Bodies”.

As leader of one of the lines of research, was to coordinate other co-organizers belonging to other universities in the country. The workload swelled as deadlines for reporting the deliverables and progress of the organization approached. Since there were several activities to be carried out:

a) Regarding the processes of the presentations, the following had to

be supervised: event diffusion, works’ reception, referees’ coordination of the workshops assigned for their control, and communication and opinions monitoring.

b) Concerning the event logistics, the organization oversaw the opening and closing events, and the induction of students who would support the two days of the congress.

c) About the collective work of the academic body: attend meetings and new requirements requested by the authorities of the Institute, the status report and follow-up of the tasks assigned to each member of the team, and support in other matters that were emerging in the preparation of the event.

d) And coupled with the inherent activities of the organization of the congress had to meet ordinary job responsibilities: academic counseling to residents and certification, teaching classes, the advance of the research project, and compliance with academic management tasks.

The function’s multiplicity of meetings over four months was causing various contradictions among the members of the organizing team. There were moments of tension when there was no clarity in certain advances and allocation of resources to meet the established goals. Additionally, coordinating a group of distance referees limited the effectiveness to meet the pre-established dates.

Undoubtedly this scenario that was lived, generated a server, challenging stress (Robbins & Judge, 2017) since it impelled the desire to see capitalized an academic event at a national level organized by our team. The tensions, disagreements, and bad moments that occurred in the lapse of this process

discouraged harmony at work (Lussier & Achua, 2011); nevertheless, they could be solved and reach a good term. What was it that a server contributed to deal with such situations?

The main actions that were attended were:

a) Maintain constant communication with the referees, and follow up on their doubts, contributions, and status of the review and opinion process.

b) Empathize with key students who helped in the logistics and preparation of the opening and closing. A bond of trust and support was opened so that they felt safe in giving suggestions so as not to fall into disorientation of the responsibilities to be fulfilled.

c) Move away for a moment from the moments of discussion between the organizers and co-coordinators, in order not to become infected with attitudes of anger and frustration.

d) In the negotiation processes, a server was involved with a collaborative attitude (Mochón, 2014), and took a focus to give proposals and solutions, and not falling into the game of finding guilty or evasive.

e) In a little time, help other members of the academic body with the delayed tasks of the organization.

f) Manage the time allotted for the various activities that had to be fulfilled, prioritizing the importance of the urgent (Salom, 2002).

STRESSORS IN THE WORKPLACE

Concerning the shared experience in this work, and according to the foundation referred to above, the following factors that caused stress were identified.

The workload and the greater demands of responsibilities assigned by the executive

organizing committee of the congress originated that the level of stress will increase, and mechanisms of greater alert will be activated as soon as it was seen that the times were being fulfilled (Organizational factor).

One of the author's personality weaknesses is being apprehensive and dedicated to accomplishing tasks, and even having high levels of self-defined requirements to achieve work goals. These were the triggers to be stressed (Personal Factors).

With the coordinating referees from different parts of the country, it was difficult to understand their level of dynamism. The author was found with different work styles, some reviewers were very passive, as were also detected others who were demanding and fussy in all the processes that were intruded. These discrepancies caused moments when they despaired of this author (Individual and cultural differences).

Tensions arising among fellow faculty caused moments of unease, where emotions are negatively manifested among some members. These situations put a level of nervousness in these scenarios' forehead (Factor at group level)....

ACTIONS TO REDUCE STRESS

About the experience shared in this work, and according to the foundation referred to above, the following actions were identified that were used to manage stress.

This author performed an activity to manage the tensions caused, he was to take 15-minute breaks in which he took the opportunity to walk for a while by the Technological or read the news headlines in electronic newspapers. And while an activity that did not require a lot of concentration was developed, he was listening to chill-out music (Relaxation - focused on emotion).

An action that favored considerably covering all obligations and fulfilling

responsibilities was the classification of important activities and those that were not, so it was possible to discriminate functions that could wait a moment (Time management - focused on the problem).

The meetings of the organization of the congress allowed to clarify doubts and to make clear the limitations to which it was incurred to fulfill the functions. This allowed us to listen to the opinions of colleagues and receive more suggestions for action (Role management, support groups - focused on the problem).

And finally, the support received by the key students who contributed to the logistics and operation activities, allowed us to establish a trusting environment that lasted and allowed excessive collaboration so that everything was done correctly (Support group - focused on emotion).

DISCUSSION

A leader who wants to succeed in his exercise of influence before others need to develop emotional intelligence capabilities. In addition to creating a perspective of personal stress, as a challenging factor, to obtain a better performance in the process of achieving important achievements in the organization.

According to Huerta & Rodríguez (2006), if a leader's emotional intelligence is developed, it will manifest in behavior-oriented to know how to negotiate and manage the conflicts that may arise in the development of activities within the work.

Such a situation forces us to focus on the realization of an introspective analysis, which allows us to sensitize and cultivate: 1) the self-domination of impulses and emotions; 2) the reliability of being honest and integral in its performance (Lussier & Achua, 2011); 3) adaptability to the changes and challenges that arise.

Based on the points discussed in this paper,

both empirically and theoretically, it has been identified that emotional intelligence contributes to facing conflicts, but above all to managing situations that can cause stress.

Stress is a mental state that involves emotions, and according to how the personality of the individual, will be manifested in positive or negative behavior (Robbins & Judge, 2017). Therefore, the emotions that arise when facing a particular situation represent a trend of action because of the thoughts and personality of the individual (Cortese, n.d.).

This can be reinforced by the idea proposed by Apiquían (2017), which highlights the fact that not all people face stressful situations in such a way, since factors such as attitude, opportunities, well-being, and support, among others are involved.

Based on these contributions, it follows that the intelligent way to deal with stress is in the emotional capacity to be open to face feelings and situations that could be pleasant or unpleasant. And if you can balance negative impulses and positive motivations, better scenarios could be obtained to resolve conflicts, as well as being creative to achieve common well-being.

The key is found in the personal domain of one's thoughts and emotions reflected in situations that generate attitudes and behaviors that could unbalance the work environment.

Although it may seem easy to carry out, it requires practice and persistence to strengthen the ability to handle emotions in stressful situations. Surely, better results can be obtained, and as they say Ivancevich et al. (2017, p.125), "professional success will be achieved".

CONCLUSIONS

This work allowed us to conclude aspects that contributed to the generation of knowledge and association of empirical facts to a better application of the recommendations that

the theoreticians say. Finally, the concluding points of this work are listed below:

- a) Work well-being is reflected in the mental state of the individual with whom he projects his attitudes and emotions to his work environment forehead.
- b) If there is emotional balance, positive attitudes, and the ability to manage stress, then there will be a greater probability of having job satisfaction and professional success.
- c) Stress could be good or bad because it could be perceived in a challenging or closed way.
- d) Conflicts could have a functional solution if impulse control, emotional balance, and motivation are involved to be able to empathize with the discordant parties.
- e) An emotionally intelligent person can identify and show empathy with other individuals, responding appropriately to the emotions of others.

f) Emotional intelligence is a predictive factor for success in leadership exercises.

g) Knowing how to handle conflicts means knowing how to interrelate collaboratively and in an environment of trust to achieve an adequate solution.

h) There are environmental, organizational, group, personal, individual, and cultural factors that are triggers or potential stressors which could generate tension and imbalance if they are not attended to timely and assertively.

Finally, it is concluded that there are also formal actions that contribute to the management of stress, from an individual and organizational level.

With this qualitative contribution, we have fulfilled the central objective of this research work, which is a breaking point to start the analysis from a positivist approach or a more in-depth analysis of the same phenomenon.

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