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# Understanding Stress in Communication Management: How It Limits the Effectiveness at Personal and Organizational Level

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## Abstract

The fundamental challenge for refining theories of stress in communication management is to understand the assumption that stress produces anxiety. Important areas of study in this area include the experience and meaning of stress, the role of appraisal and emotion in anxiety management, and the range of behavioural and psychological responses to stress and anxiety. Applying stress management theories to communication management work practices shows the rise of a culture of stress leading to anxiety and depression. Argument against this point is constant health surveillance, combined with improved methods for screening and monitoring, which virtually guarantees finding something wrong with every individual. Good employment practice includes assessing the risk of stress among employees and involves looking for pressures at work which could cause high and long lasting levels of stress. Deciding who might be harmed by these factors and whether organizations are doing enough to prevent that harm is very important. Therefore it is almost mandatory for every organization to understand and manage these behavioural issues to remain organized. It is not just for the wellbeing of the employees but the organization as a whole.

**Keywords:** stress, anxiety, communication management

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## 1. Introduction

Stress is defined as interaction between the situation and the individual [1]. In today's communication environment the energy demands from social networking services (SNSs) can result in fatigue and can cause intense emotional and physical strain [2]. More importantly

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potential stressors at the work place explain the necessity of stress management which impacts the effectiveness of the project teams in a multi-project environment presenting this type of environment as a stress factor [3]. Coping strategies influence how employees' deal with the stress. Maladaptive coping strategies are less influential than adaptive coping strategies and stress management programs directed on enhancing coping strategies have better results [4]. Workplace error management has also been a focus of various studies. Applying the transactional theory of stress framework King and Beehr has examined the connection of error management strategies to employees' well-being and showed that positive error management (PEM) did not appear to reduce strains, but negative error management (NEM) increased them and difference in the approach between the individual and organization can affect employees' interpretations and management of errors [5]. ICT-based communication is known to be a source of stress. These stressors are accumulative in nature and grow over the space of time to increase stress levels at the end of day [6]. Considering that relationships have a positive influence on managing stress research work shows that couple-targeted and stress-targeted interventions improve relationship among couples which in turn help to improve the health of their children [7].

This study examines how Healthcare communication professionals (HCPs) have to deal with workplace stress while working in a stressful environment. Most of the HCPs are seen to use avoidance – centered coping strategies and Hospital Management need to constantly review their work place stress programs to increase the chances of organizational success [8]. Increased stress and anxiety in the clinical settings are known to have an effect on clinical performance. Programs used with simulations to enhance the coping skills of health profession trainees in reducing stress and anxiety have shown increased levels of effectiveness during high anxiety clinical situations [9]. Effectiveness of a theory-based online intervention to help undergraduate students cope with the stress management has shown positive results [10].

## 2. What is stress?

Stress is a natural phenomenon that can impact an individual both from external and internal world; it can impact his physical or emotional health. And it can affect both of them. Besides, an individual's response to it affects the individual and his environment, both.

Therefore, stress is associated to both internal and external factors. External aspects include physical features like home, work, relationships, routine issues, challenges and expectations etc. Internal aspect is concerned with individual's capability to deal and react with the environmental or (external) elements that induce it. These factors affect the handling capacity of individuals. It includes their health (overall), nutrition, fitness, and emotional well-being, and rest and sleep qualities. Now, stress as a term may be used in many manners and for a various types of reasons. Psychologists argue that there are two varieties of stress: distress and eustress. Distress is harmful while eustress is not harmful. Further, stress has different effects like psychological, behavioural, bio-chemical and physiological stresses, etc.

## **2.1. Theories on stress**

There are many theories on physical processes and external types of stressors. These may be categorized in two ways: “systemic” stress these are based on psychobiology, and physiology [11] and mental stress developed within the field of cognitive psychology [1–14].

## **2.2. Systemic type (Selye’s theory)**

In science and media studies, the concept of stress is driven from the works of famous endocrinologist, Hans Selye. According to him, non-specific changes give systemic stress its specific form of reaction. Moreover, writer describes that this stress is ‘a state manifested by a mental condition which consists of all the non-specifically induced changes in a biologic system.’ It is known as ‘General Adaptation Syndrome’ (GAS). It is the stereotypical reaction pattern. It occurs in three steps.

(a) There is an alarm reaction. It consists of an initial shock phase, then there is the counter-shock phase. The shock phase shows emotionality. It is autonomous in nature. This releases adrenaline hormone along with gastrointestinal ulcerations. The counter-shock phase initiates the defensive procedures and is branded by amplified adrenocortical activity. (b) If harmful stimulus continues the person reaches the resistance stage. At this step, the alarm reaction signs vanish. This apparently shows that the individual adapts to the stressor. When resistance to this harmful stimulation rises, it drops the other stressor types simultaneously.

(c) If the aversive stimulation continues, it turns in exhaustion. The adaption capacity to the stressor exhausts, the signs of this phase recur, (a) but this time resistance becomes impossible. Irreversible tissue damage occurs. The individual can die if this persists.

## **2.3. Psychological stress: the Lazarus theory**

Two theories are important to any psychological theories. Appraisal: estimate on the person’s health and his handling skills. It is based on his attempts and actions to achieve particular demands. Stress is taken as an interpersonal notion. It is neither considered as a type of external stimulation nor a typical physiological, subjective or behavioural pattern. Rather it is seen as a ‘shift’ between people and their environment.

The handling techniques can be noticed as they lay emphasis on various components of stressful incidents [13]. They may change the person–environment relationship behind stress and negative emotions (problem-focused handling). Also, they can indicate internal elements and support decrease the negative state of emotions. They can also alter the appraisal of the situation (emotion-focused handling).

## **2.4. Resource theories: a bridge between systemic and cognitive viewpoints**

Contrasting to methods discussed above, resource theories are not mainly concerned on stress-creating factors; instead they are concerned with resources that secure the health during stressful encounters. Because self-efficacy and optimism and are the only protective features,

self-assurance and coherence signify tripartite methodologies. Self-assurance contains three mixed elements: commitment, self-control and determination unlike threat. And coherence is on trusting the world has a meaning, is benevolent and is predictable. In social support, different forms are examined; for instance, informational, instrumental, emotional and appraisal. During stressful situations, the combating power of people to cope with stress decreases. This damages his capacity to handle stresses further.

This results in spiral loss. The procedure needs to focus on the interaction between demands alter with time. Additionally, this technique reveals it is essential to examine both: the effects of resources and their outcomes.

There are four coping modes. They can be defined as: (a) Individuals who have a higher vigilance rate and lower rates on cognitive avoidance. This is called sensitizers. These individuals are basically focused on reducing the level of uncertainty through leading the attention to stress-related information. (b) People who have opposite patterns are called repressors. These individuals reduce the arousal experience evading aversive evidences. (c) Non-defensives have lower rates on both the aspects. These individuals are thought to adapt flexibility on stressful situations demands. Rather than frequently paying attention to coping strategies such as, vigilance or avoidance. They focus acting in most circumstances. (d) People who exhibit higher scores on both dimensions are called highly nervous.

In vigilant and avoidant coping techniques, the individuals strive reducing both the emotional arousal and subjective uncertainty induced by stressful encounters. In most situations, these two aims are mismatched. The highly-anxious individuals are presumed for expressing fluctuations and so have low efficient coping behavior.

## 2.5. Transactional model

Richard Lazarus and Susan Folkman, in 1981, suggested stress can result from an “imbalance between demands and resources”. It can also occur if “pressure exceeds one’s perceived ability to cope”. Stress management was premised and developed on the notion that it is not a stressor response rather individual’s capability and resource to handle the response. This can be changed, hence making stress controllable.

For developing efficient stress management program, it is extremely important to indicate the characteristics central to control stress, and to indicate the intervention techniques for controlling these factors efficiently. Lazarus and Folkman’s stress interpretation is concerned with the relationship between individuals and their external environment (known as the Transactional Model). This model challenges stress as argues it as being harmful. It shows stress becomes positive or a challenging when it not taken as a threat. Moreover, with good stress-handling skills or abilities, stress cannot harm the individual. This model also argues that individuals can learn managing and coping with stress. Their perspective can be altered to empower them with confidence and stress-handling techniques. This can have a good effect on their living. Employees mention different types of stresses. The most common among them are:

### 2.5.1. Company conflicts

Treatment of bosses/employers/companies with employees.

Job insecurity.

Bad company policies.  
Unfair work distribution with colleagues.  
Communication gap.  
Unrealistic assignments.  
Obscure expectations.  
Tight deadlines.  
Overwork.  
Rude behaviors.  
Inadequate salary/benefits.  
Uncomfortable office.  
Relationship conflicts.  
No cooperation.  
Long working hours.  
Injustice.  
Careless mistakes of subordinates.

## **2.6. Health realization aka innate health model**

Similarly, the said model is established on the notion that it is not crucial to have a potential stressor for individuals who are stressed.

It is not necessary to focus on the stressor therefore. Focusing on stressor appraisal in relation to handling abilities (as in transactional model), this type of model is concerned with the thought procedure of an individual. It argues that it is eventually an individual's thinking which is responsible for obtaining the stress response. As per this model, stress is the appraisal outcome and his circumstances through a mental filter of negativity and insecurity. On the other hand, well-being results from seeing the external environment with a "quiet mind".

For supporting individuals understand the nature of thinking processes, help them to recognize instances of anxious thinking and try to alter them with positive thinking. This helps to reduce stress levels. It occurs when either of these tools stop to work properly or when it becomes difficult to switch appropriately.

It is appraisal or perception of situation which is essential to determine whether or not it creates stress. It is the root of transactional model of stress [14] in which the capability of a person to reduce or prevent stress. It is shown by individual's appraisal of (a) threat in any condition (primary appraisal), and (b) handling skills to deal with threat (appraisal of secondary kind). The appraisals are formed by past incidents to deal with stress. So, impact these and future behavior making the appraisal process, it along with its behavior continuous. Stress can be dealt by altering the manner the situation is appraised (cognitive methods) or given response to (cognitive or behavior-related methods).



## 2.7. Factors at work that cause stress

The pressures, demands and daily routines of workplace contribute majorly to stress. There are many things linked with it causing many risks. These are workload, and social and company pressure are some of these elements. Particular to any job are: long hours, overload, pressure, complicated tasks, shorter breaks, monotony, no or less facilities and so on.

Conflicting roles and obscure work can also be a cause. The job development possibilities are crucial barriers against it. Whereas, stress occurs when there is no training, no job security and no promotion. There can be two more sources of stress: work relationships and its culture. Unsupportive, demanding or critical managers can cause stress. While, positive team, work, and social environment reduce the stress levels in staff members. Wrong organizational environment such as, “presenteeism” and unpaid work can also cause stress. While involving people in decision-making processes, sharing updates and providing good facilities help lessen stress. Organisational changes are also a main cause. This includes inadequate consultation, relocation, mergers, restructure “downsizing”, redundancies and individual contracts etc.

## 2.8. Empirical review

Systematic review on work characteristics factors related with psychological issues and related absenteeism [16] (Michie and Williams, [15], unpublished data) are: overwork, long hours, work pressure and their effects on staff members are: lack of participation in decision making processes and inability to control work and poor support, obscure or disorganized managing approach.

## 2.9. Explanatory model

Three of these elements constitute the influential control-demand work-related strain model [17]. As per the model, work-related strain and health risks occur when demands at work are higher but decision freedom is lower (low personal control overwork plus restricted opportunities for developing skills). And the opposite offers encouragement, motivation for learning and achievement. Of these two, decision latitude is considered more important than demand [18]. It was introduced in 1979, and at that time the model was extended for social support as a predictor of job strain [19]. Karasek’s model received satisfactory empirical support to offer a beneficial framework for workplace interventions.

## 2.10. Individual differences

There are individual differences in experiencing and vulnerability to stress. They are more likely to have stress if they do not have material resources like financial security and psychological resources like coping techniques. Stress harms them more if they respond emotionally, are highly competitive but pressed (type-A behavior). The affiliation between well-being and pressures are thought to be inverted U; when pressure is either low or high, the functioning and well-being becomes low (for instance, during unemployment). Different individuals show different forms of inverted U. This shows their different thresholds for stress response. An effective approach to prevent stress at work ensures work fits the individual, instead of attempting to make individuals fit their jobs that do not suit them.

### **2.11. Interactions between work and home stress**

Progressively, individualistic demands at work reach out homes and social lives of employees. Uncertain, long, and unsocial hours, working afar, taking work at home, more responsibility, job relocation and insecurity can all adversely impact family responsibilities and recreational activities. This can affect the quality of life besides work. It is an essential buffer against work-related stress. Additionally, domestic pressures like financial issues, childcare responsibilities, and bereavement and housing problems can also affect an individuals' efficiency at work-place. Therefore, a malicious cycle sets up that causes stress in one's life. It spills over all the places and creates pressures to deal with their life issues.

Women particularly, experience many types of stresses, as they still have more burdens of domestic responsibilities than the opposite sex. Girls are usually low paid, have low statuses, and may often work help fulfill domestic responsibilities. They can suffer harassment and discrimination as well.

### **2.12. Individual stress management**

Most interventions for reducing health risks of stress consist of individualistic and organizational approaches both. Individualistic approaches involve training, one on one psychological services like counseling, clinical and work-related. They must be aimed for helping to improve individuals' skills and resources to help them change their circumstances. These approaches show active coping as well as rest phases (habituation) of model.

There are various training courses that can help develop active coping approaches—for instance, communication skills, assertiveness, problem-solving, time management and effective management. But there are different sources of stress. That a person can perceive as beyond his power. For instance, structure, culture or management style of an organization. It is essential to understand that these management approaches (concentrate on changing the person) without trying to change the sources of stress. Masking these sources can be counter-productive. For instance, trying to think positively or breathe deeply on a stress-inducing situation can temporarily improve one's mood. But it not be permanent and will cause persistent stress in the individual and in others. The major goal of an individuals' approach must be developing those skills and confidence to reduce stress, and not adapting or accepting a stressful situation.

### **2.13. Organisational stress management**

Stress management and prevention needs interventions on organizational level. It is the organization which creates it. This approach is limited to help those who are already experiencing the problem. It is equivalent to apply sticking plaster on injuries than dealing with the root cause of the problem. Another analogy is to try running up the escalator that goes down. These interventions can have a variety that ranges from structural like staffing, scheduling; to physical, and psychological environment for instance, social support, control on work and participation. There is emphasis on organization than individual. As this issue is well-illustrated by the rules used in Scandinavia. The place has an outstanding record of creating safe and healthy working environments [20].



### 3. Principles of preventing work stress

Conditions at work are adapted to individuals who differ in physical or psychological abilities. Employees are provided with opportunities for participating in designing their work situation and in improving the effects on work. Technology, job content and work organization, formed so the staff members cannot be exposed to mental or physical strains. This can lead to accidents or illnesses. Remuneration forms and work distribution hours are counted here. Work restrictions or excess control on individuals is avoided. Diversity in work, social interaction and cooperation in work is given importance. Conditions of work should offer opportunities for occupational and personal grooming and training and self-determination.

#### 3.1. Assessing risks at workplace must be considered

The extent of harm from stress at the workplace, the extent to which individuals' come across this hazard, number of staff exposed to it.

The analysis for threats at workplace should cover all the sides in management and design as well as its organization and communal context. Avoidance is the priority though but essential measures should be introduced for controlling and reducing the risks and effects of the threat. Details about all these have six stages [21].

##### 3.1.1. Risk identification

Consistently sort the stressors present at the workplace and the working conditions. Examine the exposure extent for employee categories.

##### 3.1.2. Harm assessment

Collect the evidences that stress exposure is related with ill health in different employee groups or wider organization. This must involve a wide range of health issues, like general malaise symptoms or disorders; and different health-related behaviors like drinking, smoking and sickness etc.

##### 3.1.3. Identification of likely risk factors

Find association between stress exposure and the measurement of harm for identifying the risk factors in groups, and to estimate their significance or size etc.

##### 3.1.4. Description of underlying mechanisms

Recognize and explain the possible tools which show stress exposure is linked with harm to health of a particular group or to an organization.

##### 3.1.5. Audit existing management control and employee support systems

Classify and evaluate all the existing management systems to control the stressors and examine experiences and to support the employees who experience issues.

### 3.1.6. *Residual risk recommendations*

Take note of the existing managing control and support systems to make recommendations on residual risks linked with risk factors of work stress. Indeed, legislation is required at organizations for addressing and assessing all the risks include mental health also (for instance, the European Commission's framework directive introduced measures for encouraging improvements in health and safety of employees etc.) To create a secure system involves everything from targeting material, equipment to environment and staff members (for example, to ensure good working skills). Also, this needs to be monitored and review all the system for assessing the effectiveness for prevention and control strategies [19].

Though relations between work and psychological health and sickness have been noticed, but evidence-based interventions for reducing these problems are still unlikely or low. Many organizational strategies and training sessions are used in successful interventions for increasing participation in different features such as problem-solving, decision-making, support, feedback and communication etc. [22].

Various studies reveal that skills for mobilizing support at workplace and participation in resolving issues, and make decisions reported better feedback, feeling better at coping and functioning etc. Among those at leaving risks, and undergoing training showed reduction in depression levels [17]. Staff members, who faced organizational changes but who were given skills to manage stress reported decline in stress levels in the body [23].

Employees who learned empathy skills and better communication with each other also demonstrated less resignations and leave instance [24]. Similarly, members who were physically inactive and were given stress management training showed improvement in their perceived coping abilities. Also, those who were given aerobic exercises had improvements in overall well-being. There was decline in complaints about muscle pain, but they also showed reduction in job satisfaction [22].

Staff that took one of the seven training programs highlighting different stress management aspects like—physiological procedures, coping with individuals or interpersonal awareness procedures—had shown reduced anxiety, depression, psychological exhaustion, strain levels immediately after the training. A further reduction level was seen in exhaustion level in 9–16 months' follow up [25].

Also, the employees that were on long-term absence, and were referred earlier to occupational health (in 2–3 months absence period) had a cut down in their sickness absence in 25–40 weeks before work resumption and from 53 to 72 weeks before departure for medical reasons; this led to larger financial savings [26].

Success in prevention and management of stress depends on organizational culture. It should be taken as supportive to action, rather than as individual's weakness. An openness and cooperative culture should be encouraged at workplace than of criticism and blame, because this is essential. To build this culture needs active leadership skills and role models from the top management, development and implementation of stress policy in the organization and effective systems for identifying issues earlier and for reviewing and improving strategies to develop for addressing the issues. Policies and their implementation must be negotiated with

relevant groups or unions and other committees (trade union example is a model agreement to prevent stresses at workplace see the Manufacturing, Science and Finance Union guide) [27].

Lastly, different interventions require good evaluations, so their effectiveness can be examined. Preferably, the technique to achieve this goal must involve higher response rate, reliable measures and a control group. Two techniques which offer comprehensive stress analysis and these are widely applied are the Job Content Questionnaire. This involves measures of job strain predictors as discussed earlier [28] and the Occupational Stress Indicator [29].

### **3.2. Stress prevention and resilience**

Even though many methods are traditionally developed for dealing with the stress outcomes, a lot of research is conducted on stress prevention. It is a subject that is closely related with psychological resilience building. There are a number of “do it yourself” approaches too on this and on resilience-building. They are mainly based on cognitive-behavioural therapy theory and practice.

## **4. Stress management programs**

Nowadays, many companies have started using stress management training programs for their staff members suffering from it. They use different ways for this. Some organizations offer special tools for adapting to this for instance, balls, color diaries etc. Some offer individualistic interventions. This involves stressor monitoring in the patient. Understanding the causes, addressing the stressors and finding out solutions to it. Social support is crucial to it. Society plays a good role to help cope with stress. It has proven highly practical. And trying to avoid stressors is also a way to this. However, it is difficult to avoid it at the workplace especially. Also, altering one’s behavioural pattern can help keep away stress.

There are many staff assistance programs. They include different in-house counseling programs. Evaluative research is conducted on EAPs. It educates the individual to control stress and inoculation approaches for instance, biofeedback, cognitive restructuring, and relaxation. Studies prove that such programs may help remove physiological awakening related to higher stress levels. Individuals who master cognitive and behavioural stress-relieving approaches show reduction in tension, fewer sleep issues and better coping with work-related stressors.

Another condition to reduce stress at workplace is simply by altering the workload of a member. Some of them can be too overwhelmed about it to get it done, or some can have so less work that they may not be sure about work about it. Recuperating communication between staff members seems to be a simple technique, but it is highly effective to help decrease stress levels. Moreover, trying to make staff members feel important part of the organization. For instance, offering them a voice in important circumstances prove that the company trusts and value them. To have all the staff members mingle together is a highly motivating and helps shun workplace stress. When the staff members have understanding and share their feedbacks with each other, stress minimizes. Finally, altering the physical conditions at work can also help minimize stress levels. For instance, changing facilities at organization and in

environment such as temperature, air, odor and equipment. Intervention can be broken in three steps: primary, secondary and tertiary.

The first step emphasis on removing the stressors altogether. The second step is about assessing stress and finding solutions to handle it by working on the management skills. The third step deals with rehab and recovery of the stress. These stages are considered the most effective in dealing with stress, at work or even outside.

## **5. Stress and communication process**

A current time organization is considered exposed to stressful setting, naturally. The new financial down turn has added fuel to fire to this condition. This is shown by the following case which involves a stressful condition in an 'Accounting & Auditing' company. Call it company A. The said company is known for its huge size and have accomplished greater heights in a shorter time period. Technology is the main source of communication in company A across all levels. It strongly believes to save time and effort using technology. The adjectives suiting the overall atmosphere and employees at company A include demanding, dynamic, have higher expectations to target achieving, shorter deadlines etc. Company A, as most other big guns in technology sector involves unpredictable working hours. And so, it is also famous for comparatively higher monetary compensations it offers for its employees.

Recently, company A undergoes alterations their work policies to fit the changing requirements of their environment. Parallel to this, it is observed that there is an increase in the employee numbers who are leaving this organization and there is more absence and leaves while there is decline in employee performance. This increase in staff turnover is worrisome for the management. They understood that it is crucial to give attention to such issues which dangers their reputation and status in the marketplace.

Under these circumstances, one may understand that the staff members suffer from many types of behavioural problems. However, consider this also that there is increase in offering importance to managing their problems efficiently. As hinted above, the root cause of the case study analysis it for stress in the employees. And also it is related to another issue that is the communication procedure. This shall be done by describing and applying the better-suited theory in relation with the organizational behavior. Following this are the recommendations and conclusion to help managing their issue effectively.

## **6. Relationship between stress and communication process**

In the start, one should understand and try to identify whether the company and its staff members, in particular, suffer from stressful situation.

Stress is defined as "a response, consequence of any action, situation or event that places special demands on a person; and all such actions/situations/events that places special demands are called Stressors" (Gibson, Ivancevich, Donnelly and Konopaske).

## 7. Effective communication process

Companies requires efficient face-to-face communication system. This type of communications helps reducing stress levels and work dissatisfaction. Whole organization should have good communicating processes. It is one of the most essential company procedures which helps erase many confusions, conflicts and misunderstandings between individuals and the company.

There are three main issues. These include: omission, distortion and message overload. When the sender is frightened by the receiver, message along with interpretation can be affected. The major reflections that crop up with this can be: sexual attraction, social status, and differences etc. These issues lead to message distortions. The communication medium plays an important role in this process. Any inappropriate medium/channel leads to ambiguity, confusion and distortions. To filter the right information and listening selectively are the two main procedures here, when receiving and sending messages, respectively.

## 8. Measures

Digital technology is an important part of this process. It must be monitored in the organization, regularly. It is because unexpected break can affect the whole procedure, which can lead to stress.

Regular meetings with team also provide solutions to many problems that leads to higher job satisfaction and hence, reduces stress. Similarly, offering opportunities to better communication between team members from the other competency group can lead to higher cooperation in the company.

Create environment that offers two-way communications to employees and the management. All of them should be involved and the management should be approachable and nice to them. Non-verbal communication is equally essential here for creating a good impact on the message receiver.

Interpersonal communication which is the face to face, group meetings and interaction are also essential than emails. So, these strategies must be applied when required.

Feedback and upward communication in this process are most of the times, neglected. Emphasis must be offered to them to reassure the message correctness (message that is given must be understood in its right sense i.e. as it is intended by the sender).

## 9. Conclusion

In an individual and for an organization, communication, performance, quality of life and stress are extremely interdependent. It is proved that positive communication in company and job satisfaction level are the strong forecasters of stress levels and cooperation breaches. The research on organizational behavior is highly important not only for addressing performance issues; but also saving job costs in the organization. Being effective and efficient are the guidelines of all the



organizations. Organization behavioural studies assist the authorities to realize that individuals perform better, their productivity increases, customers become more satisfied and competitive position improves with this. So, it is important and mandatory for all organizations for understanding and managing such issues, and avoid being disorganized. It is not only important for the betterment of the staff members but also for the organization in the long run.

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