

## Study on Occupational Stress of Enterprise Employees and Psychological Counseling

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Received 18 June 2015; accepted 14 September 2015  
Published online 26 October 2015

### Abstract

Increasingly fierce competition has resulted in unprecedented stress upon enterprise employees. Moderate stress conduces to improvement of the job performance of employees and organizations. Nevertheless, excessive stress may not do harm to the physical and psychological health of employees, but may also affect the job performance of organizations. Therefore, enterprise managers need to face up to the issue of stress among employees and perform effective management. This paper begins with the status quo of the occupational stress among enterprise employees. With an analysis of the symptoms of occupational stress among enterprise employees and the causes for these symptoms, the paper further proposes approaches to conducting psychological counseling on enterprise employees.

**Key words:** Enterprise employees; Occupational stress; Psychological counseling

Zhang, Z. (2015). Study on Occupational Stress of Enterprise Employees and Psychological Counseling. *Studies in Sociology of Science*, 6(5), 43-47. Available from: URL: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/sss/article/view/7610>  
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/7610>

### INTRODUCTION

It was reported by the United Nations in 2007 that occupational stress had become “a flu in the 21<sup>st</sup>

century”. In China, a large population gives rise to fierce competition, incomplete social insurance brings about the sense of fear in unemployment and interpersonal relationship is complicated. All these factors entrap Chinese enterprise employees in larger work stress than enterprise employees in western countries. Chinese enterprises are incapable of using their employees in a rational way; human resource management system of the enterprises is incomplete; external psychological counseling institutes are not well coordinated. All these factors deprive Chinese enterprise employees of available resources to deal with work stress. As a result, a large majority of Chinese enterprise employees are worrisome in their ability to cope with work stress.

When Wang Junyao from the Junyao Group and Hu Kai from Dazhong Electronics suddenly passed away, occupational stress and management of occupational stress have received more attention from more enterprise managers. First of all, excessive and persistent stress may give rise to serious physical and psychological diseases among enterprise employees. Yet, management of stress is able to prevent stress from doing such a catastrophic damage to employees and effectively protect and maintain human resources of enterprises. Then, employee stress management helps to relieve overweight psychological stress of employees and maintain moderate and optimal pressure. Accordingly, the employees will enhance the efficiency of work, which, furthermore, enhances the work performance of the entire organization and increases profits. Moreover, concern with the issue of employee stress by enterprises fully reflects the human-oriented principle, which helps to construct benign corporate culture and strengthens employees’ loyalty to the enterprises.

## 1. THE CONCEPT OF OCCUPATIONAL STRESS AMONG ENTERPRISE EMPLOYEES

Occupational stress, also termed as work stress, refers in particular to the phenomenon of stress which occurs in a workplace. It includes all the stresses generated by all kinds of factors, such as, too heavy work tasks, difficulties in interpersonal communication and influences of work environment change. Personal perception of stress is also affected by other factors, mainly including personality trait of an individual, quality and quantity of work and working environment, etc..

The concept of occupational stress is defined from three perspectives. The first one is an irritant definition, which refers to the environmental stimulus requesting employees to make timely response to work. The second one is a responsive definition, which refers to the feeling generated when the requirements of a job exceed the responsiveness ability of an individual. The third one is an intermediate definition, which focuses on the mediation process of the cognitive evaluation and motivation between a source of stress and the response. With emerging of cognitive psychology, the intermediate definition has received wide recognition. The core of this definition is to emphasize that potential stress stimulus may cause different individuals to make different responses which, in turn, depend on the cognitive evaluation of an individual on the context and resources.

Comparatively speaking, occupational stress is a relatively mature domain in the research on employee emotion. On the one hand, the stimulus per se is an important form of emotion. Related fundamental studies started earlier, so the discussion is relatively thorough. On the other hand, due to the development of the economic society, problems concerning the physical and psychological health of employees caused by stress are prominent. Hence, social needs facilitate studies on this domain to be rapidly conducted. Currently, studies on stress have expanded from medical field to multiple disciplines, such as, sociology, psychology, pedagogics and management science. Stress has become a hot focus of the entire society.

## 2. THE STATUS QUO OF OCCUPATIONAL STRESS AMONG ENTERPRISE EMPLOYEES IN CHINA

“EAP and China Occupational and Psychological Health Forum” reveal a set of worrying figures. At present, approximately 60% domestic organizational employees have great stress and there are almost 10% employees to whom job burnout happens. The psychological health of employees directly cripples competitive force of

enterprises which have turned to be a sore point of some enterprises. An investigation by Beijing Horizon Research Consultancy Group in 2003 on 415 white-collar workers in Beijing (male accounting for 45.8% and female accounting for 54.2%) at an age ranging from 20 to 50 showed that 41.1% white-collar workers were faced up with great work pressure and 61.4% white-collar workers were undergoing psychological fatigue on different degrees.

It is preliminarily estimated by industrial insiders that damages to enterprises in China generated as a result of occupational stress each year are up to, at least, a hundred million Yuan RMB. Nowadays, the consciousness of management of occupational stress is still at its embryonic stage. There has not yet been a tiny space for management of occupational stress in the human resource management system of enterprises. At present, only 2.4 out of a million people in China are psychological counseling service staff. By contrast, an average of a thousand people in developed countries have one psychological counselor. The occupation of psychological counseling has just taken its step in China. In 2001, the Ministry of Labour and Social Security promulgated occupational standards for psychological counseling. In 2002, the occupation of psychological counseling was incorporated into “National Occupational Classification System”. Estimated according to the average level of developed countries, at least 400 thousand psychological counseling practitioners are needed in China.

Thus, it can be seen, whether in terms of consciousness or in terms of personnel allocation, management of occupational stress in China at present still has a long way to go to keep up with developed countries. This is quite inconsistent with the human-oriented management idea in modern enterprises.

## 3. CAUSES FOR OCCUPATIONAL STRESS AMONG ENTERPRISE EMPLOYEES AND PATTERNS OF MANIFESTATION

Although nowadays when competition becomes increasingly fierce, the whole society experiences unprecedented occupational stress, there are still differences regarding the number and intensity of external stimuli events at different job positions. This indicates that occupations and job positions of different types vary in terms of occupational stress.

### 3.1 Stress at an Individual Level

Stress at an individual level refers to the source of stress that is directly connected with the job role of an individual. The so-called role is a series of behaviors expected of an individual on a particular job position. A large majority of

people play multiple roles in the daily life, such as, father, son, leader, subordinate and so on, which determines that they are multiply expected. In such a social system as organization, a role shoulders the important function of coordinating relationships between individual members. Employees acquire information related to a role through both formal and informal channels in an organization. The most formal channel is job instruction and communication with an immediate superior. In addition, there are also other sources from subordinates, colleagues and customers who offer information related to a role. An ideal condition is that information related to a role is clearly conveyed to employees.

### **3.2 Stress at a Group Level**

Stress at a group level refers to the source of stress caused by motivation and management behavior of a group. Management behavior, lack of cohesive force, internal conflict and interpersonal relationship are all important factors that give rise to pressure in a group. Lack of social support from colleagues in a group and strained relationship with colleagues may both impose extremely great sense of pressure on employees. Besides, all the following factors may entrap employees in work pressure: behavior of inconsistency between words and deeds of managerial personnel, failure to offer support to employees, lack of an explicit direction of a decision making activity, an inappropriate target, pursuit of high yield and eagerness for quick success and instant benefits and so on.

### **3.3 Stress at an Organizational Level**

It is found by research that organizational culture is a primary source of stress among employees. The psychological atmosphere of an organization has an effect on the occupational stress level of employees. When the daily life of an organization is enveloped with a hostile, alienated or unfriendly atmosphere, its employees will feel strained all day long. As a result, they show distrust in each other, reluctant to offer mutual support and are deficient of the collaboration spirit of resolving problems together. Participative management will reduce the pressure level imposed on employees by an organization. The leadership style of a senior leader is an important cause for employees' stress. An authoritative president who almost closes his ears to his subordinates will naturally generate a tense psychological environment in an organization. As a result, an organizational culture characterized by tension, fear and anxiety of employees will arise. Usually, organizational reform may bring about pressure to employees. This is because reform often requires the employees to behave in a way different from before, which may trigger the sense of insecurity among employees. Although causes of an organizational level are a key source that triggers employees' pressure, the results of pressure will differ as different individuals make

response in a different way. Therefore, due consideration should be given at an individual level when stress at an organizational level is intervened.

## **3.4 Stress at a Supra-organizational Level**

### **3.4.1 Family**

It is generally said that home is the source of happiness and safety. However, sometimes, it may also become the major producer of pressure. It is a great source of pressure to strike a balance between conflicts from job and family life. Breakdown of a family and education of children both may give rise to the sense of pressure to employees. For example, only-child couples have to take care of four elders.

### **3.4.2 Economic Problems**

Economic problems may bring unbearable pressure to employees, which may, in turn, cause them to divert their attention from the work. For some people, as they are at the bottom of the society, their economic problems emerge in endlessness which are unlikely to be resolved forever. For some other people, it is true that they earn much, they also spend too much who can't make two ends meet and who still live beyond their income. The surplus of population of job seekers in the society at present does not only impose employment pressure on job seekers, but also becomes a potential threat to the job stability of incumbents, an important source of pressure. Social and economic status are a coalition, which includes economic status, social status and occupational status. Economic status is measured with income; social status is measured with the educational background; occupational status is measured with occupation. This source of pressure may turn out to be more important in the future.

### **3.4.3 Living Events**

Living events refer to the events that destroy daily routines and social rules. When an event is not only negative but also is uncontrollable, unpredictable or vague, it is especially likely to give rise to pressure. For instance, death of a family member, robbery occurring to a family member, house moving, ending of an intimate relationship, suffering from a serious disease and taking an important exam may all generate pressure. Although these events have nothing to do with the job, they may, consequently, have great impacts on employees' work as these events involve significant changes in adaptation and social adjustment and often collapse the life style and social relations of a person.

The above causes for occupational stress are not completely absolute. It is also significantly related to the psychological endurance of a person and his ability to adapt to the fast rhythm of the modern society. This requires the ideological and political workers of enterprises to conduct a timely research on all kinds of

problems emerging as a result of occupational stress and regard measures to adjust and alleviate the psychological stress of employees as part of the ideological and political work of the enterprises.

#### **4. APPROACHES OF PSYCHOLOGICAL STRESS COUNSELING BY ENTERPRISE EMPLOYEES**

Previously, we have seldom shown concern with the issue of psychological pressure of employees. Instead, we often lay particular stress on education related to politics and professional competence, while we ignore training on employees regarding their psychological quality and their ability to overcome pressure and to control themselves. As a result, quite a lot of problems are unlikely to be detected in a timely manner. According to statistics of relevant data, there has been an increasing number of work faults and even crimes among employees caused as a result of psychological stress in the recent years. It is not until then that the department concerned has paid attention. The ideological and political workers of enterprises should mitigate employees' pressure by means of organizational assistance. This may include the following several measures.

##### **4.1 Optimize Corporate Management Level and Mitigate Managerial Psychological Pressure**

It is necessary for ideological and political workers to know quite well about the psychological needs of employees and conduct an in-depth research. They need to satisfy the employees in a rational way through management mechanism so as to enable the employees to perceive enterprises' care and concern. This may enable the employees to get close to the enterprises mentally, reduce their sense of fear and psychological reactance and form a good interpersonal relationship and a relaxed working environment within the enterprises. At the same time, the employees may relax themselves mentally which, in turn, avoids psychological pressure caused by management.

##### **4.2 Strengthen Cultivation and Training of Employees' Psychological Quality and Intensify Employees' Psychological Endurance Capacity**

A fundamental approach to resolve the psychological pressure of employees is to train a good psychological quality of employees and strengthen their psychological endurance. Furthermore, the most direct way is to strengthen popularization and publicity of psychological knowledge and enable the employees to have an idea of the rule in psychological changes and the psychological adjustment methods. In this way, when encountered psychological pressure, they may choose an appropriate way to make adjustment, convert pressure into motive

by means of emotional transfer, self-catharsis, change of cognition and seeking support, and consolidate self-relaxation as well as enhance the ability of endurance.

##### **4.3 Establish Psychological Counseling Institutes and Offer Psychological Counseling at Regular Intervals**

Scientific guidance of a psychological institute is necessary for healthy development of the mind. Psychological pressure of employees, sometimes, can get mitigated with their own efforts. Nonetheless, due to limitations of their cognition, sometimes, their pressure is unlikely to be resolved. A psychological counseling institute is able to offer appropriate psychological counseling in due course according to the psychological conditions of employees to reduce occurrence of psychological anxiety. It is a good choice for enterprises to set up psychological counseling room, open up psychological consultant hotline and establish psychological counseling email to strengthen psychological counseling of employees.

##### **4.4 Build Two-Way Communication and Listen Carefully to the Voice of Employees**

Under the new situation, the ideological and political work needs to get close to the life of employees. Ideological education aims to resolve actual problems of employees, which are the starting point and goal of ideological and political work. It is necessary to take into consideration of the ideological reality of employees, have an accurate idea of employees' real situation and handle in a correct way the hot issues, difficulties and doubtful issues that employees mention. If actual problems are ignored, the ideological education will become only empty preaching and will seem feeble and hollow. Ideological and political workers have to maintain close ties with the masses and carry out the work at the grass-root workers and for the masses of the employees. It is necessary for them to convert the process of carrying out all items of work of the enterprises into a process to frequently communicate with the employees. First of all, they need to show care for the employees with high devotion in the political, cultural and living aspects and should not ignore any trivial matter that is to the benefit of employees. Then, the political and ideological workers have to alleviate the psychological pressure of employees by means of effective communication and build a relaxed psychological environment for the employees. Finally, it is necessary to do a good job of ideological communication regarding any significant decision making of the enterprises. During this period, the political and ideological workers need to have a heart-to-heart talk with employees and let the employees bear in mind that the performance goal of the enterprises is consistent with the responsibility goal of the employees and that only if they finish their own goal, can the overall goal of the enterprises be fulfilled.



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## CONCLUSION

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Emergence of management of occupational stress poses a new significant challenge to the ideological and political work of an enterprise under a new situation. The causes and developmental tendency of occupational stress is a realistic issue that an enterprise has to face up with, as it exists all the time and everywhere. The above methods and measures to mitigate the occupational stress of employees indicate that only if the ideological and political workers and the employees of enterprises make efforts together, can the problems of occupational stress be resolved. Only when an enterprise adheres to the human-oriented principle that keeps to human-based management, can be the occupational stress of employees reduced to the minimum degree and can the psychological security and health of employees be ensured to be an

optimal condition. This, in turn, helps to achieve the goal of consolidating stability of an enterprise and the society.

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