

*CHAPTER III*  
*THEORETICAL BACKGROUND*

## **THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

Much research attention has been focused on the issue of workplace stress, so much so that theories have emerged to explain the relationship that exists between stress and the work environment. The researcher has reviewed the three most influential and prevalent theories of occupational stress which include the person environment (PE) fit theory, the framework of occupational stress, and the demand control support model by KARESEK (Melaine Blickford, 2002).

The basic premise of the person environment (PE) fit theory is that stress arises from a misfit between person and environment – not from the two components separately, but as the factors of each relate to one another. When individuals perceive that their work environments are not good, or do not fit well with the needs, wants, and desires that they personally would like fulfilled from work, the discrepancies create diverse strains, which are then hypothesized to affect workers' health and wellbeing.

Environmental demands here include job requirements, role expectations, group and organizational norms. In order to counter these demands what is required is the individual's abilities represented through aptitudes, skills, training, time and energy the person uses to meet the demands. Any imbalance shall lead to excessive demand and disproportionate supply in the form of the aptitude, skills etc as mentioned leading to strain and increasing order shall lead to stressful situations.

What is evident through the P-E theory is that the larger the discrepancy between person and environment, the greater the likelihood that strain, and a need for coping, will arise. The framework of occupational stress is based around the same foundation as the PE fit theory. They share two basic premises, first, that stress arises from the misfit between person and environment, and second, that subjective perceptions of work environments primarily determine strains. These subjective perceptions include how an individual perceives a situation. If he/she perceives it to be demanding beyond the capacity it shall result into distress. However, if it is perceived as a challenge to fit himself on the learning curve it will be resulting into eustress. The researcher has made use of these premises for determining the parameters of interest., mainly to

identify inclusion of organizational stressors and determining stressors. The difference between the two viewpoints is the framework's core definition.

It states that occupational stress is a total process including the environmental sources of stress and the individual's perception of them, short term and long term physiological, psychological, and behavioural responses, as well as a number of modifying factors that influence the relationships among variables in the stress process (such as social support, and the quality of interpersonal relationships within the work environment).

Researcher has focused on one of the factor as perceived stress and the resulting strains which is having a reciprocal association where the negative feelings regarding work increase strains, which in turn contribute even more to the negative feelings and decreased performance/productivity.

The end result is that the accumulation of physiological, psychological and behavioral strains which then eventually result in long term outcomes such as acute depression, alcoholism, unemployment, physiological problems (e.g., cardiovascular problems) and other costly results. Finally, the demand control support model emphasizes the role of work content as the major source of workplace stress. Work content here is divided into two components: worker perceptions regarding the tasks that need to be completed in performing the job (job demands), and worker perceptions about the degree of control or discretion they have in performing the job tasks (job control). This degree of control has helped determine how respondents are and will be able to cope at individual level the stress levels. These two constructs are thought to interact with one another in affecting the amount of stress experienced by employees. The strongest levels of strain, and hence, the greatest levels of occupational stress were expected to occur in situations where there were extremely high demands, and very low control. This forms the basis of conducting the research where executives as sample are always in demand for strategic decision execution and depending upon the control these executives have they undergo stress either eustress or distress.

The demand control model/ theory has undergone various revisions. A revised version of the model includes social support as a third component. Social support is

not thought to eradicate strain, but rather to buffer it to some degree. The social support construct helps individuals to avoid the actual stress keeping the stress to be only the potential stress experienced. Research tends to be very supportive of the demand control support model; it has been effectively used to predict psychological strain and cardiovascular disease risk. The researcher in the study has referred to the Lazarus Theory. Two concepts are central to this stress theory: appraisal, i.e., individuals' evaluation of the significance of what is happening for their well-being, and coping, i.e., individuals' efforts in thought and action to manage specific demands (cf. Lazarus 1993).

Since its first presentation as a comprehensive theory, the Lazarus stress theory has undergone several essential revisions. In the latest version stress is regarded as a relational concept, i.e., stress is not defined as a specific kind of external stimulation nor a specific pattern of physiological, behavioral, or subjective reactions. Instead, stress is viewed as a relationship ('transaction') between individuals and their environment.

'Psychological stress refers to a relationship with the environment that the person appraises as significant for his or her well-being and in which the demands tax or exceed available coping resources' (Lazarus and Folkman 1986, p. 63). This definition points to two processes as central mediators within the person–environment transaction: cognitive appraisal and coping.

In his monograph on emotion and adaptation, Lazarus (1991) developed a comprehensive emotion theory that also includes a stress theory (cf. Lazarus 1993). This theory distinguishes two basic forms of appraisal, primary and secondary appraisal (see also Lazarus 1966). These forms rely on different sources of information. Primary appraisal concerns whether something of relevance to the individual's well-being occurs, whereas secondary appraisal concerns coping options.

Within primary appraisal, three components are distinguished: goal relevance describes the extent to which an encounter refers to issues about which the person cares. Goal congruence defines the extent to which an episode proceeds in accordance with personal goals. Likewise, three secondary appraisal components are

distinguished: blame or credit results from an individual's appraisal of who is responsible for a certain event.

By coping potential Lazarus means a person's evaluation of the prospects for generating certain behavioral or cognitive operations that will positively influence a personally relevant encounter. Future expectations refer to the appraisal of the further course of an encounter with respect to goal congruence or incongruence.

Several models have been proposed to explain the causes of work related stress. Frankenhaeuser have described a model where stress is defined in terms of imbalance between the perceived demands from the environment and individuals' perceived resources to meet those demands. This imbalance can be caused by quantitative overload (A very high work pace, too much work to do etc...) or qualitative overload (too much responsibility, problems too complex to solve, conflicts etc. A well-known model describing work stress or strain is the demand control model proposed by Karasek and Theorell and developed and expanded by others.

According to this model, the combination of high demands and lack of control and influence (low job discretion) over the work situation causes high work strain. Johannes Siergrist proposed a new model for stress at the work called the effort-reward imbalance model. According to this model, lack of adequate reward in response to the individual's achievement efforts is considered to contribute to high stress levels and elevated health risks. Reward could be obtained in terms of economic benefits, such as higher income

The inverted U relationship between stress and productivity from the organization's stand point, management may not be concerned when employee experience low to moderate level of stress. Such levels may lead to Inverted 'U' relationship between stress and productivity higher employee performance (Ms. Santha Subbulaxmi. Software Programmer, Sep 2002)

But high levels of stress or even low levels sustained over a long period of time, can lead to reduced employee performance and thus require action by management. From the individuals standpoint even low levels of stress are likely to be perceived as

undesirable. What management may consider as ‘a positive stimulus that keeps the adrenaline running’ is a very likely to be seen as ‘excessive pressure’ by the employee. Stress have an emotional impact on all type of organisations, regardless of whether it is a manufacturing industry or a service organization.

Thus the researcher has taken the basis of these theories proposed by thinkers and made use for analysis and interpretation. These theories have helped in findings for the present research and to conclude under the scope and objective.

## Reference

Melaine Blickford (Aug 2005) Stress in the Workplace: A General Overview of the Causes, the Effects, and the Solutions, Canadian Mental Health Association Newfoundland and Labrador Division August 2005.

Ms. Santha Subbulaxmi. S, Programmer, Lions Aravind Institute of Community Ophthalmology, Madurai, ( July - September 2002 ) "Stress & Productivity" Journal of Management, Vol. II, No. 327