

## STRESS MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES OF PEOPLE HOLDING MANAGERIAL POSITIONS

*The article deals with the problem of stress management strategies of people holding managerial positions. It is found out that stress is a very common phenomenon, inherent to every healthy individual. It is one of many psychophysical states of the organism. Stress is commonly defined as a highly unpleasant psychophysical state associated with tension, overexertion, pain, and even the feelings of helplessness and powerlessness. It is characterised by the increase of tension caused by the influence of specific factors - stressors. Emotional intelligence refers to the ability of recognizing, motivating and managing both our emotions and the ones of the people we are related to. It is noted that stress appears when workers – both employers and employees – feel psychological discomfort caused by being exposed to conditions and requirement beyond their present capabilities. When requirements are adjusted to one's physical and psychological capabilities, the worker is equipped in appropriate knowledge, skills, as well as in other people's help, working problems are solved and stress subsides. After a period of rest a new activity can be taken up. The attempt at handling difficulties is successful. This kind of stress – eustress – builds up worker's self-esteem, encourages to progress, learning and attempting new tasks – it is beneficial to the employee, employer and the whole company. It might be concluded that people who are in good relations with their emotions understand the emotions of other people, are socially competent and can better cope with crises and moments of strong stress, which is an essential ability to possess by people holding managerial positions. Managers have to be well-versed in many various, related fields such as: conducting negotiation, building a good working team, managing it, communicating with the subordinates, coming into contact with them, motivating them to efficient work, taking good decisions, resolving conflicts, relieving stress, settling disputes. EI is essential to the development of all these skills.*

**Keywords:** emotional intelligence, emotional competence, manager's personality, stress.

The analysis of skills helping people to succeed in their professional life revealed that Emotional Intelligence (EI) plays a significant part in the process. According to psychological researches [2; 9; 14] people who skilfully handle their emotions understand the emotions of other people, are socially competent and can successfully cope with crises and moments of strong stress in both private and professional life.

Stress is a very common phenomenon, inherent to every healthy individual. It is one of many psychophysical states of the organism. Stress is commonly defined as a highly unpleasant psychophysical state associated with tension, overexertion, pain, and even the feelings of helplessness and powerlessness. It is characterised by the increase of tension caused by the influence of specific factors - stressors.

Stress triggered by work related factors is called organizational stress. It is estimated that 50-60% of absences caused by workers' illnesses are connected with stress in a work place and the annual costs of sick leaves and patients' medical treatment are assessed at €20 billion in the European Union and \$150 billion in the United States.

Social expenses connected with stress are increasing too. The costs of medical care, health benefits and invalidity pensions for those who had a stress related accident at work are incurred by the society. Moreover stress is the cause of irritation which, in turn, influences our quality of life, and therefore stress affects the surrounding (pressure exerted on workers, family and friends), work quality (work related accidents, decreased efficiency), and the person experiencing it (diseases and emotional problems).

It is assumed by the executives that professional career requires total dedication. For the sake of improving qualifications they first give up their hobbies, then social,

and eventually even family life. The worst scenario for such a lifestyle is a heart attack before the person reaches his or her forties. Stress produced reactions can become pathological. The ability of handling one's emotions, which means their conscious control, is a key competence in the professional activity of people on managerial positions. A good manager should not only possess good factual knowledge, but also skilfully and consciously handle emotions, especially in a stress situation.

### Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence refers to the ability of recognizing, motivating and managing both our emotions and the ones of the people we are related to. These abilities differ from academic, intellectual skills and, at the same time, the two complement each other (yet more than 80% of overall competence distinguishing outstanding workers from the average depend not on sheer intellect, but on emotions).

On the basis of researches conducted by L. Spencer & Wei Chen after: D. Goleman, 1999, [6, p. 442-443], examining over 300 top-level executives in 15 companies worldwide, it was demonstrated that there are 6 emotional competencies distinguishing company stars from the average, i.e.:

- influence;
- team leadership;
- organizational awareness;
- self-confidence;
- achievement drive;
- leadership [1; 2; 8].

These competencies reflect one's perfect control over a wide scope of emotional abilities ranging from self-awareness to social awareness and skills. Emotional intelligence determines our potential ability to learn practical skills, which are based on 5 elements:

- self-awareness;
- motivation;
- self-control;
- empathy;
- good interpersonal relations.

Our emotional competence shows how much of our potential we managed to turn into useful work related skills. The executives and workers exploiting their potential of emotional intelligence create appropriate professional relations, allowing them to conduct accurate and appropriate exchange of information. Emotional intelligence is an essential factor to succeed in management; it is the basis of all interpersonal relations, also in stressful environment.

### **Stress at work**

Stress appears when workers – both employers and employees – feel psychological discomfort caused by being exposed to conditions and requirement beyond their present capabilities.

When requirements are adjusted to one's physical and psychological capabilities, the worker is equipped in appropriate knowledge, skills, as well as in other people's help, working problems are solved and stress subsides. After a period of rest a new activity can be taken up. The attempt at handling difficulties is successful. This kind of stress – eustress – builds up worker's self-esteem, encourages to progress, learning and attempting new tasks – it is beneficial to the employee, employer and the whole company.

When requirements appear frequently, are long-lasting, exceed one's capabilities or the person does not have the knowledge, skills and support necessary to meet them – problems remain unsolved and stress reaction continues (one is dealing with distress). The person remains constantly tense, overexcited and active. Depending on situation and the reason of stress, one can also experience unpleasant feelings such as fear, anxiety, annoyance or anger. If the tension continues for a long time, it can cause the loss of strength and fatigue. Prolonged stress, instead of enhancing activity, promotes saving energy, inertia, reluctance to accept changes and new responsibilities at work. Unless the situation at work changes, it may, in time, lead to apathy, sadness, the feelings of helplessness and guilt as well as losing self-confidence and eventually the loss of trust placed in the superior, the associates and the company. This kind of stress decreases self-esteem and temporarily reduces the ability of handling new or difficult tasks at work – it is harmful to both the employee and the employer as well as the enterprise. Chronic and undiminished stress in the workplace can in this way increase the expenses of the firm and cause financial losses. Hasty and unwise decisions, impaired efficiency and productivity, dissatisfied clients, the cost of accidents in the workplace, substitution for absent workers, selection, recruitment, vocational and training courses for new workers or managers employed to replace those who resigned are only the examples of expenses caused by unnecessary stress at work ([www.pip.gov.pl](http://www.pip.gov.pl)).

The level of stress perception may vary depending on a person. Inborn temperament and certain personality characteristics as well as appropriate knowledge, skills and the assistance of the superiors and associates may

reduce the high level of stress. Therefore the ability of handling one's own emotions, that is emotional intelligence, is essential.

### **Handling Stress**

The level of stress triggered by an event depends not only on the situation itself, but also on perceptible possibilities of handling it [3, s. 53]. Factors enabling people to successfully handling difficult situations are called internal resources. They are defined as all the means protecting us from experiencing stress and helping us to deal with it [4, p.62]. They include the characteristics of the person as well as the surrounding. Handling difficult situations can be treated as:

- a process – understood as a sequence of changing strategies; all the activities undertaken in a stressful situation [13]; It depends on situational and personal factors as well as the interaction between the two. The process is conducted by means of individual predispositions defined as a stress coping style.

- A strategy is a specific action an individual takes in a particular stress situation [13, p. 188]

- style – that is individual predispositions determining one's behaviour in stress conditions, presented as individual tendencies to deal with problems in a particular way. It is a relatively constant, individual tendency defining the course of managing stress.

People differ as to the number and kind of strategies they have in their repertoire. If it is characterised by the abundance of a certain kind of strategies, they will be used to handle particular situations. One cannot use the kind of strategy he or she does not possess in the repertoire unless a new form of behaviour [7, p. 484]. The choice of strategy is determined by:

- the situation;
- individual predispositions;
- gender;
- age;
- the kind of stressor [11; 15, 16].

The relation between the level of emotional intelligence and the style of handling stress is a frequent subject of scientific research. Manager's professional life is often accompanied by stress, its level being varied depending on the importance of matters as well as one's involvement in work.

Stress resistance is a characteristic which evidently determines the outcome of undertaken activities, especially the responsible ones, carried out in unusual circumstances, under tension and in public.

M. Derkacz [5] conducted a research using the Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire [8.] measuring EI seen as the ability to recognize, understand and control one's own and other people's emotions, and the ability to use them efficiently in managing one's own and other people's activity, as well as the Stress Management Questionnaire [12], in which the style of handling stress is understood as an individually specific manner of behaviour in different stress situations. One can differentiate between three scales of coping styles:

- "A problem-focused style" – it means undertaking tasks, where the emphasis is put on planning and inventing solutions to the problem;

- "An emotion-focused style", where the emphasis is put on oneself, one's own emotions with the tendency to wishful thinking and fantasizing in order to reduce the stress triggered emotional tension;

- "Avoidant coping style", where you refuse to think about, experience and deal with the situation. It can take two forms:

a/ distracting oneself with substitute tasks

b/ seeking social diversion [13].

The subject of the research were two groups of randomly selected people, aged 35-45:

a/ The experimental group, consisting of people holding managerial positions (N=60)

a/ The control group, consisting of people not holding managerial positions (N=60)

Among other things, statistical analysis of the results allowed to conclude that:

1. People with a high level of emotional intelligence can handle negative emotions accompanying stress situations, recognize their emotions and the ones of other people more accurately, and can efficiently use them to deal with the problem. Therefore the higher the level of emotional intelligence, the lower the result on the emotion-focused scale (r-pearson for women 0,865,  $p > 0.01$ ; for men r-pearson = 0,268  $p > 0.01$ )

2. Managers might be characterized by the positive relation between emotional intelligence and a problem-focused style, which means that the higher the level of emotional intelligence, the more frequently the managers, when confronted with a stress situation, make efforts aimed at solving the problem, usually through cognitive transformations or the attempts at changing the situation (r-pearson 0.528;  $p > 0.01$ )

3. Stress exposed managers with a high level of EI tend to avoid thinking about, experiencing the situation and engaging in substitute activities such as watching TV, bingeing or seeking social diversion (r-pearson 0.725  $p > 0.01$ )

4. The higher the level of EI, the more frequently the stress exposed people from the control group focus on

their emotions, display the tendency to wishful thinking, engage in substitute activities or seek social diversion (r-pearson 0.560  $p > 0.01$ )

5. The managers have a higher EI level than the people from the control group, which may indicate that they are more exposed to situations in which they have to identify and control their emotion as well as the ones of other people on the basis of non-verbal communication. It is important in resolving conflicts, which is the element of work on managerial position. Therefore they focus on problem solving (r-pearson 0.528  $p > 0.01$ )

6. Managers rarely react to a stress situation with inefficient styles as:

- avoidant coping style or

- engagement in substitute tasks.

7. Some differences appeared in the emotion-focused style scale. The women from both examined groups achieved higher results than the men, which indicates that women when exposed to a stress situation more often focus on their emotions than men (r-pearson 0.369  $p > 0.05$ ).

8. Women aged 35-45 holding managerial positions demonstrate a stronger tendency to focus on themselves and their emotions than men. This strategy is aimed at reducing emotional tension, yet it may sometimes enhance the sense of insecurity and increase tension (r-pearson 0.663  $p > 0.01$ ).

### Conclusion

It might be concluded that people who are in good relations with their emotions understand the emotions of other people, are socially competent and can better cope with crises and moments of strong stress, which is an essential ability to possess by people holding managerial positions.

Managers have to be well-versed in many various, related fields such as: conducting negotiation, building a good working team, managing it, communicating with the subordinates, coming into contact with them, motivating them to efficient work, taking good decisions, resolving conflicts, relieving stress, settling disputes. EI is essential to the development of all these skills.

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#### СТРАТЕГИИ УПРАВЛЕНИЯ СТРЕССОМ ЛЮДЕЙ, ЗАНИМАЮЩИХ РУКОВОДЯЩИЕ ДОЛЖНОСТИ

В статье рассматриваются стратегии управления стрессом людей, добивающихся успехов в профессиональной жизни. Показано, что эмоциональный интеллект (EI) определяет потенциальную возможность приобретения практических навыков управления стрессом, которые основаны на 5 элементах: на самосознании; мотивации; самоконтроле; эмпатии; хороших межличностных отношениях. Анализируются эмоциональные компетенции, которые отражают идеальный контроль над широким спектром эмоциональных способностей. Показано, что руководители и работники, используя собственный потенциал эмоционального интеллекта, могут создавать соответствующие профессиональные отношения, что позволяет им проводить конструктивный обмен информацией. Эмоциональный интеллект является важным фактором достижения успеха в управлении, это основа всех межличностных отношений, в том числе и в стрессовой обстановке. Показано, что стресс определяется как весьма неприятное психофизическое состояние, связанное с перенапряжением, ощущением боли, чувством беспомощности и бессилия. Стресс характеризуется увеличением напряженности, вызванной влиянием конкретных факторов - стрессоров. Рассматриваются последствия организационного стресса, связанного с увеличением социальных расходов, увеличением заболеваемости, годовыми расходами по листам нетрудоспособности; затратами на медицинское обслуживание пациентов; медицинскими пособиями и пенсиями по инвалидности. Показано, что стресс влияет на качество жизни личности (заболевания, эмоциональные проблемы, снижение эффективности профессиональной деятельности) и на окружающих его людей (давление на работников, коллег, членов семьи, друзей и тому подобное). Установлено, что руководители, обладающие важной способностью понимать свои эмоции и эмоции других людей, социально и эмоционально компетентные лучше справляются с сильным стрессом. Руководители должны хорошо разбираться во многих смежных областях, таких, как: проведение переговоров, создание хорошей рабочей команды, управление производством, общение с подчиненными, мотивация подчиненных на эффективную работу, принятие правильных решений, разрешение конфликтов, снятие стресса, урегулирование споров. Для развития всех этих навыков большое значение отводится эмоциональному интеллекту.

**Ключевые слова:** эмоциональный интеллект, эмоциональная компетентность, личность руководителя, стресс.

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#### СТРАТЕГІЇ УПРАВЛІННЯ СТРЕСОМ ЛЮДЕЙ, ЯКІ ЗАЙМАЮТЬ КЕРІВНІ ПОСАДИ

У статті розглядаються стратегії управління стресом людей, які шукають успіху в професійному житті. Показано, що емоційний інтелект (EI) визначає потенціал для набуття практичних навичок управління стресом, котрі базуються на 5 елементах, а саме, на самосвідомості, мотивації, співпереживанні; самоконтролі, міжособистісних стосунках. Анализуються емоційні компетенції, що відображають досконалий контроль над широким спектром емоційних здібностей. Показано, що керівники та співробітники, використовуючи свій власний потенціал емоційного інтелекту, можуть створити професійні стосунки, котрі дозволять їм вести конструктивний обмін інформацією. Емоційний інтелект є важливим чинником у досягненні успіху в управлінні, це є основою всіх міжособистісних стосунків, включаючи умови стресу. Показано, що стрес визначається як дуже неприємний психофізичний стани, пов'язаний з перенапруженням, білью, відчуттям безпорадності і безсилля. Стрес характеризується посиленням напруженості, що викликані впливом конкретних факторів - стресорів. Обговорюються наслідки організаційного стресу, що пов'язані із збільшенням соціальних витрат, зростанням захворювань, щорічними витратами на листи непрацездатності; витратами на медичне обслуговування для пацієнтів; медичними пільгами та пенсіями по інвалідності. Виявлено, що стрес впливає на якість життя самої людини (захворювання, емоційні проблеми, зниження ефективності професійної діяльності тощо) і на людей навколо неї (тиск на працівників, колег, членів сім'ї, друзів). Встановлено, що керівники, які мають здатність розуміти свої емоції і емоції інших людей, є соціально та емоційно компетентні, краще справляються зі стресом. Керівники повинні добре розумітися у суміжних галузях, таких як: проведення переговорів, створення хорошої робочої команди, управління виробництвом, спілкування з підлеглих, мотивація підлеглих для ефективної роботи, прийняття правильних рішень, вирішення конфліктів, управління стресом, врегулювання спорів. Для розвитку всіх цих навичок важливим є емоційний інтелект.

**Ключові слова:** емоційний інтелект, емоційна компетентність, особистість керівника, стрес.

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