The Sources of Stress amongst Construction Consultants in Workplace Environment

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Abstract

Designers in Malaysia are beginning to feel the existence and growing of stress levels at the workplace due to high pressure and competitive working environment. Designer profession is to create inspire designs that sometimes lead to stress and affect their work performance. Moreover, stress can cause poor planning, lack of communications and interpersonal conflicts. Therefore, the objective of this paper is to identify the causes and effects of workplace stress amongst designers. Questionnaire survey was distributed among 500 designers. The respondents are from construction consultant companies in Klang Valley. The response rate of this paper was performed of about 38% of the samples. The outcome of this research show that they were generally enjoyed their work but sometimes feel stress due to poor planning and job demand, working surrounding and relationship among staff. This indicates that stress lead to bad designs and sometimes gives bad effects to the performance of the designers.

Keywords: Workplace Stress; Causes; Effetcs Designers

1.0 Introduction

Designers, i.e. Architects and Interior Designers are appointed by the client to investigate all alternative approaches, creating models and laying out simple design to complicated buildings. Designers must creatively act in transforming the building concept in forms of architectural vision. Moreover, designers must have an understanding on many aspects that involved with consultation and technical aspect of architectural, have knowledge on the buildings codes, creating work strategies and others (Bredemeyer & Malan, 2006: Wall, 2011). This multiple task of designers' job sometimes gives burden to them and will cause workplace stress.

Stress does occur amongst designers when they are encounter with uncooperative people in getting their job completed. Additionally, the rising of the deadline pressure and increasing challenges in management in the modern workplace have led to stress.

Hence, consultants especially designers need to recognise what stress is and how the stress can affect them because stress can come from any situations. Ahmad (2008) indicated that at least 20% of the 27 million people in the country suffer from degree of stress. Basically, there is no specific definition of stress because individuals react to it differently. Pressure can lead to stress at home and workplace. Stress at the workplace can lead to major problems to the organization as well as for the workers. There are many factors of stress affecting designers such as, burden of works and projects, the catching of deadlines, the long working hours, the collaboration, coordination, integration process with other parties especially with clients'. These factors of stress could affect the organization quality of work and also life of the individuals, i.e. workers. All of these combined factors can cause emotional disturbances and can lead into stress.

2.0 Workplace Stress

Stress occurs when there is a relationship between the person and the environment. It appraised by the person that exceeding their resources or working ability and endangering their well-being (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). CIOB (2006) defines stress at the workplace as "the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed on them". Besides, through an online survey by CIOB (2006) showed that 70% of construction professionals felt that stress was a factor for poor retention levels in the construction industry. Generally, job stress can be seen as physical and emotion response to risky and poor working conditions in which job requirement exceed the capabilities, resources or needs of the worker.

2.1 Factor Causes Workplace Stress

In any job, there are a large number of environmental sources of work stress. Table 1 show the factor causes stress at the workplace.

Table 1: Factor Causes Stress at the Workplace

Factors	Descriptions
Characteristic of the work itself	Uncomfortable working place/poor work environment,

	extreme temperature, loud noise, poor lighting, foul smells, badly designed office equipment
The attitude of the person and/or organisations	Depressed mood, lowered self-esteem, life dissatisfaction, job dissatisfaction
Career development pressure	Uncertain job security, fear of layoff, intention to leave the job
The climate and structure of the organisation	Uncertainty and mismatch at work, uneven distributions of workload among project participants
Nature of relationship at workplace	Disrespect or distrust among project team members
Problem associated with the interface between the organisation and the outside world	Poor communications, poor relationship within workers in the organisation and affiliation among project participants

Sources: Janipha & Ismail (2012); Jerold (1996); Kornhauser (1965); Cooper (1981); Williams (2003)

2.2 Effects of Workplace Stress

Stress affects different people in different ways, and the experience of work stress can cause unusual and dysfunctional behaviour at work and contribute to poor physical and mental health. Table 2 indicate the effects of workplace stress.

Table 2: The Effects of Workplace Stress

Effects	Descriptions
Illness and diseases	Increase coronary heart disease, higher blood pressure, obesity, smoking, hypertension, diabetes, peptic ulcers
Absenteeism and poor job performance	Lack of concern for their colleagues, disrespect, distrust, dislike of those they are working with, lots of frustration
Burnout	Changes in the social life, avoid communicating with people at work, attitude to work, i.e. low motivation and commitment, frequent grumbling about low accomplishment
Fatigue	Poor decision making ability, increase error in making judgement, reduced ability to do complex tasks and planning, reduce communication skills and ability to handle stress on the job, reduced productivity and performance
Organisational ineffectiveness	Financial impact, poor employee performance, absenteeism from project meetings, leaving the company

Sources: Janipha & Ismail (2012); Baker (1985); Russek & Linda (1977); Heaney & Ryan (1990); Jackson & Schuler (1985); Defrank & Cooper (1987); Holt (1993); Wan Hussin (2007); Leung et al. (2005); Jamal (1984); Varhol (2000)

3.0 Research Methodology

The Questionnaire Survey method is chosen for collecting data for this paper. The questionnaires were distributed to the architect and interior design firms. The information required from the respondents is mainly to identify and investigate the causes and effects of stress in designers' profession at the workplace. The overall target population of this study is

those who work as a designer in Klang Valley area. A total of 500 questionnaires were sent out to design-based firms. The targeted firms were mainly located in the Klang Valley area. A total of 190 responses were received within the time limits established. This represented a response rate of 38%.

4.0 Research Analysis and Findings

4.1 Causes of Workplace Stress

The outcome showed that even though most of the consultant firms do provide mental health trainings and seminars in the workplace, the main contributory factor of stress for designers is still having a problem at work compared to having a problem at home. This is supported in the research done by Janipha & Ismail (2012), the job as designers sometimes give dissatisfaction, but they generally enjoy their job, which contributed to 53%. However, 23% of respondents indicated that work as a designer was difficult.

For the cause of problems at works surrounding, most of the respondents (24%) were strongly agreed that poor ventilation was the main cause of the problem at work surrounding. 23% of respondents agreed that noise was the cause of the problem at work surrounding. The results show that the working environment was very important for designers and noise may contribute to a higher level of stress. For poor/inadequate lighting, 23% of respondent stated that they were moderately agreed that this factor was the cause of the problem at work surrounding. There was similar percentage of respondents that strongly agreed the excessive heat and overcrowding were the cause of the problem at work surrounding.

Most of the respondents disagree to poor relation with supervisor (22%), poor relation with workmates (26%) and working with the public (30%) that cause problem of stress at workplace. However, for other working relationship, such as harassment and/or humiliation (24%), impersonal treatment which up to 31% and lack of communication, consists of 23% were moderately agreed that this type of working relationships may cause a problem at the work place. This will lead to stress at the workplace.

Additionally, the nature of organisational is one of factor affecting workplace stress, which consists of inadequate staff in the department or project team, poor communication among team member, poor planning, lack of job feedback, interpersonal conflicts, poor relations with supervisor and bullying. Research highlighted that most of the respondents were strongly agreed to poor planning. This was the main factor contributed to workplace stress. Next, the respondents agreed to lack feedback and moderately agreed to the factors of bullying in the workplace stress. Majority of the respondents were disagreeing to the factors of insufficient training and poor relations with superiors that lead to workplace stress.

For the factor of job demand, majority of the respondents contribute to 21%, were strongly agreed that too much work given to them may affect workplace stress while 26% agreed that hours worked given to complete the job and ambitious deadline affect workplace stress. Moreover, findings indicated that 26% of respondents were moderately agreed to workplace stress occur when working in isolation. However, there were respondents that disagreed to

the factor of too little work given (24%) and strongly disagreed for the factor of insufficiently skilled for the job given (23%) that affected workplace stress.

Overall, majority respondents (38%) sometimes feel underpaid by their organisation. This was because most of the respondents have between 2 to 5 years working experiences as designers. Nevertheless, 33% of respondents stated that they never being undervalued on the job given and does   mentioned they often receive appreciation for good work they have done.

4.2 Effects of Workplace Stress

Table 3: Overall Responses of Causes and Effects of Stress in the Workplace by Respective Respondents

Causes of Stress in Workplace	Effects of Stress in Workplace
PROBLEM AT WORK SURROUNDING	**TIME OFF DUE TO STRESS**
Poor ventilation	A day off
Noise	One week
Excessive heat	One month
Overcrowding	
Poor/inadequate lighting	**JOB PERFORMANCE**
	Sometimes gives bad effects to design/working performance
WORKING RELATIONSHIP	No affects at all
Lack of communication	Working performance getting poor
Impersonal treatment	Cannot produces the best output to design job
Harassment	
Poor working relationship with the public	**SYMPTOM OF STRESS**
Poor relation with workmates	Continual tiredness
Poor relation with supervisor	Sleeplessness
	Frequently headache
ORGANISATIONAL FACTORS	Depression
Poor planning	Anxiety
Lack of feedback	Indigestion
Bullying	
Poor communication among team members Inadequate staff to teams or department	**UNDER STRESS BEHAVIOURAL**
Insufficient training	Feel very tired
Interpersonal conflicts	Cannot sleep
Poor relation with supervisor	Job burnout
	Increase job tension
JOB DEMAND	Feel angry
Too much work	Lower self-confident
Hours to work (working time)	
Ambitious deadline	
Working in isolation	
Insufficient skills for the job given	
Too little work	
PERCEPTION ON JOB GIVEN	
Underpaid for the job given	
Undervalued the job given	
Receive appreciation for good work	

Outcome of the research stated that 54% of respondents stress by the work given to them compared to 45% said no. Conversely, there were slightly different of opinion to the level of stress. Only 48% indicated that level of stress did cause harm to them, whereas others responded otherwise. Stress also affected the organization and as mentioned by Janipha and Ismail (2012), almost all respondents agreed that having stress at the workplace affected the organization.

The research also shown that 55% of respondents did take time off due to stress and the longest period they take of about one month. However, most of the respondents only take a day off (47%) or take off for one week (34%) due to stress at the workplace.

For the effect on job performance, majority of respondents said sometimes it give effects to designs or work performance. Others stated that when they were in stress, they cannot produce best to design job and working performance getting poor. 33% of respondents indicated that when they were in stress, their job performance have no effect at all.

There were several symptom of stress occurred in workplace consists of headache, depression, anxiety, sleeplessness, continual tiredness and indigestion of food consumption. The highest response was continual tiredness (55%), followed by sleeplessness (54%), frequently headache (53%), depression (47%), anxiety (46%) and indigestion (45%).

Stress at the workplace also affected the designers behavioural. For under stress behavioural factor, 26% were strongly agreed that when they were under stress, they feel very tired and having job burnout. An average of 23% respondents indicated that they disagreed to increase in job tension, when they were in a stress situation.

Table 3 highlighted the overall responses of causes and effects of stress in the workplace by respective respondents.

5.0 Conclusion

There is no a specific term or definition of stress as different individual and/or organization has their owned definition. However, stress is always related to a particular feeling of individuals, in which the demands or ability of work and/or life exceed the belief of the individual in his or her capacity to cope. Stress is related to a relationship between the working environment and the person himself. One of the causes of stress in the workplace is addressing adequate mental health trainings and seminars in the organization. Moreover, other factor or causes of workplace stress consists of adequate facilities in the organization i.e. lighting, ventilation, etc., and working environment i.e. harassment and/or humiliation, impersonal treatment and lack of communication. Apart from that, cause of stress comes from the organisational activities such as lack of feedback, poor in planning and bullying. Job demand factor will increase stress in the workplace, for example, too much work given to staff at the same time and striving to cope with the deadline.

Most of the designers agreed that feel that if the staffs are in stress, they will affect the overall organization performance. Furthermore, the level of stress does cause harm to them. The effect of stress to designers is based on their job performance. They are likely shows poor job performance and this give bad effect to design or tasks given (cannot produce good design). To certain extent, sometimes stress affect the working performance, which the

situation is getting worse. Designers who are stressed are also tending to be unhealthy, less productive, poorly motivated and feel insecure at work. Their organizations are difficult to be successful in a competitive market. Even though designers cannot usually protect themselves or their organisation from stress arising outside of work, but they can defend themselves from stress that arises through proper work planning and management. Stress at the workplace can be a major problem to the organization as well as for its workers. Good management and good work organisation are the best forms of stress prevention.

Acknowledgement

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