

Reduce Job stress in Organizations: Role of Locus of Control

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to investigate theoretically how locus of control can reduce occupational stress in the workplaces so as to have an effective performance improvement. By utilizing job demand-control models, researchers explored how managers can help to reduce job stress among their employees. This study may help managers and human resource development practitioners to better understand to reduce the consequences of occupation stress by locus of control.

Keywords: occupational stress, job stress, locus of control, internal locus of control, external locus of control.

1. Introduction and problem statement

Job stress is increasing globally in all countries, organizations, professions, and among employees, employers, families and society in general. Studies show that employees in the United States and other developed countries experienced job stress as a serious issue so that American businesses pay more than \$150 billion annually for occupational stress which leads to the absenteeism of employees, loss productivity and low performance (P. E. Spector, et al., 2002). Occupational stress has been known as a serious health issue for organizations and employees. Thus, the stressful situations of the workplace due to occupational stress lead to negative consequences like anxiety, headache, stomach distress and cardiovascular disease (P. E. Spector, 2002). So, occupational stress can be described as any discomfort that perceived by individuals who their capabilities and resources cannot be coped to demands, events and stressful situations in their workplace.

Locus of control is viewed as an important element to deal to the occupational stress. Thus, it can determine any aspect of work like location, scheduling, and what kind of tasks and activities should be done. Studies show that employees display different amount of control in different jobs, for example an employee that works in a machine-paced factory must adapt himself with determined time and specific tasks that have been determined by the machine (P. E. Spector, 2002). Therefore, people have ability to control themselves in order to cope with stressful situations as Chen & Silverthorne (2008) reported that individuals with internal locus of control can cope with job stress easily, in fact they perceived lower levels of job stress and show higher level of job performance.

To sum up, Workplace stress is a serious phenomenon that leads to physical and psychological consequences such as headache, stomach distress, anxiety and depression. In addition, Stress is closely related to control in which employees can increase their control by making good decision or on the other hand, making balance between the determined demands and their capabilities at their workplace so as to prevent job stress. Although, previous studies investigated the antecedents and consequences of job stress, not much has been paid to locus of control as a vital factor in reducing occupational stress in the literature, so this study is going to investigate how locus of control can reduce occupational stress in the workplaces.

2. Occupational stress

In general, Job stress can be defined as the physical and emotional responses that happen when the employee's capabilities and resources cannot be coped with the demands and requirements of their job (Alves, 2005; Bianchi, 2004; Lindholm, 2006; Nakasis & Ouzouni, 2008). A phenomenon that is related to work and is known as occupational Stress may be expressed differently, and affects on employees in the different work contexts. Studying about job stress will demonstrate the perception of job stress and its negative effects on employee's satisfaction, commitment and productivity in the different contexts and situations (Michael, 2009). According to Owen (2006), stressful situations in the workplace make occupational stress which leads to negative and harmful effects on both employers and employees. So, occupational stress will have unwelcome results such as absenteeism, loss of productivity and health care resources (Abualrub & Alzaru, 2008; Nakasis & Ouzouni, 2008).

3. Locus of control

The concept of locus of control was first proposed by Rotter (1954), which originally it was locus of control of reinforcement (2011). Locus of control defined as the general belief that individual's successes, failures and outcomes are control by individual's actions and behaviors (internal); or perhaps, people's achievements, failures and outcomes are controlled by other forces like chance, luck and fate (external) (P. Spector, 1988). Many studies have been done to explain the locus of control in both aspects internal and external control; in fact, Control is an important factor for well-being (Meier, Semmer, Elfering, & Jacobshagen, 2008). So, locus of control is divided into internal and external control.

3.1 Internal locus of control

Internal locus of control refers to people who believe that outcomes and their success and failures are the result of their own actions and efforts (Rotter, 1966). It can be defined as the events and outcomes which can be influenced by people own beliefs and actions (Ng, Sorensen, & Eby, 2006). Similarly, individuals with internal locus of control believe that they are able to control and manage their own lives by making decisions about the events (James & Wright, 1993). Additionally, Hsu (2011) found that individuals with high internal locus of control accept that their achievements and failures depend on their own efforts and endeavors or briefly they have ability to determine their own outcomes and they are responsible for what happened.

3.2 External locus of control

External locus of control refers to the beliefs that chance, fate, managers, supervisors, organizations and other persons are more powerful to make decision about individual's lives and outcomes (Rotter, 1966). Indeed people with perceived external locus of control believe that fate, chance, and luck, friends, and managers determine the outcomes which they themselves experience; so, they contribute their successes, failures and outcomes to external sources (James & Wright, 1993). Hsu (2011) proposed that people with external locus of control believe that external elements such as luck, chance and destiny are stronger to determine their lives, and their failures or successes are not due to their own efforts.

4. How locus of control affects on occupational stress

According to Rotter (1966) locus of control viewed as a generalized belief that people contribute the outcomes to their efforts and abilities or external factors such as fate, chance and density. therefore, locus of control has two aspects: internal and external (Di Zhang & Bruning, 2011). Studies show that individuals with internal locus of control can cope better in stressful situations or on the other hand they have more abilities to adopt themselves with problems and events that they experience in their work place (Lam & Schaubroeck, 2000). Similarly, Meier, et al (2008) found that people with an internal locus of control do not suffer musculoskeletal pain, in fact they display high job control to avoid physical illnesses, in contrast people who have low job control suffer musculoskeletal pain. additionally, increasing internal locus of control is related positively to adaptation in stressful work places (Parkes, 1986). Finally, Work Locus of Control has been found to be related to health outcomes like stress (Berg, Hem, Lau, Håseth, & Ekeberg, 2005) as well as well-being (P. E. Spector, et al., 2002). It is viewed as an element to deal with work demands and provide a better well-being and performance for employees (Daniels, Beesley, Cheyne, & Wimalasiri, 2008).

5. Job-demand control model

In recent years the job Demand-Control Model has been recognized as an famous model to describe how control is related to stress and how can reduce the occupational stress in the organizations (Baker, Israel, & Schurman, 1996). The Job demand-control model (Karasek Jr, 1979) is interactions between psychological demands and decision latitude (control). In fact, it has two main dimensions: demand and control. The first dimension is job demand that refers to the pressures, overload work, conflicts, ambiguities about the responsibilities and required skills in a work place (Park, 2007). The basic premise or the most important strain in this model is when the employees suffer a high amount of stress and demands while they have low amount of control to cope themselves in the stressful situations, so they are more stressed (Kain & Jex, 2010). Additionally, The second dimension is control which has two elements – decision authority (autonomy) and skill discretion (range of skills used) (Panari, Guglielmi, Simbula, & Depolo, 2010). Also, control is viewed as an important factor to decrease the occupational-stress by surrounding and making effective decision over aspects of work like location, time, and what kind of activities and tasks should be done to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the organizations in an unstressed condition (P. E. Spector, 2002).

Furthermore, the combination of demands and decisions make four kinds of work status: active, passive, relaxed and job strain. Thus, the active status is when the employees have high demands and high control at the same time, conversely, passive status happens when the employees experience low demands and they do not need high control; in short, they have low demands and low control. In addition, in relaxed conditions, the employees experience low demands while they have high control. The last status or job strain that is the most stressful conditions when there is a contrast between demands and control, it means employees encounter to high demands whereas they have low control to deal with overload, conflict, ambiguities and pressures, so they experience a high level of stress (Ali & Lindström, 2008).

Insert Figure (1) about here

6. How to increase locus of control

Locus of control refers to the causes that individuals attribute the outcomes, their successes and failures to them. The causes or motivators may be internal and external. Thus, internal motivators refer to the desire of job satisfaction, self-esteem, and quality of life in fact; they are personal or internal motivators that people themselves should reinforce them to increase their control and latitude over stressors. In contrast, external motivators are better jobs, promotions and higher wages that can be provided by supervisors, managers and organizations to encourage the employees to promote their performance in their organizations. So, it is advised that the supervisors create innovative methods to encourage their employees in their job satisfaction and promotion so as to have high performance. Finally, if the employees perceive that locus of control helps them to gain achievements, they will try to be more innovative, creative and productive in their work but if they experience repeated failures, they become depressed and attribute their failures to other factors like supervisors, family, low salary, mean-spirited boss, luck and fate and they decide to transfer to another job or leave their company, (Forte, 2005). So, promotion, job satisfaction, self-esteem, increasing quality of life and high salary can increase locus of control.

7. How to reduce occupational stress

Job stress can be prevented and controlled effectively by integrating primary, secondary, and tertiary intervention. Therefore, primary intervention is proactive which its aim is to help healthy people to be immune of illnesses. The second intervention is ameliorative that modifies employees' responses to stressors like stress in order to help them to control stressful situations. At last, tertiary intervention which is reactive and its purpose are to minimize the consequences of stress-related that they have happened once. In fact, this intervention tries to help employees to cope more effectively with reactions in stressful conditions. So, the integration of these three interventions required a meaningful participation which involves in job control, organizational fairness, and mutual support among employees and supervisors (LaMontagne & Keegel, 2010).

Additionally, setting clear objectives can minimize role ambiguity and role conflict. Role ambiguity which can be defined as an employee's unawareness about the job's duties, responsibilities and the expectations which should be performed in the organization satisfactory (Bersamin, 2006) and role conflict is conflicting between determined demands and required skills and responsibilities in a workplace (Bersamin, 2006). Both role ambiguity and role conflict are the source of employee's stress. So, providing a clear objective of responsibilities and duties by supervisor and managers can decrease occupational stress among employees.

Furthermore, Increasing employees' sense of control through programs such as job development and enrichment, decision making, and delegation of authority in order to increase the employees' sense of control over their jobs and the work environment (Salami, Ojokuku, & Ilesanmi, 2010). Also, an appropriate organizational communication can immune the employees from work stress which uncertainty and feelings of isolation are the main sources of it. Thus, having a proper communication helps them to know what is going on in the organization, thus, they will have a good relationship with all members and parts of their organizations; and consequently, communication will decrease occupational stress (Salami, et al., 2010).

Finally, exercise and enough sleep are recommended to reduce occupational stress. Exercise relieves stress at work, by doing Exercise; it can reduce illnesses, speed up metabolism, increase blood flow and oxygen to brain. Also, enough sleep or well-rested, is much easier to keep emotional balance so as to cope with job and workplace stress.

Conclusion

Occupational stress is increasing in organizations and it leads to negative consequences such as absenteeism, loss productivity, low satisfaction and psychological and physical illnesses; thus, reduce and control job stress is vital for today's organizations. Locus of control can be as an effective factor to reduce workplace stress by job satisfaction, promotion, sense of self-esteem, increasing high salary and quality of life. Also, planning an accurate program like integrating primary, secondary and tertiary interventions, clear objectives, sense of control, appropriate communication and enough exercise and sleep are ways to reduce occupational stress. Finally, Karasek's (1979) model of job demand-control can guide the practitioners to make decisions to prevent stress so as to increase performance and high productivity in all organizations.

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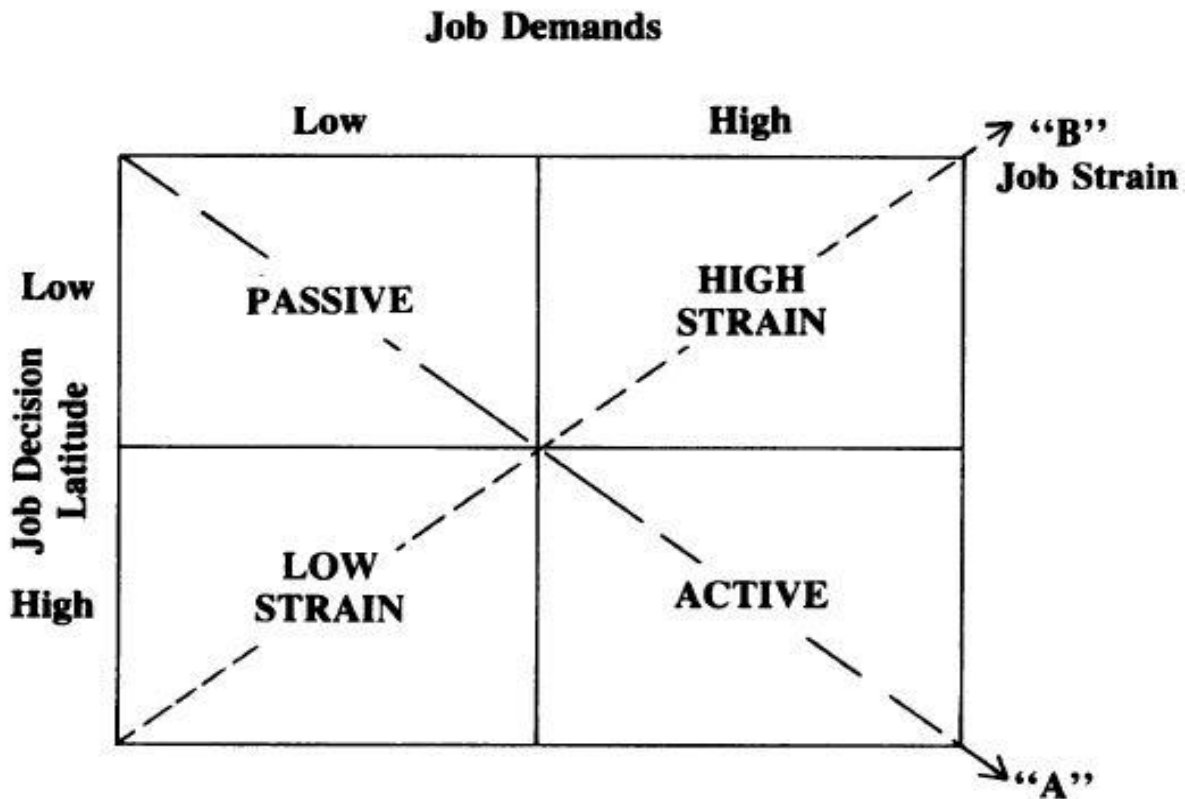


Figure1: Karasek’s Job demand control model; Adapted from Karasek, et al. (1981, p. 695)