



Occupational Stress and Behavioural Studies of Facilities Management Employees in Commercial Complex

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Abstract

Stress is inevitable in any types of occupation and career. It is recognised as major managerial and economic issues which contribute to employee turnover and poor performance. There is a need to understand how to reduce the effects to employees. This study aims to determine the stress relationship between employees in commercial complex facilities management organisations. Data collection is through questionnaire surveys to employees and semi-structured interviews to selected facilities managers for commercial complexes in Klang Valley, Malaysia. The findings indicated existence of stress that affected the occupational and behavioural performances of employees.

Keywords: Commercial complexes, Customers' satisfaction, Human behaviour, Occupational stress

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1.0 Introduction

The Malaysian building construction and facilities management industries are progressively undergoing several technological transformations due to the economic demands and global requirements. These industries are still perceived as one of the most important contributors to the economic growth and comparatively, they are at par with other developing countries. In order to sustain the positive growth, the life cycle of building properties and management of the facilities provided, many business organisations have emphasised on the role of Facilities Manager. The general function of a Facility Manager is to manage and support the operational functions of their core business that may include total facilities management.

The concept of facilities management (FM) in Malaysia is still new (Ismail 2001) and consequently there are expected challenges in undertaking the practice. These challenges may create stress in the working environment (Broadbridge, 1999). Broadbridge states that all work and job occupations are subjected to a certain degree of stress that varies from occupations and organisations. Service industries such as FM that deal with people, different shapes and sizes of buildings, complicated technology and machines may also experience undergoing several structural job changes all at the same time.

The complex job scopes and responsibilities are potentially to create more stress to the workers and employers. This is supported by Manshor et al. (2003), stating that employees may experience more stressful working conditions and feel pressured if they are instructed to do a more difficult job function and responsibilities and when the work is perceived harder than the work done by other working teams. Stress affects an individual's adjustment that may influence the performance and production of the entire organisation (Menon and Akhlish, 1994). Organisations are now realising the potential harmful effects of stress in terms of decreased motivation, lowered performance levels, mental and physical ailments and burnout. According to the American Psychological Association (2009), 69% of employees report that work is a significant source of stress and 41% of the respondents typically feel tense or stressed out during the workday. In addition, 51% of the employees said they were less productive at work due to stress. Working very quickly to follow tight deadlines, having no influence on job responsibility or having monotonous tasks are some examples that may contribute to occupational stress. Several studies indicated that the work-related 'stressors' are likely to have contributed to several spectrum of ill health such as headache, neck and shoulder pains, fatigue or backache. They may also cause many other diseases such as depressive disorders, heart diseases or even to life-threatening ones. The occupational stress is increasingly recognised as a contributing factor to employee absence, poor turnover and performance. This has been recognised as a major managerial and economic issue.

In the era of information and technology (IT), a kind of stress caused by IT has become one of the leading health hazards in the workplace. Known as "Technostress" (McShane and Von Glinow, 2000), it is a negative psychological link because people are avoiding the usage of new technology maybe due to inability or incompetency to use. On the other hand, "Job burnout" is recognised as a prolonged response to chronic emotional and interpersonal

stressors on a job. The effects of stressful working condition environment can be defined by three dimensions of exhaustion, cynicism, and inefficacy (Maslach, 2001).

There is a noticeable growth of working life that could be linked to stress. Hence, this research aims to study on the various concepts of stress related to an organisation, the stress level, the occupational stressor and the behavioural impact encountered on employees in facilities management organisation for commercial complexes in Klang Valley, Malaysia. The target respondents are working to satisfy the organisation and customers needs with expectation for quality facilities. Their jobs are often characterised by deadlines and heavy workloads. Through survey questionnaires, the expected findings will be able to indicate the level of stressor that may require several improvements that may be adopted in other sectors of the built environment.

2.0 Literature Review

The Concept of Organisational Stress

The word 'stress' can be defined as the sum of physical and mental responses to an unacceptable disparity between real or imagined personal experience and personal expectations. According to Newhouse (2000) as cited in Treven and Potocan (2005), 'stress' derives from Anglo-Saxon word and was first applied in physics for designating the mechanical force in medical industry. Stress could happen at any stage of life and through different contexts such as working environment, family commitment and social activities. It is a response which includes both physical and mental components. Mental responses to stress include adaptive stress, anxiety, and depression. Stress that enhances physical and mental functions is considered as a good stress. This positive stress is known as "eustress" (Caputo, 1991). It is needed to promote wellbeing by serving as catalysts of stimulants to push any individual toward achieving the target goal. If stress persists to an excessive degree, it will eventually lead to the need for resolution. This condition may lead either to anxious/escape or depressive behaviour. It depletes individual emotionally, mentally and physically.

Stress and the Theory

Gibson et al. (1994) developed a model known as General Adaptation Syndrome (GAS). The purpose is to provide an automatic defence system in helping people to cope with environmental demands. The model is divided into three stages (Fig. 1.0). The line across Stage 1 to Stage 3 indicates the individual's energy and ability to cope with the stressful situation.

In stage 1, known as "Alarm reaction" is the threatening or challenging situation that causes the brain to send biochemical message to various parts of the body. It will increase respiration rate, blood pressure, heartbeat, muscle tension, and other physiological responses. The individual's energy level and effectiveness immediately decreases in response to the initial shock. On the other hand, "Extreme shock" may result in an injury or incapability and even death because the body system fails to respond. In most situations, a

person will be more alert to the current condition he/she is experiencing and quickly prepares the body for the “Resistance” in stage 2.

During a “Resistance”, the body has activated various biochemical, psychological, and behavioural mechanisms. In this stage, the person is able to cope with the increase pressure in the environmental demand longer. However, people have a limited resistance capacity. This explains why the graph of resistance to stress decrease in the third stage. Known as the “Exhaustion”, people will eventually be worn out and tired through prolonged pressure and stress. They will be more likely to catch cold or other illness when they have been working under pressure. Individual who frequently experience the “exhaustion stage” is usually found to have increased risk of long-term physiological and psychological damages. Thus, any individual will need to resolve the tense and stressful situations and rebuild their resistance capabilities with renewed energy before they could return to the stressful challenging environment.

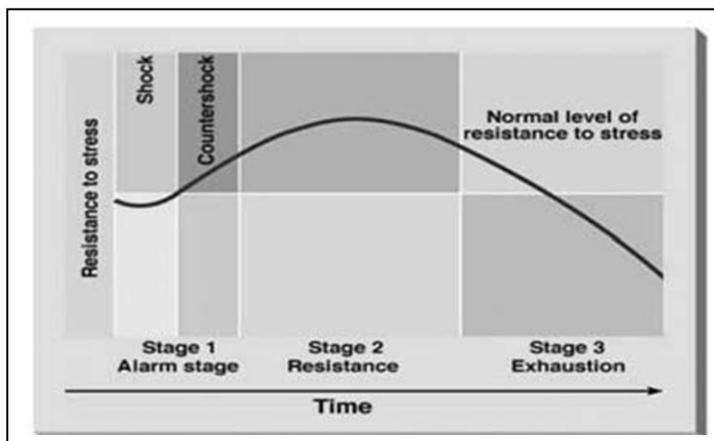


Figure 1: The General Adaptation Syndrome Model Adaptation.
(Source:Ivancevich, J.M., Matteson, M.T., 1993)

The Theories and Impact of Occupational Stress

There are several models and theories of occupational stress such as “Cybernetic Theory” by Cumming and Cooper (1998). The theory states that a person may lack in fitness due to physiological stress, psychological stress or both. The physiological stress may result in physical symptoms such as raised blood pressure, raised serum cholesterol and lowered immunity. While the psychological stress affected the psychological symptoms such as sleep disturbances, anxiety, panic, and restlessness. Both these stresses may result in behavioural changes that may increase absenteeism, insurance claims and use of health care services.

The concept of “Cybernetic theory” is used to emphasize the temporal dimensions of the development, response, and possible resolution of occupational stress. According to the theory, a person will try to be in a stable and equilibrium state at all times, and will act to re-

establish equilibrium if there are any external disturbances or forces that changes the stability. This theory can be related and applied to the occupational stress measurement and management because it suggests that occupational stress can control or react to any changes in an organisational environment by influencing any of the factors or forces that constitute the organisation's social structure. Any individual has the potential to cause and experience stress. Some psychological and behavioural theories indicate that "perception" is an important variable. Other studies mentioned on the theories of "locus control", "self-efficacy" and "affective disposition" that may have a major impact on perceived stressors and resultant stress. Any of these factors that go through the perceived control or emotional response will cause the person to be under stress or strain. "Strain" represents a real threat to individual symptoms and it can be categorised as physiological, psychological and behavioural. One is considered as being under strain or stress when an individual is perceived to receive additional demand beyond his/her capabilities and resources. He/she will show signs of emotional, behavioural and physical symptoms. The individual may emotionally feel anxious, tense, angry, confused and unmotivated. Their behavioural signs will lead them to make mistakes, snapping at others, being anxious or eating, drinking, smoking more than usual. Physically the individual will experience headaches, backache, dizziness, frequent coughs and colds, high blood pressure or feeling tired all the time. There are other symptoms that may be experienced by the individual. Some studies suggested that this model posits "control" as an intervening or moderating variable however, other studies found the empirical support for this stance is weak.

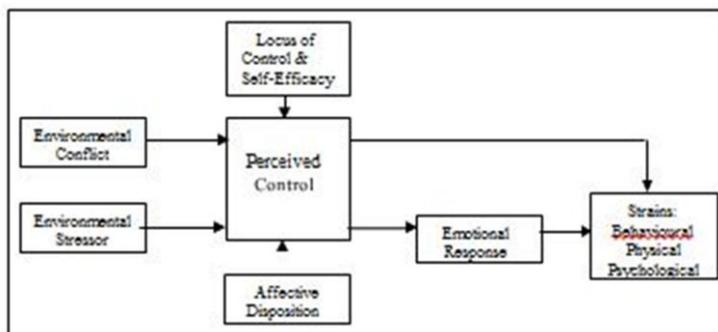


Figure 2: Control Theory

Facilities Manager and Management Organisation

Clark and Hinxman (1999) define a facilities manager as a person in charge of an organisation or a sub-unit. to fulfil the FM concept, a facilities manager should be capable to coordinate technical activities, the provision of good communications and enable to interact with all the staff within the organisation. Facilities manager is responsible for monitoring various maintenance work, quality and value management through multiple business information and decision. The job demand may require uncompensated frequent overtime to resolve

problems and meet deadlines. The job is often regarded as 'on call' since there is always demand or urgent problems that may arise even during non working hours (Alexander, 2008).

3.0 Methodology

The study reviews relevant literatures on organisational stress approach from publications and other research findings. In order to determine the relationship of stress experienced by FM personnel, survey questionnaires are conducted. The objective is to distinguish any impacts to the FM organisation due to stress and problems encountered in managing the facilities and assets. Questionnaire surveys were distributed to 80 personnel of FM management and technical staff in ten commercial complexes located in 'Klang Valley', Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. A total of 41 responses were collected resulting in 51.25% of response rate. The questionnaire focused on general behaviour. Interviews were also carried out to selected managers for the FM organisations. This is to ascertain on the findings that relate to the occupation and responsibilities.

4.0 Findings and Analysis

The questionnaire survey consisted of 21 items on general occupational stress factors in a common work setting. Seven point scale ranging from 1 (the lowest stress level) to 7 (the highest stress level) are used to rate the participants perceived severity of stress when dealing with their occupation. Table 1.0 shows that generally the occupational stress level among facilities management employees is highest on the factors of punctuality, urgency to complete work, peers working relationship and job competition. There are other potential stressors that arise from work load.

According to the interview findings, most of the respondents indicated that due to the nature of work for commercial complexes that deal with public, the FM organisations are responsible for too many people. The job responsibilities ranges from maintenance and repair of the building, infrastructure and system, ensuring safety and security for the public and tenants in the building including crisis management that may arise from time to time. There are a lot of work to do and with too many unreasonable deadlines. Sometimes they are required to travel frequently in relation to the job such as for meeting or any exhibition shows. They usually work beyond normal working hours. Some of the respondents reported that there may be cases on inability to concentrate on the job and feeling anxiety or frustrated during work. There are also cases reported on absenteeism, high accident and high turnover rate during meetings. The respondents agreed that stress is among the factors that may cause poor job performance or dissatisfaction to individual. Most respondents agreed that the management of the FM organisation should improve on the working condition and the workplace to lessen the occupational stress experienced by the employees.

Table 1: Level of Occupational Stress

Item	Scale 1	Scale 2	Scale 3	Scale 4	Scale 5	Scale 6	Scale 7
Job Stress Factors	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
B1 : Punctuality	0	4.9	4.9	19.5	7.3	41.5	22
B2 : Interruption during conversation	12.5	15	15	25	10	22.5	0
B3 : Do multi tasking work	12.2	4.9	14.6	12.2	29.3	22	4.9
B4 : Impatient in waiting	14.6	14.6	24.4	24.4	14.6	2.4	4.9
B5 : Being rushed to complete work	9.7	2.4	4.9	29.3	36.6	12.2	4.9
B6 : Control the temper	17.1	17.1	29.3	22	7.3	2.4	4.9
B7 : Rush in action	0	12.2	26.8	24.4	19.5	7.3	9.8
B8 : Enjoy work	9.8	9.8	9.8	26.8	7.3	24.4	12.2
B9 : Workaholic	4.9	19.5	31.7	9.8	17.1	7.3	9.8
B10 : Perception by other people	2.4	4.9	2.4	31.7	22	26.8	9.8
B11 : Perception about work	4.9	17.1	19.5	31.7	7.3	14.6	4.9
B12 : Job satisfaction	2.4	7.3	4.9	14.6	19.5	31.7	19.5
B13 : Peer competition	7.3	12.2	19.5	22	9.8	14.6	4.9
B14 : Stiff to interference	7.3	19.5	19.5	22	7.3	12.2	12.2
B15 : Hard-driving & competitive	9.8	22	19.5	24.4	2.4	7.3	14.6
B16 : Desire for recognition / achievement	2.4	12.2	12.2	22	12.2	24.4	14.6
B17 : Association with upper management	9.8	2.4	4.9	22	24.4	26.8	9.8
B18 : Work satisfaction	12.2	14.6	34.1	17.1	2.4	4.9	14.6
B19 : Associate with people who are motivated and dedicated for promotion	12.2	4.9	7.3	9.8	17.1	29.3	19.5
B20 : Happy when doing something	4.9	2.4	2.4	22	17.1	36.6	14.6
B21 : Enjoy competitive activities	4.9	2.4	4.9	17.1	24.4	34.1	12.2

5.0 Conclusion and Recommendation

Stress is inevitable in any types of occupation and career. There is a need to understand how to reduce the effects to workers. The findings show the existence of stress encountered by employees in the selected FM organisations. Due to the nature of commercial business, the employees for FM organisations are required to satisfy the organisation needs, tenants and customer expectations including technical and security requirements. Some other personal consequences include the inability to concentrate and anxiety. For organization, the consequences range from absenteeism, poor job performance, job dissatisfaction to high accident and high turnover rate. It is recommended that organisations should enhance the quality of physical workplace condition with provision of improved facilities for the employees to use. There should also be proper distribution of work load and programmes to encourage career development and work relationship amongst the employees for better working environment.

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