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- 1 IMPACT OF CROSS CULTURAL ENVIRONMENT ON HUMAN RESOURCE PRACTICES

 Preeti Bishnoi¹
- 3 RIGHTS TO INFORMATION: THE BASIC HUMAN RIGHTS

 Mahadevappa P1
- 6 ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY WITH THE HELP OF SOLAR WATER HEATERS
 M. S. Jyoti Meshram¹, Abhay Kulkarni²
- 9 A STUDY ON THE HR ANALYTICS COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE FOR ORGANIZATION AS A HR STRATEGY Seema Swanand Sant¹
- 12 EMPLOYEE'S WELFARE AND SOCIAL SECURITY APPROACHES WITH REFERENCE TO SELECTED INDUSTRIAL UNITS IN KOLHAPUR DISTRICT

 Kokare Kundlik Vithoba¹ Tanuja Popat Kushire²
- 20 POOCH AT WORK: A NOVEL STRESS BUSTER FOR EMPLOYEES WORKING IN STRESSFUL ENVIRONMENT Purushottam Bung¹
- 23 COMPARATIVE STUDY OF STOCK MOVEMENT BETWEEN TECH MAHINDRA AND INFOSYS Dr. Vijendra C¹
- 28 **WORKING CONDITION OF WOMEN SANITATION WORKERS**Pavitha T. M²
- A STUDY ON THE CUSTOMER PREFERENCES TOWARDS JEWELLERY IN BAREILLY MARKET Tanima Soni¹, Ritika Gulati²
- 34 IMPACT OF STRI SHAKTI SHG SCHEME ON THE PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN PANCHAYAT RAJ INSTITUTIONS

 Shivanna K1
- 37 A STUDY ON EMPLOYEE SATISFACTION WITH REFERENCE TO PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL AT SYS INFORMATION HEALTHCARE PVT. LTD., MYSORE

 Mahesh A. S¹, Somashekar P²
- 42 TRIBLES HEALTH STATUS: A CASE STUDY IN CHAMARAJANAGAR DISTRICT

 Mahesh R¹
- 45 INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY RELATED WITH BUSINESS APPLICATION AND ORGANIZATION Dr. Nagaraja G. B¹, Dr. D. K. Pandey², Dr. Shivakumar S³
- 49 MAJOR PERSPECTIVES OF RURAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN INDIA Jayadatta Shreepad S¹, Syed Ameen Ahmed²
- 753 REFLECTIONS ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN IN INDIA

 Sunitha N¹
- A STUDY ON EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT PRACTICES IN IT AND ITES COMPANIES

 Geeta Kalyankar Rao¹, Dr. Mohsin Shaikh²
- 61 INNOVATIVE ECOSYSTEMS IN BUSINESS ECONOMICAL STRUCTURE OF INDIAN ENTERPRISES

 Munnu Prasad V¹

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POOCH AT WORK: A NOVEL STRESS BUSTER FOR EMPLOYEES WORKING IN STRESSFUL ENVIRONMENT

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ABSTRACT

Stress is an integral part of every human being. Without stress, life appears to be dull and boring; whereas too much of it can be dangerous. Hans Selye.¹ M.D., a pioneer researcher in 'stress and stress management' defines stress as "The nonspecific response of the body to any demand made on it (When external demands exceed resources)." As the fast developing countries like India which are experiencing significant economic progress, the stress levels with which people work in general is also increasing significantly. This has led to sharp rise in the stress related chronic health disorders (Physiological and psychological) like; anxiety disorders, attention deficit, hyperactivity, essential hypertension, epilepsy, headache, insomnia, chronic muscular pain, etc.

The conventional stress management techniques/strategies like; aerobics, yoga, meditation, prayer, imagery, self-hypnosis (Autogenic Training), biofeedback, long silent walk, soothing music, etc., have been proved successful yet incomplete. Getting a new friend, i.e. cats and dogs, have proved to be highly stress relieving. Pets provide excellent social support, stress relief and other health benefits – perhaps more than human beings.

Firms, especially, which are into service sector can think of keeping these new friends, i.e. cats and dogs (Of selected breed after necessary training) in their work places so that employees can spend some good time with these pets (Hugging, cuddling, stroking and playing), which has proved to be one of the most effective 'stress busters.' It does not cost much for the firms to maintain these pets at work places. Whereas benefits derived in terms of reduced stress levels of employees which ultimately make the employees more creative, focused and optimistic is just amazing.

KEYWORDS

Pooch at Work, Novel Stress Buster, Managing Stress.

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INTRODUCTION

Every profession on this earth involves stress as an inevitable tool of challenges and has become integral part of everyone's life. Stress as viewed by Olley (1999).2 is the physiological, psychological and behavioural response of an individual seeking to adopt and adjust to both the internal and external pressures. Dalloway (2007).3 describes stress as an automatic physical reaction to danger, demands or threat. Health Information publications (2005).4 define stress as the physical and emotional strain caused by our response to pressure from the outside world. Love and Irani (2007).5 view stress as the individual's inability to cope up with excessive workplace demand or job pressure. Hartig et al. (2007).6 describe stress as a process of responding to an imbalance between demand and resources. The above definitions mean 'stress is a condition or a feeling experienced when a person perceives that demands exceed the personal and social resources the individual is able to mobilize.'

The implications of above definitions is that too much work related pressures are being placed upon employees today arising from; lack of breathing space between assignments or tasks, non-availability of time to unwind, relax and recuperate, aspirations for greater achievement, overwork, emotional exhaustion, isolation, job insecurity, dealing with deadlines, pacing with new technologies,

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environment pollution, traffic congestion, competitive environment, etc.

Stress may tend to build up as the day progresses. This can be referred to as the 'stair case effect.' As reflected in figure 1, if we do not have time to adapt to the stress, then we go into the next stress situation with some residual stress. This is similar to taking another step on a staircase. If we climb too high, the pressure builds. Short term relaxation techniques such as yoga, meditation, biofeedback, self-hypnosis, playing some sport, chatting with the friend, etc., at different times during the day can prevent the stress from building to an unmanageable level.

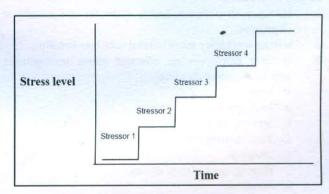


Fig. 1: Stair Case Effect

If the employees ignore the stress levels with which they are working, it may lead to serious physiological or psychological health disorders like; anxiety disorders, fear, forgetfulness, rapid breathing, attention deficit, hyperactivity, essential hypertension, epilepsy, headache, insomnia, chronic muscular pain, etc. and he/she may become drug addict or start excessive consumption of alcohol or tobacco. The figure 2, shown below clarifies that up to some level (Optimal point)