

Occupational Stress and Workplace Creativity (WPC): Understanding the Relationship

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate stress-related issues and Workplace Creativity (WPC) concept. Various direct and indirect contributing factors interlinked with the stress and Workplace Creativity (WPC) is examined, specifically during and post COVID-19. Wide range of research investigated the relationship between stress and Workplace creativity (WPC) and found mixed results, showing both significantly constructive and destructive effects on the employee's professional as well as professional life. Examining the extensive literature review, this study takes one more step toward providing strategies for dealing with the stressors resulting from continuous and consistent work-from-home. It provides the practical strategies to deal with behavioral, psychological, and emotional struggles of the professionals workplace creativity while associated with different sectors. Time management, which is a critical factor, has been discussed to tackle the burnout at Workplace creativity (WPC). In addition to that, this study provides quick practical tips for improving the individual's well-being. Lastly, we report limitations and future directions for the researchers.

Keywords: stress, eustress, distress, workplace creativity (WPC), COVID 19

JEL Classification L20, L29, M10, M15

1. Introduction

Stress exist all around us (Haque, 2022). A plethora of research viewed and explained stress differently, such as the work of Selye (1976) found it a natural response of a body to attack. On the other hand, Haque & Aston (2016) considered it to be a frequently occurring phenomenon when individuals come across something out-of-routine. Ekundayo (2014) argued it to be intangible, while Faizan & Haque (2019) classified it as eustress (good stress), distress (bad stress), hyper-stress (manageable) and hypo-stress (non-manageable). Nonetheless, most researchers agreed that stress varies from person to person and individuals deal differently with it. Pandemics are stressful situations that impact the mental health and well-being of individuals (Saleem, Malik & Qureshi, 2021). It is also evident that the level of stress for all of us has increased since the beginning of Covid-19. Depression, social deprivation, anxiety, and stress are some of the common attributes exhibited by the professionals during COVID-19 (Brooks et al., 2020; Saleem et al., 2021; Yildman & Arsalan, 2020). COVID 19 pandemic has affected the well-being of the employees substantially. Many sectors, such as food industry, education, healthcare and aviation, have been negatively impacted by the outbreak. Over 5 million people have died because of the outbreak (Ritchie et al., 2020). It also had a severe impact on the mental health of workers. The recent systematic literature review of Vindegaard and Benros (2020) explained that the mental health of the workers is largely affected by COVID-19. Furthermore, the study by Giorgi et al. (2020) concluded that workers have developed poor sleep routines, anxiety and higher level of depression during the COVID-19. Thus, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the

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workers in general (Daniel, 2020).

This pandemic has increased the stress level in every individual uniquely. Handling stress during a pandemic is challenging for most professionals operating in all industries. The job sector is also not an exception; thus, facing challenges while finding new ways regularly to keep their employees motivated, stress-free and open to transforming general stress into eustress so employees can perform better. On the other side, employees are trying to balance their personal and professional lives to perform effectively and efficiently. Professionals are more like jugglers, trying to keep the balance while juggling different priorities and responsibilities. Businesses and employers are encouraged to coordinate with state and local health officials to obtain timely and accurate information to inform appropriate responses. Local conditions will influence public health officials' decisions regarding community-level strategies. As an employer, if business operations are interrupted, resuming normal or phased activities presents an opportunity to update your COVID-19 preparedness, response, and control plans (Song & Gao, 2020). This has led to incline the stress factors in the employee's workplace creativity (Oakman et al. 2020). Conversely, personal life is also being compromised. Professionals do not only have professional commitments, but they have personal responsibilities and commitments which cannot be ignored. The study of Zehra & Faizan (2017) argued prior to the COVID-19 outbreak that work-from-home is not promoting work-life balance; instead, it increases stress among working individuals. Nonetheless, some employee's personal life has gotten better because they are spending quality time with their families. So far, this notion has been confirmed that work-from-home has its challenges, and it is interlinked with stress. Thus, this study aims to investigate the strategies to overcome the stress while embracing the concept of workplace creativity.

2. Literature Review

Stress is a common response to the attack (Seyle, 1976). Haque & Aston (2016) explained it as the disturbance of body's natural equilibrium. Thus, stress refers to two things: the psychological perception of pressure, on the one hand, and the body's response to it, on the other, which involves multiple systems, from metabolism to muscles to memory (Tocino-Smith, 2021). Some stress is necessary for all living systems; it is how they encounter and respond to the challenges and uncertainties of existence. The perception of danger sets off an automatic response system, known as the fight-or-flight response, activated through hormonal signals and prepares an animal to meet a threat or flee from it (Tocino-Smith, 2021). The concept of fight-or-flight is explained further by Ekundayo (2014), reflecting that some may fight their stress while others may surrender.

Any environmental or physical pressure that induces a response from an organism is referred to as stress in psychology and biology. Stress, in most circumstances, helps organisms survive by forcing them to adapt to constantly changing environmental conditions. McGonigal (2008) argued that if stress is managed positively, it helps us live more fulfilling.

Stress needs to be addressed, diagnosed and treated irrespective of age, color, religion, and ethnicity. Some types of stressors could be harmful to the individual's well-being and their families (Le Fevre, Matheny & Kolt, 2003). Employees who have started to Workplace creativity (WPC) (WPC) can see this stress positive also, which is referred to as "eustress" (Reynolds, n.d.). On the other hand, some employees demonstrated negative stress, which is referred to as "distress" while recipients of the work-life balance concept (Zehra & Faiza, 2017). Stress can be treated as well as managed, depending on the level and degree. However, it should not be left untreated.

Studies have confirmed that there are four broad types of stress, namely eustress, distress, hyper-stress and hypo-stress (Faizan & Haque, 2019; Kundaragi & Kadakol, 2015). Eustress is good stress; it is little stress that excites a person positively (Faizan & Haque, 2019; Kundaragi & Kadakol, 2015). On the other hand, distress is bad stress; it negatively affects performance and

working efficiency (Faizan & Haque, 2019; Kunderagi & Kadakol, 2015). Kunderagi & Kadakol (2015) explained that hyper-stress is manageable while acute in nature due to work overload, whereas hypo-stress is non-manageable, which causes serious health consequences and develops chronic diseases. However, for the purpose of specificity, only eustress and distress are discussed, which are well-established in the existing literature.

The business sector has promptly understood the utility of eustress as well as the potential to maximize the performance of employees while ensuring that they are not being overwhelmed by their given tasks. The balance between optimal arousal and performance was sketched out in the Yerkes Dodson law dating from 1908 and showed that beyond a certain threshold, performance could become impaired due to excessive anxiety (Certo, 2003; Gardner & Schermerhorn, 2004). The Yerkes Dodson Law, which frequently appears in basic management texts (e.g., Certo, 2003; Gardner & Schermerhorn, 2004), affirms that individuals can only really thrive under certain conditions. This balance often needs people to feel that their responsibilities are accessible yet stimulating instead of overbearing hindrances. At its worst, according to Gavin & Mason (2004), job stress is felt when the demands of the work exceed the workers' belief in their capacity to cope. As such, research has shown (Brule & Morgan 2018) the benefits of workplaces supporting the environment of eustress. Well-managed eustress can allow corporate interests to arise through the optimal performance of their employees.

Distress is contradictory/opposite to eustress (Haque and Aston, 2016). Interestingly, Kunderagi and Kadakol (2015) explained it as damaging stress, negatively impacting efficiency and performance. It is also a common element evident in the organizational setting, and when prolonged for a longer period, distress develops into chronic stress (Batty et al., 2017). Furthermore, it also develops constant worry (Kunderagi and Kadakol, 2015). Seen from the opposite perspective, pain and euthanasia are at both ends of the spectrum. Unlike eustress, pain can make you feel overwhelmed because your resources (physical, mental, emotional) are not enough to meet your needs. It often leads to anxiety, depression, and decreased performance (Faizan & Haque, 2019; Haque, 2020; Kunderagi and Kadakol, 2015). Distress or negative stress is characterized by:

- Lasting in short as well as in the long term
- Triggering anxiety and concern
- Surpassing our coping abilities
- Generating unpleasant feelings
- Decreasing focus and performance
- Contributing to mental and physical problems

Messenger et al. (2017), in their research, concluded that Eurofound and the International Labor Office confirmed that there is higher stress among people workplace creativity.

There are different causes and consequences of stress. Stranks (2005) classified causes into three, namely personal, organizational and environmental factors, whereas the consequences are physical, behavioral, emotional, and cognitive. In line with the present aim of the study, only symptoms of stress are discussed. Stress symptoms can impact your body, your thoughts and feelings, and your actions (Stranks, 2005). Recognizing typical stress symptoms might assist you in managing them. Unmanaged stress can lead to various health issues, including high blood pressure, heart disease, obesity, and diabetes (Haque, 2020).

One might think that disease is to blame for that throbbing headache, frequent insomnia, or a drop in work productivity. However, stress could be the root of the problem. You, the people you care

about, and those around you will become more resilient if you learn to manage stress healthily.

3. Methodology

This study used secondary sources to examine the impact of stressors on the well-being of individuals. Thus, the selection of study is subject to the axiological stance of the researcher. This study falls into the anthropological paradigm with critical realism ontological and epistemological stances (Mark, 2010). This study could also be categorized as basic research to enhance understanding of the existing problem. To a certain extent, the observational technique is employed by exploring the studies interlinked with the research phenomenon. Being a professional in the healthcare sector provides the ability to monitor and direct and indirect observation of colleagues.

The studies included in this study are primarily from the last decade with a basic criterion of only including articles published in the Scopus/ABS/WOS/Impact Factor (peer-reviewed journals) and Working (White) studys. There is neither statistical analysis nor field research employed. Below is the list of the main studies included in this study:

Table 1. *Summary of the articles included in this study.*

Articles	Authors	Indexing	Findings
Work Stress Hampering Employee Performance During COVID-19: Is Safety Culture Needed?	Saleem et al. (2021).	Scopus	COVID-19 stress has affected the task and contextual performances.
Learning to Workplace creativity (WPC): experience of Australian workers and organizational representatives during the first Covid-19 lockdowns.	Marzban et al. (2021).	Scopus	Workload has increased while social challenges have emerged higher for the employees.
Work-family conflict during workplace creativity due to pandemic: A qualitative research on female teachers.	Kara et al. (2021).	Scopus	Workplace creativity (WPC) is tiring for working women (teachers) compared to male teachers.
Work-from-home during COVID-19: Accounting for the care economy to build back better	Jenkins & Smith (2021)	Scopus	Employers have taken for granted the flexibility of the workers in the situation of Workplace creativity (WPC).
Does Telework Stress Employees Out? A Study on Working at Home and Subjective Well-Being for Wage/Salary Workers	Song & Gao (2020).	Scopus	Teleworking is adding more stress to the life of professionals.
Workplace creativity: Too much of a good thing?	Behrens et al. (2021)	Working Study	Workplace creativity has created inequalities among professionals.

Articles	Authors	Indexing	Findings
Boundary Management and Work-Nonwork Balance While Workplace creativity	Allen et al. 2021	Scopus	There is a need for boundary management to bring balance to the life of individuals workplace creativity.
A rapid review of mental and physical health effects of working at home: how do we optimise health?	Oakman et al. (2020)	Scopus	Employees' mental and physical health is affected during work at home in the COVID-19.
Influence of Workplace creativity During the COVID-19 Crisis and HR Practitioner Response	Chen (2021)	Scopus	COVID-19 has helped the practitioners and organizations to re-strategize their approach as Workplace creativity (WPC) has brought conveniences.
Do not Call It Smart: Workplace creativity During the Pandemic Crisis	Barbieri et al. (2021)	Scopus	Working women exhibit stress and concern higher than men while workplace creativity.

The included studies have confirmed validity and reliability test; thus, the findings of this study meet the criteria of reliability and credibility.

4. Discussion

Workplace creativity during the COVID-19 Crisis has impacted the distant employees' productivity. The pandemic has changed the way people work, and more people choose WPC. Unlike traditional working models, this approach has limitations and impacts on organizations and individuals. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the homes of employees suddenly became the main place of economic activity. Many countries have used their homes as a buffer against economic downturns and have taken action to support this WPC (Jenkins and Smith, 2021). A major argument is that businesses and governments see housing as a supporting pillar for economic development. Even employers who offer work-at-home jobs can be seen as an effective way to deal with the epidemic. It takes everyone – managers, employees, and their families – to adapt. Advances in technology have made it possible for people to WPC, and this has affected the way people, especially staff. It has also benefited some companies during the tough times of the pandemic. Companies have adopted the WPC model, relying on modern technology to reduce the corresponding regulatory costs (White, 2019). Workplace creativity (WPC) can improve performance due to its flexibility. Employees can decide when and where to work. Many employees are satisfied with the flexibility they get from the WPC model. Workplace creativity can also improve performance because there are no interruptions, employees have fewer breaks, and there is no contact with co-workers (Garg and Rijst, 2015). However, some people use their home as a free workplace that can be used inexpensively in an emergency (e.g., COVID-19) but neglects its function as a place to live. As a result, employees are faced with corresponding challenges and problems.

Work-life balance is a concept that separates an individual life into two contrasting aspects, i.e., work and personal life (Manor and Desiana, 2018). These two issues can sometimes result in negative blocks (Nwagbara & Akanji, 2012). Additionally, work-life balance can also be described as the individual's capability, regardless of age or sex, in combining the responsibility of their work life with their household life (Wheatley, 2012). From the company owner's point of view, work-life balance improves employee loyalty and results in better employees-company communication

and productivity improvements that will benefit the business owner to maintain the sustainability of the enterprise. However, work-life balance has several challenges, namely culture of the organization, work time and effectiveness. Work-life balance has several dimensions, such as Enough Time-off from Work, Allegiance to Work, Flexibility in Work Schedule, Life Orientation and Upkeep of Work and Career (Wong & Ko, 2009). Since work-life balance is a concept that separates an individual life into two different aspects, this priority imbalance affects decreasing productivity and performance in the organization (Fapohunda, 2014).

WPC requires upgrading employees' work skills as well as it should bring more balance by reducing stress. This demand for WPC is driving the digitization of human workers at an alarming rate due to the explosion of COVID-19 (Savi, 2020). Employees need to work and communicate online, which requires specific skills, such as new office skills and online communication skills. Due to improper communication, there is higher depression and anxiety among the professionals. The task and contextual performance have been affected due to COVID-19 breakout while Workplace creativity (WPC) is in operation (Saleem et al., 2021). On the other hand, the study of Oakman et al. (2020) also showed that work at home during the COVID-19 has taken a toll on physical and mental health (Oakman et al. 2020). The work of Chen (2021) revealed that Workplace creativity (WPC) is not always a stressful thing as it has brought the opportunity for professionals to be near their families at their convenience. On the other hand, the work of Barbieri et al. (2021) stated that Workplace creativity (WPC) should not be called a smart move because working women, especially with children, have shown higher stress and health fatigue than their counterparts in the Pandemic Crisis.

Some individuals are more stressed during a pandemic because they cannot communicate their anxiety to others. In addition, with uncertainty about the future, such as layoffs, pay cuts, and bankruptcies, employees experience a serious increase in internal stress. Employees who WPC often have conflicts between taking care of their families and their jobs during an epidemic (Song and Gao, 2020). Telecommuters work longer hours than those who work in formal offices, which is a major reason for work-family imbalance. Their work style is flexible, so they have unlimited access to online offices (Song and Gao, 2020). Workplace creativity (WPC) reduces the company's need for office space but increases the employees' need for living space because of the need for extra rooms for WPC (Behrens et al., 2021). In addition, when some employees need to take care of their families, their families may stay at home while they are working (Kara et al., 2021). Employees expect a dedicated workspace at home with fewer distractions from family members, which is associated with a better work-family balance (Allen et al., 2021).

Finally, the role of culture is weakened. In WPC situations, the functions embodied in corporate culture are weakened, such as leadership culture and cooperative culture. The manager's ability to control and supervise subordinates is also affected. In addition, managers may be concerned about the impact of workplace creativity on contracts and employee reputation. Unlike traditional office work, this model reduces opportunities for intimate psychological interactions while reducing face-to-face communication. While information and communication technology (ICT) can facilitate online interaction and collaboration with colleagues, they lack the enthusiasm for face-to-face interaction, which is seen as key to developing closer social relationships (Vayre and Pignault, 2014). Failure to address the lack of interpersonal interaction can lead to employees feeling disconnected from the corporate culture and work environment (Marzban et al., 2021).

5. Conclusion

Workplace creativity (WPC) has its advantages, but it has a downside to it. There are many professionals going through physical and mental fatigue due to it. The conclusion is drawn that the contextual and task performance is affected by the stress interlined with the COVID-19 while workplace creativity. There have been social challenges and excessive workload, especially for

women. Some organizations have taken employees for granted to be flexible. There is intense stress in the personal life of teleworking personnel as it has created an imbalance. There is a need for boundary management to bring balance to the life of individuals workplace creativity. The mental and physical well-being of the individuals gets worse during the lockdown. On the other hand, it has also provided some benefits, such as employees having time to be with their families, and the organizations have revisited their working strategies.

Strategies and steps help to manage the stress of workplace creativity. It is natural to feel stress, anxiety, grief and worry during the COVID-19 pandemic. Below are ways to help yourself, others, and your community manage stress.

When feeling stressed, moving your body consistently may help. A 6-week study of 185 university students found that participating in aerobic exercise 2 days per week significantly reduced overall perceived stress and perceived stress due to uncertainty. Plus, the exercise routine significantly improved self-reported depression.

Many other studies have shown that engaging in physical activity helps reduce stress levels and improve mood, while sedentary behavior may lead to increased stress, poor mood, and sleep disturbances. Thus, it is highly recommended that while professionals are workplace creativity, they shall make a routine for physical workouts. Regular exercise can lift the mood and help overcome anxiety, depression, and other mental fatigue. Some people may also benefit from yoga and meditation.

Diet affects every aspect of your health, including the mental health. Studies showed that people who followed a diet high in ultra-processed foods and added sugar are more likely to experience higher perceived stress levels. Being chronically stressed may lead you to overeat and reach for highly palatable foods, which may harm your overall health and mood. Similarly, not eating can also disturb health. Thus, it is essential that while workplace creativity, professionals must make a routine diet and follow it religiously so that the events do not overly stress them.

It is essential to limit and restrict social media activity. The phone screen time and higher presence on social media are also harmful. It should be avoided to the maximum extent possible. Instead of being on the phone most of the time, it should be constructively used by involving self in any recreational activities. Late-night longer stays on the internet also lead to sleep deprivation, which acts as a contributing factor to stress and anxiety.

While workplace creativity, some individuals develop the habit of consuming higher caffeine in coffee, tea, chocolate, and energy drinks that stimulate the central nervous system. Consuming too much may worsen and increase feelings of anxiety. Plus, overconsumption may harm your sleep. In turn, this may increase stress and anxiety symptoms. People have different thresholds for how much caffeine they can tolerate. If you notice that caffeine makes you jittery or anxious, consider cutting back by replacing coffee or energy drinks with decaffeinated herbal tea or water.

Social support from friends and family might help individuals get through stressful times when higher pressure is exerted by work-from-home projects. A study among 163 Latinx young adults in college associated lower levels of support from friends, family, and romantic partners with loneliness, depressive symptoms, and perceived stress. Having a social support system is important for your overall mental health.

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