Job Stress and the Efficacy of Selected Military Managers

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Abstract

Aims: Military managers play an important role in the improvement and development of military communities. Their knowledge and skills can increase the efficiency of the organization they work in. Since these managers are exposed to stressful situations more than others, the negative effects they face can affect both their organizations and staff. The present study was an attempt to take a step in planning for and selecting efficient managers by examining the variables playing a role in this regard.

Methods: In this cross-sectional descriptive study, all the staff in four military training schools in Tehran, were selected using convenience sampling. In order to collect data, a 27 item self-administered questionnaire was used. The first 12 items checked participants’ level of job stress while the next 15 items examined their efficacy using a 5 point Likert scale.

Results: Managers were observed to have an average stress level. Not receiving sufficient budget and having to deal with a lot of work in a limited time were the most important stressful factors. In the case of factors positively affecting their management, being active and serious, having appropriate relationship with employees, and following organizational objectives received the highest scores.

Conclusion: The negative effects of stressful situations on managers are immediately reflected in the performance and efficacy of managers and will lower the quality of their management as a result.

Keywords: Stress, Quality, Effectiveness, Efficiency, Military, Managers

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Introduction

One of the most identifying characteristics of the modern era is the great and ongoing changes that happen in individuals’ thoughts, social values, working strategies, and many other related issues [1]. The changes and shifts in the recent decades have been so fast that all aspects of human life have been affected [2]. Such changes in the environment in conjunction with the advances in technology have made it more difficult for organizations to reach their objectives [3] and have forced managers to work in a more active but fuzzy environment [4]. As a result of this situation, in the classification of theories and thoughts in management, one can see different concepts and schools of thought like scientific management, administrative management, bureaucracy, behaviorist attitudes, systematic attitude etc. [5,6]. Today, the newly introduced concept of ‘efficient management’ has made productivity the highest and the most important goal and the destination for all managers [7]. This has resulted in managers’ focused attention on the improvement of productivity and efficiency in their organizations [8]. As such, today, in order to be able to survive, all organizations need to be active and use creative and innovative personnel so that they can adapt themselves with the changes and meet the society’s demands [9].

Human resources are among the most important assets of an organization [10]. For reaching organizational objectives, every organization needs the cooperation of all the members involved [11], which is of more importance in educational institutes and organizations [12]. Educational institutes need managers who act like the brain in the body of organization [13]. If education is considered as the most important issue in a society, with the same logic, one can hold a significant role for military managers in the development and advance of a society [14]. Knowledgeable and experienced managers can result in higher and better efficacy, productivity, and reliability of the educational system [14]. With the same line of argument, establishing creative and innovative units in an organization needs managers who are not only creative themselves but can also pave the way for creativity and innovation in their organizations [15].

No doubt, education is one of the most difficult tasks [16], which needs an able manager who is quite aware of and familiar with her responsibilities and role in the process of education and the effect her decisions can have on education [17]. On the other hand, stress in our daily life is an undeniable fact [18]. There is no one who has not experienced stressful situations. As such, fighting stress at work is an important issue and concern in most organizations today [19]. Managers, due to the nature and importance of their job and responsibilities, are more exposed to stressful situations [20] whose effects are conveyed to the organizations and the personnel [21, 22]. An efficient manager in an educational organization can help increase job satisfaction in her personnel, encourage creativity and innovation in organizational programs, and cause many other important changes [23]. Therefore, successful management and leadership in an educational system is possible only through recruiting talented and qualified individuals [24]. In the present study, the effect of stressful factors on the efficacy of managers in a number of educational military organizations was checked from the personnel’s perspective. This study could be an effective step taken
in having more efficient plans, time management, and creative and qualified managers.

**Methods**

Four military training organizations were selected from among such organizations in Tehran, Iran using convenience sampling. For data collection a self-administered questionnaire with two sections were used. The first section included items on job stress while the second part was about the effective factors in the efficacy of managers.

Based on general responsibilities a manager has like goal setting, prioritization of goals and activities, planning, responsibility assignment, and meeting management, and based on the available literature, a first draft of items in each section of the questionnaire was prepared. In order to check the content validity of the questionnaire, three experts checked the items. After applying their comments, 12 and 15 items remained for assessing job stress and efficacy, respectively.

The consistency of the items was checked by the experts. The experts were asked to respond to the suitability of each item by yes or no. Then, Kučran test was run for the analysis. The results showed a Q of 5.6 which could not reject the null hypothesis of items being the same.

A five point Likert scale was used for the items in the questionnaire ranging from ‘very little’ to ‘very much.’ Based on experts’ opinion, the equivalent points assigned to each option were 1, 2, 4, 6, and 8 respectively. As such for the first section of the questionnaire on job stress, an individual’s score could range from 12 to 96. Accordingly, respondents were divided into three groups: those with little job stress (those scoring less than 50), average stress (between 50 and 75), and high stress (above 75). For the second section with 15 items, the total score could range from 15 to 120, with those scoring less than 60 being weak in efficacy, those scoring between 60 and 90 being moderate, and those with a score above 90 being strong in efficacy.

The respondents were ensured that their responses will remain confidential and would be used only for research purposes. The questionnaires were collected one day after administration. From among the distributed questionnaires, only 43 were returned. The rest were either not returned or not answered completely. The collected data were analyzed using SPSS 17.

**Results**

According to the obtained results from the first section of the questionnaire which was on job stress, from the personnel’s point of view, the managers had an average level of stress (62). The two most affecting factors in managers’ stress level were budget constraints with 95 points and the assignment of a lot of tasks to be done in a limited time with 87 points. Job hasty-ness, self-distrust, acting without thinking, and unpunctuality in meetings were among the least effective factors in causing stress. Table 1 presents the results for the items on job stress.

The results of the efficacy section of the questionnaire showed that the personnel considered the managers’ efficacy to be at an acceptable level. Items such as ‘being active and serious,’ ‘having a good relationship with employees,’ and ‘pursuing organizational objectives’ received the highest scores. Table 2 presents the results in this section.
Table 1. Factors Affecting Job Stress in Managers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Stressfulness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of attention to the budget</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>Strong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heavy work load in short time</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>Strong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High competitiveness</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ignoring work distribution</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inappropriate expectations</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ignoring educational and working improvement in personnel</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ignoring organizational discipline</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strict implementation of organizational protocols</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hastiness</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>Weak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of self-trust</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>Weak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working without thinking</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>Weak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unpunctuality in meetings</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Weak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean score</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Factors Affecting Managers’ Efficacy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Stressfulness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Being active and serious</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>Favorable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having professional relations with employees</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>Favorable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pursuing objectives</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>Favorable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Putting effort in choosing qualified colleagues</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>Favorable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Putting effort in work more than expected</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>Favorable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintaining mental equilibrium in crisis</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>Favorable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being precise and attending details</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>Favorable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involving subordinates in affairs</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>Favorable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caring about speed and efficiency</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>Favorable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Availability</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>Favorable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making right decisions</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>Favorable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Familiarizing learners with different professions</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>Favorable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involving others in decision making</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>Favorable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fast decision making</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>Favorable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean score</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>Favorable</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Logically speaking, a low level of job stress is expected to be in close relationship with higher efficacy. However, the results showed a very weak relationship between the two ($r = 0.15$) which was not significant.
Discussion
Today’s societies are continuously being faced with changes and transformations. In order to be able to survive in such a new world, organizations and institutes need both creative and innovative leaders and employees [25]. Moreover, in the modern era, all organizations are in competition with each other [26]. As such, they have to present new services and products and adapt themselves with the latest technology [27, 28]. In fact, innovation acts like blood in the vessels of the organization helping it survive [29].

The key role of military managers and leaders in an organization’s development and prosperity cannot be denied [30]. Unfortunately, educational systems, due to numerous problems they face, do not have the needed appeal to attract very qualified individuals for management and leadership [31]. However, the modern era is known to be the stress plague era. Managers face a high level of job stress at work. Though the level of stress different managers face differ from each other, all managers do experience it in one way or another and her response to that stressful situation might be different from each other. In any case, the negative effect of such stressful situations will be reflected in managers’ performance and will lower their efficacy as a result [32].

Any stressful situation, based on its intensity, can have either positive or negative effects [33]. A model of mental pressure at work suggests that when there is no mental pressure at work, there will be no job motivation and the efficacy declines. However, when mental pressure begins to increase, the efficacy and productivity start to increase accordingly. An optimal level of mental pressure at work corresponds with one’s best performance [34]. In such a situation, one’s creativity and innovation find a chance to prosper and develop, and she will know her potentials [35]. After this optimal level, an increase in the level of stress brings quite negative consequences. It lowers efficacy, becomes destructive, lowers her energy level, and challenges her decision-making ability, and makes her face a crisis in trying to overcome the resulted problems [35]. One’s efficiency will drop considerably, and she will feel exhausted. In sum, one can consider the stressful factors to include: one’s personal characteristics and problems, unexpected and unpredictable events, lack of a clear
Excessive stress can result in physical and mental disorders. An abnormal manager can make her personnel’s behaviors abnormal. If a manager, who is supposed to eliminate tensions at work and stop their spread, is stressed herself, numerous problems can arise for the educational system [37]. Some believe that people can show their creativity when under time pressure, but research shows that it is quite opposite. The more pressure one feels, the less creativity she can demonstrate [38].

There are many factors that can cause job stress in managers affecting both their physical and mental health and decreasing organizational efficiency. Among such factors are: lack of participation in decision making, insufficiency of facilities for improvement, the inter-dependence among units, poor communication, poor and insufficient feedback on one’s performance, vague and conflicting aims, lack of group solidarity, and conflicts among groups and individuals. The personal consequences of job stress for managers can include aggression, depression, inability for concentration, and physical problems. Regarding the negative consequences of job stress for organizations, one can name the low quality and quantity of services, imprecision in administrative affairs, distrust, disregarding others, communication decline, misunderstandings, and sensitivity in interpersonal relationships.

Although efficacy is one of the most important concepts receiving a lot of attention from both scholars and organizations, and despite the numerous studies carried out on that, still there are ambiguities regarding the definition and indices of that concept. Efficacy encompasses a managers’ relation with others, the pre-specified responsibilities, and the power a manager has as a result of her position. Efficacy refers to the amount of work that a manager can get done by the management of her organization. Efficacy is at the same time dependent on the personality, behavior, and expectations of the managers, employees, co-workers, higher ranking authorities, and the organization. As such, efficacy is the extent to which assigned responsibilities are successfully performed and predetermined objectives are reached.

While most studies emphasize the role of managers in educational leadership, there is little agreement on the behavior and responsibilities of a leader. A successful and strong leadership, through providing a clear and thorough definition of the objectives and strategies needed for meeting such objectives and motivating innovative personnel, tries to pave the way for having an active and innovative organization. Efficient managers emphasize on improvement, determine educational objectives, present performance evaluation indices, count on others as well for achieving their educational objectives, and manage their time for having regular inspecting visits to the units working under their supervision.

Coordination between objectives and employees and managers’ orientation is only possible through the awareness of the objectives and the internal and external functions of the organization. Managers need to do their best to keep the flow of information among different units so that each unit is aware of its performance and the objectives it should try to achieve. Each
unit should also be aware of the objectives and performance of other units and understand the need for and the necessity of having such an internal communication among units. Efficient managers expect their employees to have a high quality performance. They provide them with the right condition for sharing their opinions for reaching the organizational objectives. Such managers, instead of scolding the educational staff, try to eliminate the problems and weaknesses by letting them show innovation and participation in the decision-making process. This way they can use individual’s expertise and interest in the right place and discover the talented human resources.

References

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