

## THE INFLUENCE OF RUMORS ON ORGANIZATIONAL STRESS

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**ABSTRACT:** The concept of occupational/organizational stress has been analyzed in detail in the sociological, psychological and medical literature, but also in the managerial one. Many specialists have analyzed the factors associated with stress at work. In the introductory part of the paper, we have made a brief review of them. In essence, the paper presents some results of a research based on questionnaires that have aimed to discover if contagious stress occurs in the industrial environment in Sibiu, Romania. We have discovered that our respondents, empathizing and noticing the emotions of others, are very exposed to contagious stress. One of the conclusions was that the employees in the industry in Sibiu are very affected by the rumors in the organization, which greatly increase their stress level.

**KEY WORDS:** Rumor, organizational, stress, manager.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Work stress – also termed as “job stress” or occupational stress” – is a strain, depression, fretfulness, anxiety, angst etc. that someone is facing in his/her workplace when he/she is overloaded with copious demands and expectations which he/she has to complete within a limited time-frame [3].

The concept of occupational/organizational stress has been analyzed in detail in the sociological, psychological, but especially the medical literature [3, 5, 7]. The pressure and demands that every employee faces in the workplace are constantly increasing, the notion of organizational stress being today clearly one with negative connotations [8]. The negative impact that stress can have on employees is only part of the whole story, because the organization itself can expect to experience negative results [5].

The personal characteristics of some employees – such as problem solving ability, assertiveness, time management ability [4, 7] – help them to resist at organizational stress, while others need a more friendly work

environment and social support from colleagues, bosses, friends and family [8].

Workplace factors associated with stress have been classified by specialists in factors related to the content of work and factors that deal with the social and organizational context of work [7]. The first category includes overloading with work tasks, time pressure, difficult or complex tasks, lack of breaks, lack of variety and poor physical conditions of work – related to space, temperature, light, etc. [3, 7]. The second category includes the factors related to the role of the employee in the organization (responsibilities, conflicts, etc.), those related to career development (like excessive promotion, lack of promotion, vain ambitions, lack of job security), working relationships (with colleagues, superiors and subordinates, difficulties in delegating responsibilities, etc.) and organizational structure and climate factors (limitation or lack of participation in decisions, organization’s policies, financial or non-financial restrictions, etc.) [3].

With all these factors directly related to the workplace, individual factors (such as personality type, tolerance of the individual to

ambiguous situations, his level of anxiety, level of neuroticism) and factors outside the organization (generated by other social links of the person, such as problems with family, crises from his existence, etc.) overlap [3].

## 2. PREMISES OF THE RESEARCH

Empathizing and noticing the emotions of others is a skill that can lead to contagious stress [6, 9]. The positive emotional contagion improves cooperation, decreases conflict, and increases perceived task performance among the members of a work group [1]. But contagious stress is a negative emotional contagion, and it probably diminishes the cooperation and performance of the work group, increasing the level of conflicts. Unfortunately, in many cases, the management inside the small and medium enterprises (SMEs) is

based and developed mainly on intuition and on entrepreneurs' personality [10].

This leads us to state that managers in SMEs are not concerned about contagious stress. However, due to the large number of employees, we believe that even in large companies it is difficult to keep this phenomenon under control. Starting from the above considerations, our research – whose exploratory phase we have carried out at the end of 2018 [4] – has aimed to discover if contagious stress occurs in the industrial environment in Sibiu (Romania). The last phase of the research, the descriptive one, led us to the results presented below.

## 3. THE MAIN RESULTS

A group of 5 questions to which the 120 respondents from the Sibiu industry have answered has aimed to quantify the stress level of the employees (Figure 1).

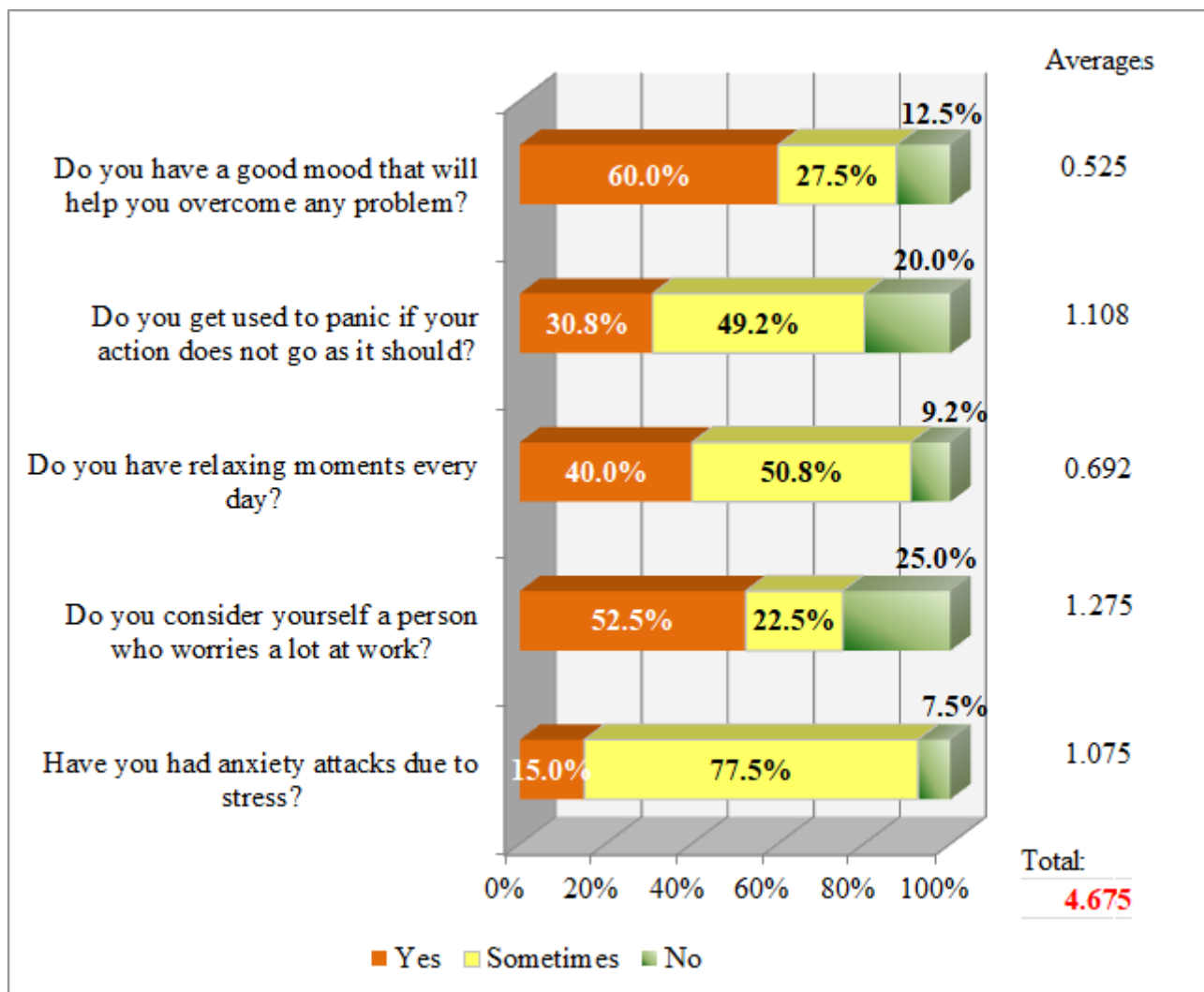


Figure 1. Questions that quantify the stress level of the employees

The answers of the first and third question in Figure 1 – namely “Do you have a good mood that will help you overcome any problem?” and “Do you have relaxing moments every day?” – were quantified with 0 points for “Yes”, 1 point for “Sometimes”, and 2 points for “No”. To these questions, denial is proof of a high level of stress.

The other three questions in this group (Figure 1) were quantified with the reverse scale: 2 points for “Yes”, 1 point for “Sometimes” and 0 points for “No”. The agreement with these questions – namely “Do you get used to panic if your action does not go as it should?”, “Do you consider yourself a person who worries a lot at work?”, and

“Have you had anxiety attacks due to stress?” – is evidence of a high level of stress.

The averages of the answers to each of the questions in Figure 1 could have values between 0 and 2, and their sum between 0 and 10. The sum of the five averages was 4.675, very close to the median 5 of the total scale from 0 to 10. So, the level of organizational stress in the industrial environment in Sibiu, Romania, is a medium one.

Another group of 5 questions has aimed to quantify the possibility that organizational stress become contagious (Figure 2). The answers to each of these questions were quantified with 2 points for “Yes”, 1 point for “Sometimes” and 0 points for “No”.

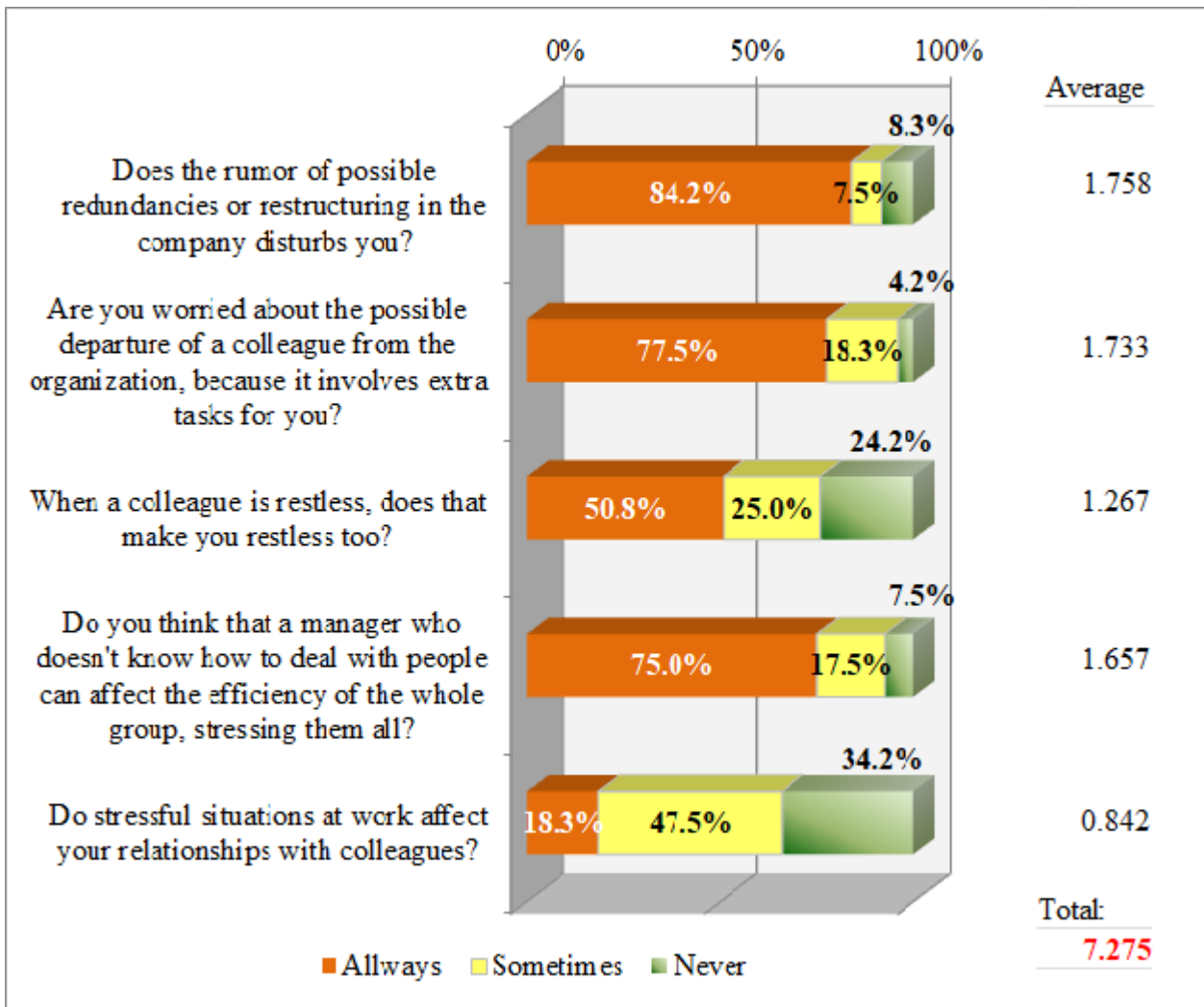


Figure 2. Questions that quantify the possibility that organizational stress become contagious

Looking at averages of the answers (Figure 2), we observe that the elements that most often cause contagious stress are: the rumor of possible redundancies/restructuring, the

possibility of taking over the tasks from a departing colleague, and the possibility of having a manager who doesn't know to deal with people.

The sum of the five averages was 7.275, on a scale from 0 to 10 (Figure 2). So, the employees in the industry in Sibiu are very affected by the rumors in the organization, being exposed to the contagious stress.

### 3. CONCLUSIONS

Through the research carried out, we have discovered that the level of organizational stress in the industrial environment in Sibiu, Romania, is a medium one.

On the other hand, employees in the industry in Sibiu are very affected by the rumors in the organization, which greatly increase their stress level. This should be taken into account by managers when they improve the company's communications system. We think that the organizational contagious stress damages both the activity of the employees and the activity of the managers in the area.

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