

**SOURCES OF PROFESSIONAL STRESS IN BANKS AND THE ROLE
OF THE MANAGER IN PREVENTING AND MANAGING IT**

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Studies on preventive measures in the field of occupational health increase the focus on identifying early indicators of health damage. Occupational health professionals found out that working conditions, can not only cause specific occupational diseases, but can also play much broader role among the many determinants of employee health. Identifying the sources of professional stress in organizations, in particular in banks, developing and implementing clear preventive strategies by the management of the company, managing and coping with stress, can help for the physical and psychological well-being of the employees.

Key words: banks, sources of stress, preventing and managing occupational stress

Banks are strictly formalized financial institutions whose main activity is public fundraising, lending, as well as complex servicing of individuals and legal entities. They differ in internal organizational structure, which is determined by the strategy of the company and is strictly individual and covers the main departments of a credit financial institution, arranged in a certain hierarchy.

Despite the differences that exist in the organizational structure of the banks, the division of central management and branch network is common to all. The employees of the Bank's central management support the operational activities of the branches, but their interaction with clients is rather an exception, unlike their colleagues in the offices, who are in daily contact with the customers of the institution.

Sources of professional stress in banks

In addition to the stressors that can be attributed to any profession, bank employees in the branch network are also disposed to burnout, as they are bound by professional relationship with clients. In the context of multiple complex relationships in the organizational structure of banking institutions, which operate in an increasingly competitive and demanding market, the aim for customer satisfaction, combined with protecting the interests of the organization, place bank employees in a constant tension and high levels of it might lead to stress and burnout.

Most of the time we spend at our workplace and it appears to be one of the main sources of stress. Over the years, a lot of sources of occupational stress that have different levels of psychological and physiological impact on the individuals have been identified.

In the banking system, the following main sources of occupational stress among the employees in the branch network can be summarized:

1. Relationship with customers

Daily, banking staff is facing high levels of pressure from customers. In addition to day-to-day servicing, which includes opening bank accounts, doing payment transactions and administration of credit products, employees accept various complaints about equipment malfunction, assist clients when an

unauthorized actions are taken with the funds in their bank accounts, as well as dealing with objections and unfounded claims by frustrated customers.

2. Organizational structure

In recent decades, the involvement of branch managers in decision-making process is strictly limited and the inability of taking decisions by local managers decreased their motivation, job satisfaction and reputation among clients. In a situation of powerlessness and unmet needs for self-expression, employees experience stress.

3. Role overload

In recent years of intense competition, unification of work positions and decreased staff number, bank employees faced quantitative and qualitative overload. The process of reducing the number of staff required allocation of responsibilities among other employees, which led to overwork and extended working hours. The front office employees, who were strictly specialized in opening bank accounts and doing payment transactions and cashiers, who served clients only for cash transactions, are nowadays involved in the process of attracting clients for lending. These additional responsibilities and the continuous achievement monitoring of the corporate goals with reports for the meetings with potential clients, proved to be impossible to achieve for some of the employees, which led to negative attitude towards the whole work process [3, p. 861-873].

4. Inequality between efforts made at work and remuneration

In banking system, the lowest paid employees work on a cashier position. Although the sense of injustice between efforts made in work and the real payment can be developed in an employee at any position in the institution, it is extremely common and completely understandable for cashiers. On a daily basis, these employees operate with millions of different currencies and any mistake that they make as a result of accepting false banknotes and wrong accounting, leading to deficit, is actually paid by them as they are financially responsible. This has a negative effect on their mental health and results in stress [2, p.12].

5. Physical security

On one hand, the nature of the job of banking employees, expressed in operating and disposing large amounts of money, puts them at risk of physical assault in case of robbery, which threatens both their physical and mental health. However, not only cashiers are worried about their safety while performing official duties. Banking professionals, who are responsible for credit exposures at risk and problem clients, often face the aggression and dissatisfaction of debtors, blaming the institution, on behalf of its staff, for their financial problems.

6. Intergroup conflicts

In banks, intergroup conflicts can most often occur in three ways:

- Between different departments in the branch;
- Between different departments in Head office;
- Between the branch and Head office.

In their daily work, bank employees are in constant communication with each other. The most common cause of conflicts between different departments within the bank is poor communication and the transfer of responsibility for the execution of a specific task. The most difficult and increasing stress levels is the communication between departments in the branch and in Head office, since by defending a case, branch staff is more customer oriented, while the employees in the Head office are risk oriented. If no compromise can be found, sometimes conflict becomes dysfunctional and results in stress [1, p.167-178].

The problem with occupational stress is inevitable in every sector. A lot of employees are exposed to stressful situations and are facing psychological problems. For this reason, company management has to take preventative measures to avoid stress in the organization, as well as to take initiatives to help employees overcome its devastating effect.

The role of the manager in preventing and managing occupational stress in banking institutions

Banking sector is an important segment of the country's economy, operating in the field of services. Banking staff should be extremely receptive and responsive to customer needs, but also committed to the growth and prosperity of the institution. In order to achieve the goals of the organization in a highly competitive environment, trainings for successful sales, dealing with objections and implementing of new products and services are regularly organized in the financial institutions. On the other hand, the problem with experiencing professional stress is still extremely underestimated by the management. Employees are exposed to stressors on a daily basis, which raises the need to develop strategies for preventive management and development of coping strategies, both individually and organizationally.

At an organizational level, it is necessary to formulate preventative and remedial strategies to prevent bank employees from experiencing dysfunctional stress. The effects of stress are not only direct, but are often associated with indirect negative impacts. The most effective way to deal with stress is to learn how to manage it. Learned skills should be used constantly, not only when a stressor arises. At the same time, stress can only be managed if we are able to identify the factors that cause it.

The management of banking institutions and branch managers should periodically organize trainings on stress management mechanisms to functional levels. The daily contact of the manager with his subordinates enables him to identify the experience of stress, as well as to adequately act and provide the necessary assistance to deal with the resulting tension in the employee.

Managers in banking institutions can contribute to the psychological well-being of employees in three main stages:

1. Raising employee awareness

Help in identifying rising levels of stress before reaching dysfunctional levels. By noticing changes in the physiological and psychological reactions of

the employees, managers could direct their attention to identify the cause and to take timely and adequate action to deal with the situation and not lead to negative consequences for the individual.

2. Identifying the cause

Analysis of the stressful situation will help to identify the cause of the increased levels of stress. Stressors can be internal and external. For experiencing occupational stress, external for the individual stressors appear to be related with the organization and the nature of job. In this case, managers could directly influence the sources, changing them to eliminate or reduce the experience of stress to functional levels.

3. Dealing with stress

The management can assist bank employees in using adequate coping strategies in organizational environment, as well as organizing trainings for learning effective techniques to deal with the increased levels of stress.

Organizing seminars and trainings for bank employees in order to emphasize on the specific experience of professional stress, the identification of stressors and possible ways for adequately dealing with the situation, will minimize the negative effect on the individual.

Developing and implementing clear strategies for preventing, managing and coping with the occupational stress in banking institutions will contribute to the physical and mental well-being of employees, which in turn will enhance their effectiveness, because the most productive is the healthy individual.

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