Organizational Stress among Sri Lankan IT Professionals: An Empirical Study

Abstract—This paper aims at gaining an in-depth understanding of organizational stress among Sri Lankan IT professionals addressing the questions what causes organizational stress, how it affects IT professionals and the industry, what are the levels of stress prevailing in Sri Lankan IT professionals. Depending on the varied nature of the research a mixed methodology including both qualitative and quantitative methods has been used. The organizational stress model developed by Lu, Cooper and Kao has been used as the guide that drives this research. The findings reveal that although stress levels are seems to be high, it is not so when compared to other countries. Causes and effects of organizational stress have their unique features related to cultural setting in Sri Lanka. The outcomes of this research are useful to promote better working and living conditions among IT professionals and in turn to increase the overall efficiency and effectiveness of IT industry in Sri Lanka.

Keywords—Organizational Stress, Sri Lankan IT professionals, PSM9, Causes of Stress, Effects of Stress

I. INTRODUCTION
Organizational stress is a common phenomenon in today’s work places. This problem is reported to be severe in the IT industry where they have to work in a machine oriented and monotonous environment. Although much research have been done related to this issue in the other parts of the world, the understanding of the issue related to organizational stress in IT sector in Sri Lanka seems to be poor.

IT workforce in Sri Lanka reached 50,000 mark in 2010. These employees work in a range of roles spanning to over thirteen categories. The highest numbers of employees are in the field of Software Engineering, Quality Assurance, Network and System Administration and Technical Supporting.

According to past researches [1],[2],[3] these professionals are the worst hit category due to occupational hazards associated with organizational stress. Most public and private organizations related to IT industry are under this pressure which might hinder Sri Lanka’s future goals of making IT the fifth largest foreign exchange earner and moving towards knowledge society.

Hence, this research aims at understanding organizational stress among Sri Lankan IT professionals. What causes organizational stress? How it affects IT professionals and the industry? What are the levels of stress prevailing in Sri Lankan IT professionals? Are some of the key questions aims to address in this research.

This is an empirical study mainly based on qualitative data gathered through in-depth interviews and quantitative data gathered through closed–ended questionnaires.

This paper is organized in to six sections. Firstly, the introduction of the paper is given which is followed by the literature review. Third section is the research objectives and fourth is the research methodology. Fifth is results and discussion which is followed by the conclusion of the paper.


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health. In extreme cases, long-term stress at work may lead to psychological problems. Organizational stress not only affects individuals, but also the organizations themselves [1], [4, 5], [16], [23-25].

Hence, both these causes and effects emphasize the severity of the issue organizational stress and it direct researchers toward the knowledge gap existing in the research arena.

Therefore, this knowledge gap acts as the base on researching on Organizational Stress among Sri Lankan IT professionals.

III. OBJECTIVES

This research mainly focuses on achieving the overall objective of gaining an in-depth understanding of organizational stress among IT professionals in Sri Lanka. This overall objective is achieved through following sub objectives:

1. To identify the levels of stress among Sri Lankan IT Professionals

Here, the IT professionals are categorized in to three categories based on the result of the stress measuring tool PSM9.

2. To explore key causes of organizational stress

This explores all possible stressors particularly in related to Sri Lankan context.

3. To examine the effects of organizational stress on individuals and organizations

How organizational stress impacts on individuals and as a result on organizations is explored under this.

IV. METHODOLOGY

The organizational stress model developed by Lu, Cooper and Kao [26] has been used as the guide that drives this research. According to this model, potential sources of stress are the independent variables of the study. Moderators of stress are the moderate variables. Consequences of stress are the dependent variables of the study. All these three types of variable are interrelated and together they contribute to the final outcome of the research.

To examine the effects of organizational stress on individuals and organizations, qualitative data are used. This qualitative research which deals with exploring causes and effects of organizational stress. Therefore, most of the times qualitative data needs to be collected and to further verify them and to support the research objectives, quantitative data is used.

Thus, depending on the research objectives this research is progressed along two lines; quantitative research which deals with the objective of identifying levels of stress and qualitative research which deals with exploring causes and effects of organizational stress. Hence, both quantitative and qualitative data were gathered and analyzed using a range of methods.

In order to carry out quantitative part of the research, close ended questionnaire enclosing the stress measuring tool PSM9 is used. This questionnaire was distributed among the sample of 250 IT professionals via online and personally. Moreover, another 50 questionnaires were distributed among non-IT professionals in order to facilitate accuracy of the outcome of the research.

Out of 250 questionnaires given to IT professionals, there were 153 completed questionnaires. Out of 50 questionnaires given to non- IT professionals 27 were received and data of these questionnaires were used for analyzing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description of the Mood</th>
<th>Not at all ....</th>
<th>...Extremely</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I feel calm</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel full of energy and keen</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel preoccupied</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel stressed</td>
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Fig. 2: An Except of the Stress Measuring Model

To gather data relating to qualitative part of the research, in-depth interviews and observations were used. Through a well prepared interview guide with the help of relevant literature and expert consultancy, professionals were interviewed until the number of professionals came to a saturated point. No pre-defined number of sample was there. Instead, selected IT and non-IT professionals derived from quantitative part of the research were interviewed. Most of these professionals were found through the snow-ball method.

Some of the professionals were interviewed face-to-face, some over the phone and others through social networks like Facebook, g-talk and yahoo messenger. A peer observation regarding professionals was also done in order to gather qualitative data needed to achieve the objectives of the research.

Cognitive maps were used to analyze gathered qualitative data in order to identify the causes and effects of organizational stress among Sri Lankan IT professionals. Quantitative data was analyzed using the method given in PSM9.

V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The preliminary investigation reveals that there has been many complaints on high stress levels among Sri Lankan IT professionals. Though the situation is this and IT industry is considered as a high stress industry, PSM9 reveals a different result.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Professionals</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>High</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IT professionals work in IT organizations</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IT professionals work in non-IT organizations</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 3: Levels of Stress among Sri Lankan IT Professionals
According to the tool, all IT professionals irrespective of their industry belong to medium and low levels of stress.

From IT professionals work in IT organizations, 19 record low level of stress and 59 record medium level of stress. From IT professionals those who work in non-IT organizations, 43 record medium level of stress and 32 records low level of stress. None of the professionals in both types of organizations report high level of stress.

According to the results it is possible to say that most IT professionals have perceived stress than real stress since when they are measured with medically accepted tool, none of them falls into the high level of stress.

As per the cognitive map developed using qualitative data, there are two major factors causing stress. They are organizational factors and personal and social factors.

From the organizational factors, lack of communication, insufficient knowledge, inadequate resources and staff often result in tight deadlines and heavy workloads for Sri Lankan IT professionals. Then factors like poor work relationships in the organization, less opportunities available for the career development within the organization and less people oriented organizations trigger stress in these IT professionals.

Further, behavior and attitudes of team members and coworkers, rigid organizational structure and culture, poor induction programmes, lack of training and development, less benefits and poor remunerations are also found out to be common stressors in Sri Lankan IT professionals.

From the personal and social factors, religious orientation plays a major role in stress among Sri Lankan IT professionals. Moreover, maturity of a person, gender roles entitled to them by the Sri Lankan Society, educational background and family also take part in causing stress in these professionals. When talking about family, being an only child is something to be considered.

As identified from the interviews, expectation in life plays an important role in professionals’ stress levels. Those who complain about high stress have higher expectations in life and when their organizational factors do not able to come up to the level of their expectation, the frustration creates in mind can result in stress within these professionals.

In addition, if the professional is a highly innovative character and if he likes to learn new things and to face challenges in life that reduces the stress which can create from the organizational factors. This too links with ones’ attitudes and values. Professionals those who with comparatively high stress do not really like to take challenges in life. They are very passive characters. They do not like to experiment and learn new things in their career. When they are given a new task they get excited and that creates stress in their minds. They always consider new things as a burden and that creates anxiety and frustration.

All these are again linked with the flexibility of the professionals. since IT is a dynamic field those who enter the field should also be dynamic. If anyone fails to quickly adapt to changes occur in IT field that too can create stress among IT professionals. Most Sri Lankans like to do a 8-5 job where they have same working hours for their entire life. However, that cannot be expected in the IT field. There are no 8-5 jobs in the field or else there are few 8-5 jobs. Specially, since Sri Lanka is undertaking large number of foreign projects, our employees have to adapt to their time slots. That results in night shifts in the Sri Lankan IT industry. This shift base working is something which creates stress in Sri Lankan professionals as per the interviews. This increases if the professional is an only child or a female worker.

Then, family comes into play and due to family matters IT professionals can get stressed. If the professional is the only child, most of them do not like to work during the night and they are not very fond of shift base work in where they do not know the exact time they can get back to their homes. This has resulted in workers moving from one organization to another and moving from IT industry to non-IT industry.

In addition, if the respective professional is a female that again creates many issues. According to authentic culture, women are supposed to do household chores and bringing up the children. When they are working in a dynamic field like IT this entitled responsibility may get neglected. That would again create problems in the family and that usually causes stress in female IT professionals.

Accordingly, all these factors act as stressors which create organizational stress in Sri Lankan IT professionals. This organizational stress then creates effects ranging from mild to worst.

Effects of organizational stress can be divided into two as individual effects and effects on organization. Again, individual effects can be divided into two; psychological and physiological effects.

Often aches and disorders and addictions come under physiological effects. Results reveal that most IT professionals who complained about high stress at least have addicted to one of the things like caffeine, alcohol or cigarettes as means of getting rid of stress.

On the other hand these professionals experience many aches and disorders due to stress. One of the most common issue is gastritis. Apart from that, pertaining headaches and joint pains are common in these professionals. These disorders and aches in the long run without proper attention may result in unfortunate situations like blindness, tumors, cancers etc. in these professionals.

Of the psychological effects, they experience concurrent mood swings. They easily lose their temper. They are always anxious over one thing or the other. They easily get panic even over minor happenings in their life and due to these, most of them experience lack of social interaction.

All these things affect personal health of the professional and ultimate result of this is the creation of unhealthy workforce in Sri Lanka. Unhealthy workforce directly affects the smooth functioning of the organizations.

Through the interviews it was found that most IT professionals change the whole industry due to stressors which cause stress in IT professionals. Some of the leading IT organizations in Sri Lanka experience high rate of turnover in every month. This incurs lot of cost for the organization to recruit and train new employees.

High turnover rate affects the productivity, quality and efficiency of the organization. When experienced and knowledgeable people leave the organization, that interrupts its normal operations and it takes some time to recruit and train another employee to fill the vacancy. This ultimately results in retaining of less knowledgeable and inexperienced workforce in
the organization. As a result the quality and productivity of the organization affects and that will again affect the overall Sri Lankan IT industry and its goodwill.

When discussing about IT professionals those who work in IT organizations, they have quite high levels of stress than IT professionals working in Non-IT organizations. From these professionals, programme oriented IT professionals in IT organizations have high levels of stress than technical oriented IT professionals in these organizations. However, in Non-IT organizations, stress levels of technical oriented IT professionals are higher. This is mainly due the poor IT knowledge of fellow employees working in these Non-IT organizations.

Organizational stress among Sri Lankan IT professionals are less when compared to IT professionals in other countries. This is basically due to the better cultural and religious background in Sri Lanka. Though there are high usages of best practices to manage stress in other countries, still stress levels are high because of the influence of their culture. Also the addiction for alcohol and smoking are in high rates in other countries than Sri Lanka. Coping strategies like close social relationships, religious practices are ample in Sri Lanka. Moreover, effects of stress have high influence on foreign IT professionals than Sri Lankans. Suicide rates and depression rates in Sri Lankan IT professionals are less when compared to foreign IT professionals. Hence it is possible to say that Sri Lankan IT professionals are not severely affected by the organizational stress when compared to other countries.

VI. CONCLUSION

Contrasting to results of preliminary investigation of the research, Sri Lankan IT professionals are not suffering from high stress. None of these professionals falls into the high stress category. What they actually suffer is difficulty in managing stress rather than actual high levels of stress.

According to the research, organizational stress is caused by two major factors; organizational factors and personal and social factors. Both these play unique role in creating stress in Sri Lankan IT professionals. Stress create through these stressors affect both individuals and organizations resulting in drastic effects in their long run. However, Sri Lankan IT professionals are not severely affected by the organizational stress when compared to other countries.

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