

Stress and satisfaction at work, as part of the passage of time, among the employees of a state company

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Abstract. This paper presents a study in which a team of specialists analyzed three variables that can influence work relationships, namely stress, emotions and job satisfaction. Through the analysis carried out, it was observed whether there are notable differences regarding the quantitative overload at work, role ambiguity, role conflict and career development as part of the stress felt by employees, respectively on dimensions regarding remuneration (salary), advancement, working conditions and the nature of work as part of the perception of job satisfaction, in close relation with the emotion dimension, in a state-owned company, a decade apart. From the comparative analysis of the results from the two monitored periods: years 2013 and 2023, it emerges as a conclusion the need for psychosocial protection measures for employees that can materialize through: strategies related to professional requirements, strategies related to the employee's abilities and strategies related to the control of difficult situations that take into account the components of the work system, for better functioning both at the level of the company that was the subject of this study, but by extrapolation they can be useful to other organizations that present similar functioning characteristics.

1 Introduction

Stress is an emotional and physical state of tension that is part of our everyday life. At the emotional level, we recognize it as various states - predominantly affective ones that have different names: annoyance, impatience, boredom, fatigue, anger, disgust, shame, fear, panic, anger, horror, frustration, etc. and which constitute the mask of stress, which is why stress cannot and must not be avoided. According to European Union statistics, stress at work affects approximately 28% of employees, more than 40 million workers, and represents the second health problem related to professional activity. Previous research has shown that stress as a professional risk factor is one of the most serious problems at the organizational level, with a strong impact not only on employees, whose physical and mental health is at risk, but also on the quality of the entire work process. Currently, specialists are paying special attention to the phenomenon through research, monitoring and finding mitigation solutions. A statistical calculation highlights the fact that the total annual costs due to professional stress are estimated at around 20 billion euros for the EU countries, without adding productivity losses [1]. A 2022 European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-

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OSHA) survey focusing on stressors that can affect mental and physical health shows that workplace stress is increasing in Europe post-pandemic, with more than four workers in ten (44%) stating that stress at work has increased as a result of the pandemic. Thus, almost half of the respondents (46 %) said they face time pressure or an excessive volume of work, to which we can add poor communication, cooperation within the organization and lack of control over work pace or work processes. Also, respondents report work-related health problems frequently associated with stress thus 30% (general fatigue, headaches, eyestrain, muscle problems or pains). In terms of activities to prevent or reduce risks in the workplace, 42% said there was information and training on coping with stress, access to counseling and psychosocial support (38%) and awareness and other activities of information on safety and health (59 %). [2]

2 Conceptual delimitations

2.1 The Concept of organizational stress

Pitaliu believes that to some extent occupational stress is a problem that goes beyond Romania's organizational environment, as Romania is in a period of transition and its citizens face a series of specific problems, such as: growth. This is especially true at a time of difficulty in the transition to a market economy, outdated action plans and management practices, and economic instability. This is considered to be a serious consequence regardless of the geographical and socio-political region, but it acquires special nuances, especially in situations of socio-economic and political transition, as is the case in Romania. [3]. Lazarus is the first researcher to talk about stress as a process integrated into a wider category of mental manifestation, namely emotions: "where there is stress there are also emotions - perhaps we should call them stress emotions - but the reverse is also valid, respectively, where there are emotions, even positive ones, there is usually stress, but not always".[4]

If clinical psychology focused especially on individual stress, the development of organizational psychology was needed to introduce the phrase "organizational stress", thus laying the foundation for a more in-depth study of this reality and its impact on the efficiency of work teams and other coordinates related to well-being at work.[5] Occupational stressors are associated with unproductive work behavior, where stress is determined by a tense work environment, poor interpersonal relationships, everyday problems, workload and unproductive behavior such as: expected to be involved in delays, damage to equipment, willful misconduct at work and theft. [6] In 2010, E. Stănescu conducted a study on the subjective well-being of pre-university teachers in Romania, knowledge and acceptance were emphasized. Those who seek to fulfill their desire to actualize and maintain the highest possible standards are more likely to experience subjective states of emotional well-being than those with low self-efficacy and self-esteem [7].

2.2 Job satisfaction

Work satisfaction represents, according to Verboncu & Zalman[8], an affective response of the employee to various aspects and conditions of work, being also a result of his subjective perception of the degree to which work offers him those elements that he considers to be important . Through this aspect concluding that job satisfaction is an affective state that cannot be measured but only deduced from the employee's behaviors and work performance. Zlate [9] groups the factors of job satisfaction into three categories: 1. organizational factors, including working conditions, the work itself performed by the employee, his chances of promotion; 2. group factors, represented by relations with bosses and colleagues, the

cohesion of the group of which the employee is a part, as well as group morale; 3. personal factors, some authors referring to the socio-demographic characteristics of the employee such as age, sex, race, nationality, others to the socio-professional characteristics represented by seniority, level of professional training and experience, and others to personality characteristics.

According to Vercellino [10] job satisfaction refers to the degree to which a person is satisfied with different aspects of his job or his situation, implying that a motive is achieved, a need fulfilled and a goal achieved. Personal satisfaction is a central aspect in the management of modern organizations. It goes without saying, then, that in an era of globalization and increasing economic competition, retaining valuable employees is a problem for many organizations. In this regard, remember that a basic aspect of retention and motivation tools is the recognition of an employee's satisfaction with the company they work for, and that this satisfaction is conditioned by several factors. For some people, only salary is important, for others, salary benefits are important, and for others, staff training methods, work environments and everything else are generative environments for personal growth and value creation.

2.3 Emotions at the organizational level

There are three main forms of research on emotions in organizational settings: research on positive and negative emotions as variables that moderate the relationship between organizational stressors, employee attitudes and behavior; the study of emotional states and the behaviors they cause; research into how emotions are expressed and controlled to meet organizational demands. In the field of organizational psychology, affectivity was studied after defining job satisfaction as an attitude that includes both cognitive and emotional components [11]. One of the biggest dilemmas of researchers in the field of organizational psychology was how to approach the study of stress and emotions. As Lazarus also said [12] where there is stress there are also emotions - maybe we should call them stress emotions - but the reverse is also valid, that is, where there are emotions, even positive ones, there are mostly sometimes stress, but not always. Lazarus is the author of the narrative approach, by considering the existence of fundamental emotions, some called negative, such as sadness, worry, pride, guilt, which can be considered stressful emotions, because most or they arise from stressful situations, which affect the individual on an individual as well as organizational level, and others called positive emotions, which in turn can sometimes be considered stressful, foreshadowing a state of threat or affect. Investigating the dynamics and the role of emotional responses to the experience of anger and fear in the organizational environment is able to make the organizational development programs, the practices and procedures of the human resources departments, the management styles of the leaders and the subordination styles of the employees more concretely effective in the way the employees it relates to the tasks received and professional responsibilities. This effect can be obtained by identifying the organizational sources of fear and anger as part of the negative emotion experienced by employees and recognizing the negative impact of perpetuating organizational policies and practices that generate them and by being aware of the responsibilities that each member of the organization has in maintaining the faulty models of communication and conflict resolution.[13]

3 Research

3.1 Purpose

This study was designed to test the relationship between job stress, job satisfaction, and emotions among employees in a state-owned company a decade apart.

3.2 Research methodology

3.2.1 Three working instruments were used to test the research hypotheses

Through which it was aimed the way in which they perceive and evaluate stress at work, satisfaction at work, respectively the intensity of emotions experienced at work at a global level under the ratio of the majority of the time in relations with subordinates, superiors and colleagues, in relation to work tasks and the general work climate.

I. *The Stress Diagnostic Survey* (SDS, Ivancevich & Matteson, 1980) was used to measure the level of stress in the organization. The values of the Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient vary between .63 and .83 for the six subscales of the questionnaire, and for the occupational stress scale Cronbach Alpha is .93.

II. *Job satisfaction* was determined with the help of the job satisfaction assessment questionnaire (Job Satisfaction Survey, Spector, 1994). Cronbach Alpha for the job satisfaction subscales are as follows: .75 – satisfaction with salary, .73 – satisfaction with advancement, .63 – satisfaction with working conditions, .78 – satisfaction with the nature of work. For the global scale of job satisfaction, the Cronbach Alpha coefficient is .91.

III. *The PANAS-X Questionnaire* (Positive and Negative Affect Schedule-Expanded version) was applied, made by David Watson and Lee Anna Clark (1994) based on previous works by Watson, Clark and Tellegen (1988), the PANAS questionnaire, representing one of the most used tools for assessing affectivity. Negative affectivity and appositive affectivity represent two relatively independent dimensions, and PANAS, respectively PANAS-X, measure them as such, with a correlation coefficient between -0.2 and -0.3.

3.2.2 Target group

In this study, a number of 200 participants took part, of which 100 were tested in 2013 and 100 at the level of 2023, within a large state-owned company, using small and independent samples of subjects, from all sectors of activity.

3.2.3 Method

The present research was carried out in 2023, at the level of a state company, by collecting data in two stages, at the level of 2013 and the current year 2023, therefore the activity is standardized in terms of the same operational and system procedures.

3.3 Research hypotheses

I. *Main hypothesis no. 1*: There are significant, negative correlations between stress (role ambiguity, role conflict, quantitative overload at work and career development), and job satisfaction (remuneration (salary), advancement, working conditions and nature of work) - for employees in a state company in the two time fractions.

II. *Main hypothesis no. 2*: Job satisfaction scales represented by compensation (salary), advancement, working conditions, and nature of work are significant predictors of job stress.

III. *Main hypothesis no. 3*: There are significant differences at the level of environments regarding organizational stress (role ambiguity, role conflict, quantitative overload at work

and career development), job satisfaction (remuneration (salary), advancement, working conditions and nature of work) and emotions positive and negative, as part of the passage of time among employees.

3.4 Variables

- I. *The dependent variable*: VD1: organizational stress (role ambiguity, role conflict, quantitative work overload and career development); VD2: emotions (positive, negative);
- II. *The independent variable*: VI1: job satisfaction (remuneration (salary), advancement, working conditions and nature of work); VI2: delimitation in time (year 2013, year 2023)

4 Research results and interpretations

The analysis and interpretation of the results were carried out with the help of the specialized psychological statistics program SPSS 20. The following statistical analyzes were performed: Pearson correlations; Multiple linear regression; Significance test of difference between means t-student for independent samples.

4.1 Interpretation of the results for the main hypothesis no. 1

		remuneration (salary)	advancement	working conditions	the nature of work
role ambiguity	Pearson Correlation	-.171*	-.320**	-.200**	-.296**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.015	.000	.004	.000
	N	200	200	200	200
role conflict	Pearson Correlation	-.178*	-.224**	-.104	-.276**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.012	.001	.144	.000
	N	200	200	200	200
quantitative overload in work	Pearson Correlation	-.146*	-.225**	-.249**	-.127
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.040	.001	.000	.073
	N	200	200	200	200
career development	Pearson Correlation	-.252**	-.487**	-.064	-.185**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.369	.009
	N	200	200	200	200
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).					
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).					

Table 1. Correlation of work stress with work satisfaction and emotions

Results were obtained by calculating the Pearson correlation coefficient for:

- a) role ambiguity in relation to the scales for job satisfaction, the following aspects are highlighted, in relation to remuneration the statistically significant correlation being valid for 3% of the subjects; in relation to advancement the statistically significant correlation being valid for 10% of the subjects; working conditions the statistically significant correlation being valid for 4% of the subjects); nature of work the statistically significant correlation being valid for 9% of the subjects.

b) role conflict in relation to the scales for job satisfaction, the following aspects are highlighted, in relation to remuneration (salary) the statistically significant correlation being valid for 3% of the subjects; advancement the statistically significant correlation being valid for 5% of the subjects; working conditions statistically insignificant correlation; nature of work the statistically significant correlation being valid for 8% of the subjects.

c) quantitative overload at work in relation to the scales for job satisfaction, the following aspects are highlighted, in relation to remuneration (salary) the statistically significant correlation being valid for 2% of the subjects ; in relation to advancement the statistically significant correlation being valid for 5% of the subjects; working conditions the statistically significant correlation being valid for 6% of the subjects; nature of work statistically insignificant correlation.

d) career development in relation to the scales for job satisfaction, the following aspects are highlighted, remuneration (salary) the statistically significant correlation being valid for 7% of the subjects; in relation to advancement the statistically significant correlation being valid for 24% of the subjects; working conditions statistically insignificant correlation; nature of work the statistically significant correlation being valid for 3% of the subjects.

Role ambiguity, a frequent and persistent aspect in the employees' activity, as part of the stress felt, in the above data it can be seen how it can be countered by applying specific advancement regulations as part of the better integration of work procedures, respectively by making changes to the nature of the work, aspects that from the perspective of the respondents can offer a more efficient integration of work tasks. Regarding career development, the perspective of the employees of the unit engaged in the research project stands out in a very high percentage in the advancement chapter in relation to the stress factor career development in negative correlation of 24%, an aspect that gives an optimistic perspective to the activity from the perspective of the idea in that people don't want to limit themselves at work, wanting to learn and improve.

4.2 Interpretation of the results for the main hypothesis no. 2

Model	Unstand. Coef.		Stand. Coef.	T	Sig.	Correlations		
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Zero-order	Partial	Part
(Constant)	16.647	1.476		11.282	.000			
remuneration (salary)	.019	.064	.022	.291	.771	-.171	.021	.019
advancement	-.228	.064	-.263	-3.537	.001	-.320	-.246	-.230
working conditions	-.103	.067	-.104	-1.530	.128	-.200	-.109	-.100
the nature of work	-.244	.068	-.243	-3.601	.000	-.296	-.250	-.234
a. Dependent Variable: role ambiguity								
(Constant)	16.214	1.475		10.993	.000			
remuneration (salary)	-.044	.071	-.048	-.627	.531	-.178	-.045	-.042
advancement	-.150	.070	-.163	-2.160	.032	-.224	-.153	-.146
the nature of work	-.255	.075	-.237	-3.415	.001	-.276	-.237	-.230
b. Dependent Variable: role conflict								

(Constant)	16.484	1.551		10.626	.000			
remuneration (salary)	-.050	.087	-.043	-.568	.570	-.146	-.041	-.039
advancement	-.177	.089	-.154	-1.987	.048	-.225	-.141	-.135
the nature of work	-.267	.093	-.203	-2.876	.004	-.249	-.201	-.196
c. Dependent Variable: quantitative overload in work								
(Constant)	20.960	1.626		12.892	.000			
remuneration (salary)	-.024	.078	-.022	-.310	.757	-.252	-.022	-.019
advancement	-.510	.077	-.461	-6.642	.000	-.487	-.429	-.411
the nature of work	-.132	.082	-.102	-1.599	.111	-.185	-.113	-.099
d. Dependent Variable: career development								

Table 2. Linear regression with stressors in relation to the job satisfaction scale

By applying stepwise multiple regression, we verified the following statistical aspects:

- a) independent variables (remuneration (salary), advancement, working conditions, nature of work) that correlate with role ambiguity can be used as significant predictors to predict the scores of the dependent variable (role ambiguity). According to the regression analysis, we find the following statistical situation, there are two independent variables (advancement, nature of work) that explain about 10% of the variance of the criterion (role ambiguity).
- b) independent variables (remuneration (salary), advancement, nature of work) that correlate with role conflict can be used as significant predictors to predict the scores of the dependent variable (role conflict). According to the regression analysis, we find the following statistical situation, there are two independent variables (advancement, nature of work) that explain about 7% of the variance of the criterion (role conflict).
- c) independent variables (remuneration (salary), advancement, working conditions) that correlate with quantitative overload at work can be used as significant predictors to predict the scores of the dependent variable (quantitative overload at work). According to the regression analysis, we find the following statistical situation, there are two independent variables (advancement, working conditions) that explain the variance of 6% of the criterion (quantitative overload at work).
- d) independent variables (remuneration (salary), promotion, nature of work) that correlate with career development can be used as significant predictors to predict the scores of the dependent variable (career development). According to the regression analysis, we find the following statistical situation, there is only one independent variable (advancement) that explains the variance of the criterion (career development) explains 17% of the variance of the criterion (career development).

Analyzing the data resulting from the applied statistical procedures, we can see that the advancement indicator constitutes an impact factor in order to reduce the sources of stress among the employees in this research, with a significant weight in improving the prediction in terms of role ambiguity 5% and together with the indicator the nature of work reaches 10%, at the individual level this indicator has a prediction of 6% in relation to work overload, respectively 17% in terms of career development. On the other hand, we believe that it is necessary to approach this indicator with great caution as part of job satisfaction, in the idea that advancement increases the motivation to receive and solve elaborate and complete tasks, and maintains the concern for performance, but it can be the same well a mirage of immediate failure if it is not justified at the level of competence and good knowledge of the procedures that actually regulate the activity.

4.3 Interpretation of the results for the main hypothesis no. 3

		Lev.'s Test for Equa. of Var.		t-test for Equality of Means				
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Dif.	Std. Er.D if.
role ambiguity	Equal var. not assum.	2.683	.103	3.675	198	.000	1.660	.452
	Equal var. not assum.			3.675	196.773	.000	1.660	.452
role conflict	Equal var. not assum.	1.303	.255	4.369	198	.000	2.080	.476
	Equal var. not assum.			4.369	196.976	.000	2.080	.476
quantitative overload in work	Equal var. not assum.	10.230	.002	3.800	198	.000	2.270	.597
	Equal var. not assum.			3.800	187.832	.000	2.270	.597
career development	Equal var. not assum.	5.604	.019	5.309	198	.000	2.970	.559
	Equal var. not assum.			5.309	179.089	.000	2.970	.559

Table 3. Independent Samples Comparative stress test on the two time fractions ($m1 = \text{average at the level of 2013}$; $m2 = \text{average at the level of 2023}$)

According to the research data, we observe that there are statistically significant differences regarding the stress at the workplace of the employees in the two fractions of time captured in the research, for all four scales considered at the research level. Thus, for role ambiguity ($m1=9.00$, $m2=7.34$); role conflict ($m1=10.18$, $m2=8.1$); quantitative overload at work ($m1=11.08$, $m2=8.81$); career development ($m1=13.38$, $m2=10.41$). The data presented above confirm the research hypothesis, as there are statistically significant differences between the two years among employees in terms of stress at work, in the sense that they felt stress at work more strongly in 2013, aspects that have improved over ten years of activity, noting that in 2023 the averages on these stress scales are at a much lower level.

		Lev.'s Test for Equa. of Var.		t-test for Equality of Means				
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Dif.	Std. Er.Dif.
remuneration (salary)	Equal var. not assum.	29.629	.000	2.232	198	.027	1.190	.533
	Equal var. not assum.			2.232	149.556	.027	1.190	.533
advancement	Equal var. not assum.	9.065	.003	-1.887	198	.061	-1.010	.535
	Equal var. not assum.			-1.887	179.171	.061	-1.010	.535
working conditions	Equal var. not assum.	4.664	.032	.724	198	.470	.340	.469
	Equal var. not assum.			.724	189.435	.470	.340	.469
the nature of work	Equal var. not assum.	3.194	.075	-4.402	198	.000	-1.950	.443
	Equal var. not assum.			-4.402	190.452	.000	-1.950	.443

Table 4. Independent Samples Test job satisfaction comparing the two time fractions ($m1 = \text{average at the level of 2013}$; $m2 = \text{average at the level of 2023}$)

According to the research data, we observe that there are statistically significant differences in terms of job satisfaction in the two fractions of time captured in the research, for two scales considered at the research level. Thus, for remuneration (salary) ($m1=13.02$, $m2=12.01$); nature of work ($m1=17.20$, $m2=19.15$). Regarding job satisfaction in terms of salary, we notice that in 2013 there is a better positioning of employers regarding this aspect, compared to 2023, and regarding the nature of work, the situation is reversed in the idea that in 2023 there is greater satisfaction regarding this aspect of work compared to 2013, people being much more excited about what they do at work.

		Lev.'s Test for Equa. of Var.		t-test for Equality of Means				
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Dif.	Std. Er.Dif.
positive emotions	Equal var. not assum.	22.444	.000	-.324	198	.746	-.230	.710
	Equal var. not assum.			-.324	153.700	.746	-.230	.710
negative emotions	Equal var. not assum.	5.994	.015	3.641	198	.000	2.910	.799
	Equal var. not assum.			3.641	189.043	.000	2.910	.799

Table 5. Independent Samples Comparative stress test on the two time fractions ($m1 = \text{average at the level of 2013}$; $m2 = \text{average at the level of 2023}$)

According to the research data, we notice that there are statistically significant differences regarding the emotions felt in the two time fractions captured in the research, for only one considered at the research level. Thus, for negative emotions ($m1=22.86$, $m2=19.95$). It can be observed that in the year 2023, negative emotions are lower in terms of their interference at the workplace compared to their much higher degree of inclusion in the year 2013, through the lens of what employees feel as negative emotions in relation to the work tasks, the work environment, respectively the relationships at the workplace.

5 Conclusions

The present research responds to some practical needs that can significantly contribute to the development and application of strategies focused on creating a supportive emotional environment and ways of intervention in order to mitigate or eliminate negative effects, by referring to the specialized literature. Therefore, Țabără [1] claims that stress management is conditioned by: activity management, time management and strategies undertaken by the teaching staff/school organization in order to reduce stress factors. Zlate [9] suggests three types of interventions for persistent work-related stress: primary – aimed at reducing the number or intensity of stressors in a proactive and preventive manner and secondary – it oscillates between being proactive and reactive, with the aim of modifying an individual's response to stressors; tertiary - is based on treatment and rehabilitation aimed at minimizing the effects of stressors and contributing to individual well-being. Baban [14] lists three types of strategies for managing stress at work: strategies for job requirements, at all stages of good communication, concrete methods are established for performing performance tasks,

continuously increasing the complexity of requirements, negotiating the allocation of resources to perform new tasks or by changing the way performance is delivered; employee skills strategy, the goal is to motivate activity and train stress tolerance in various situations, as this can lead to poor professional performance; strategies for overcoming difficult situations, the goal is to reduce work-related deficiencies.

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