

THE EFFECT OF MANAGERIAL ROLES AND ORGANISATIONAL  
STRUCTURE ON JOB STRESS OF MANAGERS IN  
SAUDI ARABIAN OIL COMPANY

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A Thesis Submitted to Asia e University in  
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the  
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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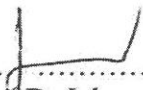
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## ABSTRACT

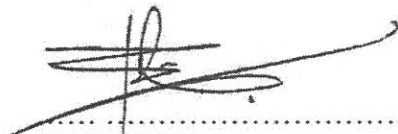
The research was focused to the work-related stress among lower and middle line management in Saudi ARAMCO. It explored the significance of various factors contributing to job-related stress on unit heads, division heads, and department heads. To determine the job stress level in Saudi ARAMCO, 900 respondents were approached via online questionnaire. The target population included all Saudi ARAMCO employees holding positions as unit heads, division heads, and department heads. Only 392 employees responded to the questionnaire. A quantitative analysis was conducted using Variance, t-test, and multiple regressions as statistical analysis tool. The results support the hypothesis that there exists a relationship between job stress and three independent variables; organizational structure, managerial role and job satisfaction. The research study has revealed that managerial role, organizational structure and job satisfaction are contributors to employees' work stress. Lower and middle line management should be satisfied, fully engaged in decision making, well familiar with managerial role and adherent to the published rules and guidelines. The top three stressors for unit heads include workload, centralization and job satisfaction. For division heads, they include workload, business role and job satisfaction, whereas they encompass workload, formalization and job satisfaction for the department heads. The correlation and the regression analysis results indicate that work stress at management level has a positive relationship with managerial role in terms of business role and workload. The research supported the conceptual development of work stress and organizational structure. The results revealed that centralization and decision-making greatly increase work stress if they are not properly handled.

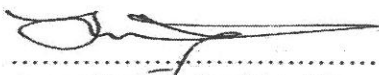
**APPROVAL PAGE**


I certify that I have supervised /read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in quality and scope, as a thesis for the fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

  
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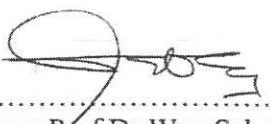
  
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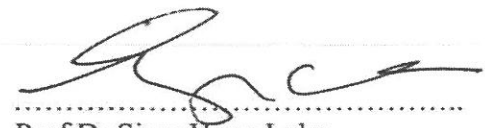
  
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## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the thesis here submitted in fulfillment of the PhD degree is my own work and that all contributions from any other persons or sources are properly and duly cited. I further declare that the material has not been submitted either in whole or in part, for a degree at this or any other university. In making this declaration, I understand and acknowledge that any breaches in this declaration constitute academic misconduct, which may result in my expulsion from the program and/or exclusion from the award of the degree.

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Introduction to the Problem

Work-related stress can no longer be considered an occasional, or personal problem to be treated with pain relief tablets; it is gradually becoming a more universal phenomenon, negatively affecting all kinds of working people, all work places, and all countries (Sutherland & Cooper, 1996; Sulsky & Smith, 2005). This trend involving growing costs to individuals, industries and complete societies has greatly increased vigilance towards the need for more efficient and modern ways of tackling work stress (Stranks, 2005). There has been increasing acknowledgment of work stress as an essential occupational health issue.

In the industry, there is a intensified awareness that work stress contributes to a major portion of employees' worker compensation entitlements, health care costs, disability, absenteeism, low morale and deterioration in the performance (Health and Safety Executives (HSE, 2004). Undoubtedly, stress can promote health issues and often induce an inability to deal with life's situations, including work. Crampton et al. (1995) stated that at the workplace, stress could negatively affect the performance. Individuals under very little stress might not make sufficient effort to perform at their top levels, while those with too much stress are often unable to concentrate or perform effectively. Diminishing work stress has become a national priority at personal, organizational and social levels (Sulsky & Smith, 2005).

The concerns regarding stress appear well established. Health professionals have estimated that United States industry loses nearly 550 million working days on yearly basis owing to stress-related absenteeism (Danna & Griffin, 1999). King (2005) specified in her book, "*Understand it Overcome it*", that a Health and Safety

Committee report found that, between 2001 and 2002, 32.9 million working days had been lost due to work-related illnesses in the United Kingdom (UK). In 2003/2004, an estimated 12.8 million days off of work in the UK were attributed to work stress, fear, or depression, making it one of the major reasons of work-related health absenteeism (HSE, 2004).

This phenomenon is not limited to the West. Asian employees are also experiencing a significant increase in work stress (Hudson, 2007). The Hudson Report represents the expectations of over 2,400 individuals from multinational organizations from all main industry sectors that make fundamental decisions regarding employees' roles and expectations, with nearly 685 of these executives located in Singapore. Half of the respondents across all sectors pointed out that their employees were suffering from work-related stress. The study revealed that the main source of work related stress was attributed to the quick growth in work volume.

## **1.2 Background of the Study**

Managerial stress has been identified as a major concern for researchers as well as practitioners (Marsh & Blau, 2007; Pors, 2003; Menon & Akhilesh, 1994; Smith & Cooper, 1994; Burke, 2002). According to Cooper and Marshall (1978), occupying a managerial position increases the probability of experiencing higher level of work-related stress than working as a subordinate.

Cooper and Marshall (1978) have pointed out a number of work stressors in the leadership role. Firstly, there are factors essential to the characteristics of the leadership role such as extensive working hours, frequent travels, attending too many meetings, and excessive work. In an international study of executives' stress, Cooper (1984) revealed that Japanese executives suffered from multifarious pressures to "keep up with new technology". In a similar vein, executives in unindustrialized

countries like Egypt were unable to cope with the growing importance placed on having and utilizing the latest technologies, as they have an inexperienced workforce and inadequate infrastructure.

Many factors such as high workload, low job satisfaction, business role ambiguity, and organizational structure in term of formalization, centralization and decision-making authority can become major cause of the job related stress. Low job stress would be presumably associated to better job satisfaction as well as organizational commitment (Jamal and Badawi, 1995). A study conducted by Yousef, D. (2002) revealed that low role conflict is bound to lead to reduced job stress and, at the same time, better job satisfaction.

Organizationally prompted work stress has been given due consideration in a study by Conner, D. and Douglas, S. (2004) for investigating the association between organizational structure, work stress, and perceived strain. The results of study pointed out that highly mechanized organizational structure has revealed diverse stressors as compared to the highly organic structures. The mechanized structures are characterized by formal lines of authority, well defined chain of command, clearly spelled out rules and regulation, guidelines, policies and procedures, vertical integration as well as well-defined communication channels, whereas the organic structures are characterized by shared control, opportunity for participation in decision making, informal network of authority, lateral interaction and informal network of communication. The study result indicated that lack of decision making freedom and lack of decision control are more associated to the mechanic organizational structures, whereas the role of conflict and role ambiguity are associated to organic structures.

Managerial stress can develop owing to people's professional relationships with colleagues, subordinates and bosses. Hans Selye, well-known father of stress medicine, once proposed that one of the stressful aspects of life is learning to live with other people; "good relationships between members of a group are one of most important key factors for individual and organizational health" (Selye, 1974). Some research studies regarding work relationships have indicated that various stress-related symptoms and illnesses become particularly strained when the relationship between the subordinate and his/her boss is spiritually unhealthy owing to any reason (Cooper & Payne, 1991).

Stress has implications for individuals as well as the organization, and it can no longer be perceived merely the individual manager's problem. Stress affects the performance and production of the entire organization (Menon & Akhilesh, 1994). Organizations are now realizing the potentially dangerous impacts of stress in terms of decreased motivation, lowered performance levels, and mental as well as physical illness that exceed stress cause.

Most studies dealing with managerial stress have used the general category "managers" as a unit for their analysis. A few studies have looked at different managerial levels, in terms of junior, middle and top management levels, with an aim of identifying the causes of stress that act on them (Gemmill & Heisler, 1972; Singh, 1990). As the petroleum industry also has its own share of work stress among its workforce, it is reasonable to make an effort to inquire into the impacts of that stress on the workers as well as the industry. This is the scope of Sutherland and Cooper's (1996) research into the identification of work stress, which had affected the workers on an offshore oil and gas facility.

The three most important management levels in any organization structure in Saudi ARAMCO encompass unit heads, division heads and department heads. Besides supervising other employees in a fair and consistent manner, they must have the ability to motivate others and encourage them to enhance productivity and work quality. They must also have smooth functioning of business requirement. They should be technically competent to ensure that every single decision made is well thought out giving due consideration to any risk associated to it. They are under pressure at all times to ensure that they execute Saudi ARAMCO's top management commitment to meet the stake holder (government) expectations by meeting the required oil demand whenever it is needed. Saudi ARAMCO is obligated to providing a reliable supply of petroleum and petroleum products to local communities as well as consumers around the globe. Thus, management level working at unit, division or department is vulnerable to work stress not only due to workload but also due to organizational structure as well as managerial role.

This study provides insight into Saudi ARAMCO top management regarding the level of work stress encountered among its lower and middle line management. The study intends to look into the relationship between the work stress and the organizational structure. If organizational structure in terms of formalization and centralization and decision-making is not aligned to produce healthy, trusted and productive environment, then management will experience work stress at job site, which will impair its performance. The study will also investigate into the relationship between the business role, workload and work stress.

According to Al-Saadoun, Hamed (2006), the vice president of employees' relations and training at Saudi ARAMCO, the key success criteria for managers in the future workplace at ARAMCO include:



- Managers who work in coaching style with an increased span of control and the need for rapid decision-making, they will need to communicate what is important as well as support the empowerment of decision making.
- Managers who lead by example in relatively flat organization, where employees are empowered to make decision, trust is essential to success.
- Managers must effectively motivate, encourage, and inspire behaviors in others.

The study aims at identifying the relationship between job satisfaction and work stress for the selected management levels at this study. If managers are not completely satisfied at job site, then it can turn into a big problem that will definitely hinder the performance of any organization. Thus, it is really important to ensure that managers at ARAMCO are fully satisfied at workplace. This study intends to identify the main stressors contributing to the work stress among unit heads, division heads and department heads. If the top main stressors are identified for each management level targeted in this study, then the company will definitely do its best to overcome such issues and the results will be definitely very encouraging.

### **1.2.1 Context of the Study: Saudi ARAMCO**

The Saudi Arabian Oil Company, well known in the oil industry as “Saudi ARAMCO”, is the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia’s government-owned national oil and gas company. It is fully-integrated, global oil and gas enterprise, and a world leader in exploration and production, as well as refining, distributing and marketing of petroleum products. Saudi ARAMCO stands committed to providing a reliable supply of energy to the world, and is proud of having always met its product delivery commitments to its customers, especially

when its ability to bring extra production capacity online is needed to provide an adequate response to local or global market requirements.

Moreover, Saudi ARAMCO is a huge oil company, with more than 55,000 people managing proven reserves of 260 billion barrels of crude oil and one of the largest gas reserves in the world (263 trillion cubic feet). It is committed to providing a reliable supply of petroleum and petroleum products to communities as well as consumers around the world. Such a commitment by the company's top management, to meet the shareholder (government) expectations by meeting the required oil demand whenever it is needed, has put extreme pressure on its lower and middle line management. This pressure may be a cause of work stress to those sections of its work force that fail to handle it in an appropriate manner.

### **1.3 Problem Statement**

The literature on work-related stress has indicated that occupying a managerial position increases the probability of experiencing higher levels of stress than occupying a subordinate role (Glowinkowski & Cooper, 1987; Wexley & Yuki, 1984; Alknaan, 2002).

Management at any organization has to play a key role and is rightly considered as a key asset, because its departure could have a significant effect on the implementation of the organization's business plans, and may eventually become a major contributor to a parallel decline in productivity. As such, management retention is important for the long-term growth and success of the company.

A study conducted by Hussain, Zainab and Al-Kahlout, Issam (2010) involving 234 employees working in the oil fields offices in Kuwait Oil company has revealed that top main stressors include work requiring critical decision making, too much workload and managing or supervising the work of the subordinates. A study

conducted by Manshor, Fontaine and Choy (2003) involving managers in multinational companies in Malaysia in order to investigate the sources of occupational stress revealed that workload, working conditions, and relationship at work were the concern of the managers that lead to stress at the work place. Another study was conducted by Joyce and Mahesh (2013) involving 98 employees in order to comprehend the employee's work stress in oil refinery industry. The study indicated that the work stress is caused not only due to work overload and time pressure, lack of recognition and praise, which indicate low job satisfaction, are also major cause of the stress.

Since Saudi ARAMCO is a giant oil company that manages one of the biggest gas and oil reserves in the world, it is committed to providing a reliable supply of energy to a wide range of communities and consumers. This commitment by the company's top management, to meet the expectations of the government ownership interest as to providing the required oil demand whenever it is needed, has placed immense burden on its lower and middle line management, such as front line supervisors (unit heads), general supervisors (division heads) and managers (department heads). This pressure becomes a major cause of the work stress that some of its workers fail to handle.

In addition, managing over two hundred oil and gas fields scattered across a very large geographic area puts enormous pressure on the management of the upstream business line and its supporting organizations, as they do their best to get production out of such fields while adhering to a high level of safety standards and best international practices. At the same time, they have a vested interest in trying to do so in a very cost effective manner.

As Saudi ARAMCO is not different from other oil companies, its management is also vulnerable to similar stress factors owing to its remarkable responsibility of sustaining high oil and gas production at all times. Basic survey was conducted involving the management personnel holding positions as unit heads, division heads and department heads across Saudi ARAMCO in order to perceive whether there is an indication of any work stress or not. The basic survey questionnaire (attached as Appendix-1) was sent via e-mail to approximately 55 pre-defined employees holding position as unit heads, division heads, and department heads. Only forty-eight responses were received in unmarked envelopes, clearly indicating that the identity of the respondents should not be revealed. The responses of the survey have revealed that 39.6 % of the surveyed management experience stress at work place. 22.9 % of surveyed unit heads and division heads are seriously thinking of leaving the company owing to work stress provided they are successful in finding similar job and pay. Table 1.1 displays results of the basic survey conducted on pre-defined management level.

Table 1.1: Result of basic survey

Management level	Participated in survey	Do you have stress			Interest to leave Saudi ARAMCO company
		Yes	No	Not sure	
Unit Heads	25	12	11	2	7
Division Heads	16	5	10	1	4
Department Heads	7	2	5	0	0
Total	48	19	26	3	11

The work stress among individuals in the lower and middle line management levels at Saudi ARAMCO can also be associated to other factors, such as organizational structures, management and business roles, workload and role ambiguity. Hatton et al., (1999) quantified in his study that increased levels of job

strain have been found to be associated to work overload, job ambiguity and low job status. Lack of involvement in organizational decision-making (Shaddock et al., 1998) as well as role ambiguity has, in turn, been associated to work burnout (Rose et al., 2003).

The main objective of this study is to evaluate the level of work stress that lower and middle line managers experience at Saudi ARAMCO. This study will investigate the extent to which variations in the levels of work stress are impacted by organizational structure. Secondly, variations in the level of work stress might be explained by personal background variables, business role, workload, or job satisfaction variables.

This study will carry out a comprehensive investigation of organizational job stress and managerial or individual job stress. The organizational job stress encompasses the organizational structure of human resources development, work trends, management methods, decision-making aspects of the organization, and cooperation. Managerial job stress or individual job stress comprises of the high pressures of work quality and importance, the amount of time allocated, the unduly high amount of work, the pursuit of improvement and promotion, the effects of role ambiguity, and the responsibility for staff performance. In addition, other important independent variables encompass the respondents' educational attainment, age, gender and length of service with Saudi ARAMCO, as well as current job position.

#### **1.4 Research Questions**

The key and relevant research questions tackled by this study include:

1. What is the relationship between the managerial role (business role, work load) and job stress among unit heads, division heads and department heads of Saudi ARAMCO?

2. What is the relationship between the organizational structure (formalization, centralization, decision making) and job stress among unit heads, division heads and department heads of Saudi ARAMCO?
3. What is the relationship between job satisfaction (recognition, work itself, salary/income) and job stress among unit heads, division heads and department heads of Saudi ARAMCO?
4. What is the relationship between demographic variables (position at organizational hierarchy, business line type) and job stress among unit heads, division heads and department heads of Saudi ARAMCO?
5. What are the main work stressors that are present at the job site, which cause job stress at the unit head, division head and department head levels across Saudi ARAMCO?
6. What are the levels of job related stress among the investigated management levels (unit heads, division heads, department heads)?

### **1.5 Objectives of the Study**

Stress at the workplace is highly personalized phenomenon. It does differ widely, even among colleagues working in identical company settings within a company such as Saudi ARAMCO, and can vary for quite a few diverse reasons. The intensity, duration and severity of job stress depend upon the extent of the demands being made to the managers and workers (Stranks, 2005). In addition, the worker's or manager's corresponding sense of control and the freedom of decision-making that he or she has in addressing work stress is also of utmost importance.

The general objective of this study is the assessment of the level of work-related stress being encountered by the lower and middle line management at Saudi ARAMCO.

The specific objectives include investigating the significance of various factors contributing to job-related stress to the front line unit heads, division heads and department heads in Saudi ARAMCO by:

- Identifying the relationship between the managerial role (business role, work load) and job stress among unit heads, division heads, and department heads of Saudi ARAMCO.
- Identifying the relationship between the organizational structure (formalization, centralization, decision making) and job stress among unit heads, division heads and department heads of Saudi ARAMCO.
- Identifying the relationship between job satisfaction (recognition, work itself, salary/income) and job stress among unit heads, division heads and department heads of Saudi ARAMCO.
- Identifying the relationship between demographic variables (position in the organizational hierarchy, business line type) and job stress among unit heads, division heads and department heads of Saudi ARAMCO.
- Identifying the main factors contributing to the job stress among unit heads, division heads and department heads of Saudi ARAMCO. Assessing the levels of work stress for the individuals in the lower line (unit heads) and the middle line (division heads and department heads) management.

## **1.6 Significance of the Study**

This research is significant for corporate policy makers, academics and health agencies. The corporate organizational executives and managers can derive insights from the research on stress assessment as well as the significance of a healthy and conducive working environment. This research is of utmost importance for the

people teaching in the fields of stress management, occupational health and safety, and occupational health psychology. This research study is expected to pave the way for understanding the main stress factors negatively affecting management working in vast multi-national companies.

The study will evaluate the level of work-related stress among very critical management levels that have been entrusted the task of managing the most valuable assets of the company. The results of the study will be beneficial in making the management aware of a problem that will impair the business performance, productivity of its workforce, and the health of the organizations.

Organizational structure will be evaluated in terms of formalization, centralization and decision-making authority to ensure that employees are not prone to immense stress owing to rigid standardized procedures, centralized decisions and the high degree of formalization. For many employees, business is no longer a place to come to work only but also a sense of belonging and identity. It is really important for each organization to keep their employees fully satisfied so that they can put their best in achieving the organization objectives.

The results of this study are also very important for Saudi ARAMCO, as they can identify areas of improvement in the techniques and procedures, which are used by ARAMCO to conduct its business, and may be beneficial for hundreds of supervisors', general supervisors' and managers' effectiveness. The knowledge can assist in developing and implementing effective organizational policies and interventions by ARAMCO top management to promote a stress free working environment. Human resources organization within Saudi ARAMCO should benefit from this study for improving the performance of its management by adopting new