The Role of the Incentive System in the Process of Reducing Stress Levels in the Workplace

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Abstract:

Purpose: The aim of this study is to draw attention to the phenomenon of stress, as well as its effects on everyday human functioning. The article presents basic concepts such as stress and stress in the workplace, as well as characterizes various factors causing this phenomenon. It also presents ways of identifying the phenomenon of stress and possible ways of dealing with stress in the workplace. The article also refers to the impact of stress on the employee's motivation to work. The concept of "motivation" was introduced and its types were listed. The second part of the article presents the results of empirical research on the impact of stress on the level of employee motivation and involvement in performed tasks, as well as the role of the motivation system in minimizing the phenomenon of stress in the workplace.

Design/Methodology/Approach: The study used the method of analyzing the literature on the subject, as well as analyzing source data. The research sample was selected by defining the population that allowed for obtaining results enabling reference to the research problem. The sample selection method used was non-random. The sample included people of different ages, different income levels, different job profiles and different places of employment. The study was conducted using an online questionnaire. Neutral people were selected for the study. The selection of experts in the researched field would negatively affect the credibility of the obtained results.

Findings: Modern times are a period in which there has been a very rapid increase in the pace of life, as well as dynamic professional and personal development of many people. Unfortunately, the demands of modern life often exceed both the physical and mental capabilities of a given individual, and then the phenomenon of doubt in one's own potential appears. Through this approach, a person begins to wonder whether he or she is able to meet the ever-growing market demands. This type of negative thinking begins to cause stress, which negatively affects the quality of life, the level of social relationships, as well as the efficiency and effectiveness of work. Stress has become one of the most common problems in today's society and affects not only adults, but also adolescents and even children. Even though stress accompanies virtually every sphere of life, and a certain level of it is a natural and inherent element of the functioning of every individual, its excess can lead to many negative consequences for both mental and physical health. One of the important elements of minimizing both the causes and effects of stress in the workplace is a properly developed motivation system, which undoubtedly influences the employee's success and mental balance

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both in his private and professional life. Currently, the job market is very competitive. Not only because of competition between companies from a specific industry, but also because of competition among people applying for a given job position. Therefore, effective motivation plays a key role in achieving professional success, but also affects the level of commitment and efficiency of employees and the quality and effectiveness of their duties as well as the level of stress reduction in the workplace.

Practical Implications: *The article contains information and guidelines for workplace owners related to the common phenomenon of stress in the workplace. It shows the basic types and sources of stress and shows the possible long-term effects of this phenomenon. It also draws attention to the shortcomings of the motivation system existing in many workplaces, which contributes little to minimizing both stress and its effects.*

Originality/Value: *The study contains important conclusions regarding variables influencing the minimization of stress as well as improvements in the employee motivation system at work.*

1. Introduction

Modern times are a period in which there has been a very rapid increase in the pace of life, as well as dynamic professional and personal development of many people. Unfortunately, the demands of modern life often exceed both the physical and mental capabilities of an individual, and then there is a phenomenon of doubting one's own potential. Through such an attitude, a person begins to wonder whether they can meet the ever-increasing demands of the market.

This type of negative thinking begins to cause stress, which negatively affects the quality of life, the level of social relations, as well as the efficiency and effectiveness of the work performed. Stress has become one of the most common problems in today's society and affects not only adults, but also young people and even children. Although stress accompanies virtually every sphere of life, and a certain level of it is a natural and inherent part of the functioning of every individual, its excess can lead to many negative consequences for both mental and physical health.

On the other hand, it is believed that life without stress is not possible (Selye, 1977). This is because stress is a symptom of the mobilization of the body to fight, adapt to prevailing realities, master the demands of external reality, and indirectly represents an opportunity for profit and development of companies (Makowska and Poprawa,

2001), as well as a factor affecting the motivation of both the individual and society as a whole.

For years, scientific research has focused on understanding the nature of stress and the factors that cause it. Therefore, ways of dealing with stress and related issues are of utmost importance to all those interested in human resource management, as the practices used in this area have a significant impact on stress levels throughout the organization. The way in which employees are selected, how they are evaluated, compensated and also the leadership style used in the workplace, the content and conditions under which duties are carried out, working hours and interpersonal relations are all factors that can cause stress.

Many experts believe that inadequate organizational management is the main cause of generating stress in the workplace (Jackson and Schuler, 2003, p. 607). One important element in minimizing both the causes and effects of stress in the workplace is a properly designed incentive system, undoubtedly influencing the employee's success and mental balance in both his personal and professional life.

Currently, the labor market is very competitive. Not only because of the rivalry between companies in a particular industry, but also because of the rivalry between people applying for a particular job position. Therefore, effective motivation plays a key role in achieving professional success, but also affects the level of commitment and productivity of employees and the quality and efficiency of their duties as well as the level of stress reduction in the workplace.

2. Research Objectives and Methodology

The purpose of this study is to highlight the phenomenon of stress, as well as its effects on daily human functioning. The article presents basic concepts such as: stress and stress at work, as well as characterizes various factors causing this phenomenon. It also presents ways of identifying the phenomenon of stress and possible ways of dealing with stress at work.

The article also refers to the impact of stress on the way an employee is motivated to work. The concept of "motivation" is introduced and its types are listed. The second part of the article presents the results of empirical studies on the impact of stress on the level of employee motivation and commitment to the tasks performed, as well as shows the role of the motivational system in minimizing the phenomenon of stress at work.

The study used the method of literature analysis, as well as analysis of source data. The research sample was selected by determining the collectivity, which allowed to obtain results to address the research problem posed. The sampling method used was non-random. The sample included people of different ages, income levels, job profiles, and different numbers of places of employment.

The survey was conducted using an online questionnaire. Neutral individuals were selected for the survey. The selection of experts in the field under study would have negatively affected the reliability of the results obtained.

One of the tools of quantitative methods, the survey questionnaire, was used in the study. The questionnaire consisted of 28 survey questions and 5 metric questions. A total of 478 respondents took part in the survey. After a preliminary analysis of the acquired material, information obtained from 423 respondents meeting the established selection criteria was intended for further analysis. The presentation of the results was developed in graphical form.

3. Stress as an Element Shaping Human Behavior in the Workplace in Light of the Literature

In the socio-economic context, work is the realization of professional and gainful activities that create material, cultural and utilitarian value (Oginska-Bulik, 2006, p. 13). Work can promote an individual's self-improvement, intellect and character, and bring satisfaction and awareness of one's skills.

However, work can also be a source of life frustration, lack of motivation, inability to find one's place in society, and low self-esteem. As a result, it can be a source of health problems, related to a person's psyche and physicality, which is part of the generation of stress and its related effects (Bartkowiak 2009, pp. 18-19).

Currently, stress and counteracting stress are becoming an increasing challenge for many people. This is due to political, social, economic, cultural and technological changes and their impact on everyday human existence (Handbook, 2005, p. 3). Currently, stress is a fairly common and frequent phenomenon, but its impact on well-being and health can be diverse and difficult to assess unequivocally. This phenomenon is usually described as a dynamic state that arises in response to various situations and demands, both physical and mental, called stressors.

Stress can be caused by a variety of factors related to both work in the organization or the organization's external environment, such as labor market conditions and life situations outside the workplace. However, whether these factors can lead to stress-related adaptive responses also depends on how they are perceived by the individual and on their individual personality traits.

Stress can lead to both positive and negative consequences, although in most cases it unfortunately leads to the negative ones. This is due to the fact that most people equate stress with restrictions, increasing demands and some kind of pressure from the environment. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that a certain level of stress is necessary to function properly and perform at a high level. This is because stress, as a motivational factor, stimulates and keeps a person ready for action (Hellriegel *et al.,* 1995, p. 236; Robbins, 1998, p. 454).

Work and private life are closely intertwined, with the result that stressors from one of these spheres affect the other. In a person's private life, common sources of stress may include the loss of a loved one for various reasons, illness, accident, separation from family, divorce, marriage, pregnancy, the process of entering adulthood and making one's children independent, etc. (Pocztowski, 2018, p. 468).

Some of the factors, such as, for example, being laid off from work, problems with taking up new employment or retiring, are difficult to assign to one group. New forms, or working hours, as well as technological changes, are contributing to the increasing interpenetration of work and private life, which requires employees to find stability between these spheres.

Today's work environment sets high standards for employees. The appearance of many dangers associated with the work environment can lead to emotional strain and complications in adaptation. Thus, the phenomenon of so-called occupational stress is becoming increasingly important, and its consequences are varied and can be seen both at the individual level (for example, in the form of burnout syndrome) and at the organizational level (Lubranska, 2017, p. 88).

Factors creating environmental stressors in the workplace may include, among others:

- work overload due to the volume of duties and expectations of company functions,
- intense work rhythm and time pressure,
- hostile atmosphere between co-workers,
- unsatisfactory pay,
- no or limited career opportunities,
- uncertainty about maintaining employment,
- the need to be flexible to organizational changes,
- risks related to the current labor market situation, etc. (Pocztowski, 2018, pp. 467-468), (Jackson and Schuler, 2003, p. 607).

Occupational stress is a state of tension that occurs in the place of employment. During this state, a person is confronted with both objective and subjective factors. Objective factors are the physical and social aspects of the job, such as technical tools, the location of the headquarters, the type and form of work performed, and the presence of dangerous elements.

Social aspects of work, on the other hand, include, but are not limited to: planning and management of work, interpersonal relations, opportunities for upgrading skills, getting a higher position and pay policies. Subjective factors refer to the very reasons for taking a particular job, attitudes toward the tasks performed, and the level of job satisfaction (Ogińska-Bulik, 2006, p. 31).

Workplace stress can be both long-term (chronic) and resulting from traumatic events. According to Dudek (2012, p. 81), they are distinguished by, among other things, the intensity and method of impact of a given stressor. Long-term stress results from daily or cyclical demands, problems and challenges that do not exceed the employee's adaptive skills. It causes a sense of tension in the body, but does not lead to significant health problems as a result of a single situation.

In contrast, over time, the body's defense mechanisms are weakened and finished. Traumatic stress, on the other hand, is a consequence of experiencing frightening, shocking events, such as disasters, calamities, accidents, violence, exposure or loss of life. The individual in question may then take an active part or be an observer of such an event (Merecz, 2011, p. 46).

Experiencing a traumatic event leads to severe emotional upheaval in a person, which can result in a number of symptoms, such as recurring and unwanted memories, negative emotions associated with the traumatic event, avoidance of reflections, feelings and areas that are associated with the traumatic situation, and higher levels of arousal that had not previously appeared before the event (Dudek, 2002, p. 2).

There can be two types of stressors in the workplace that affect the health and emotional state of employees, they are:

- physicochemical factors that usually directly affect the functioning of an organ or a given system,
- psychosocial factors that affect a person's health indirectly, by causing stress, which is a direct cause of harmful health effects (Dudek, 1998, p. 109).

Such a distinction is very important, because it provides an opportunity to accurately classify and characterize different types of stress at work and its sources.

On the one hand, the source of stress may already be the implementation of work itself (including technology or environment). On the other hand, the organization of work, including the obligation to comply with the rules and regulations there, is also an important source. In addition, the simultaneous functioning of an individual in heterogeneous social models (forcing the playing of unequal roles, or the acceptance of different value systems) can also contribute to the emergence of stress.

Taking these sources into account, Łoboda (1990, pp. 72-88) detailed a variety of factors affecting stress occurring in the workplace, and these include:

- poor physical working conditions,
- elements relating to the method of carrying out the duties,

- abnormal interpersonal relations,
- components that affect an individual's sense of connection to the organization,
- stress factors associated with career development,
- the challenges of balancing work and private life,
- adaptation difficulties to carry out a specific role in the organization.

Many stressors are included in the considerations presented above. However, one of the most important stressors is still the uncertainty and fear associated with employment. According to Widerszal-Bazyl (2007, p. 20), it is observed that this uncertainty has, in fact, always been evident in the market economy, but in recent times it is beginning to gain significant importance especially in workers of post-working age.

This is due to the changes taking place in the modern world of work and the nature of the profession, such as the globalization of the economy, increased competition between companies, the pursuit of the highest possible economic efficiency, the rapid development of technology and the implementation of restructuring changes (Sverke and Hellgren, 2002, p. 25).

Chirkowska-Smolak (2015, pp. 10-11) distinguishes two types of effects of job insecurity:

- individual, such as the deterioration of both the mental and physical health of the individual, an increase in stress levels, a decrease in the level of satisfaction and desire to perform certain duties, and:
- organizational, such as the modification of employees' attitudes toward work, a reduction in the strength of the emotional connection to the company, a decrease in trust in the company, a decrease in productivity and job security, a weakening of interpersonal contacts, increased absenteeism, a tendency to change companies, and a decrease in employees' self-esteem.

The aforementioned effects can have both immediate and long-term consequences. Prolonged experience of work-related pressures can lead to a range of consequences that affect the ability to function properly cognitively-emotionally and think (including: fear, depression, sadness, reluctance to perform daily activities, problems with concentration, difficulty making choices, disappointment with one's attitude and tasks performed, difficulty controlling emotions), behavioral adaptations (such as: deterioration of performance, weaker resistance to danger, susceptibility to addictions, impulsiveness combined with hostility and even violence), and the occurrence of numerous health problems and physical conditions (Ogińska-Bulik, 2003b, p. 25).

Being in the grip of a stressor in the workplace has a very negative impact not only

on the employee, but also on the entire organization. It results in reduced efficiency and worsening of work standards, unproductive time management, a higher risk of errors and dangerous situations, and a higher level of employee turnover, and even a greater number of absences, which in turn generates costs for the entire organization.

Their consequences also include the desire of employees to leave the company, aversion and reluctance to change, reduced motivation and commitment, costs related to motivation and retention of staff, as well as adaptation difficulties after a longer absence.

Additionally, organizations incur costs for financing or co-financing health care, and are also exposed to the loss of reputation and attractiveness of their position on the market among potential employees (Łuczak and Żołnierczyk-Zreda, 2002, p. 2; Molek-Winiarska, 2011, p. 912; Ostrowska and Michcik, 2014, p. 14; Potocka, 2010, p. 32; Żołnierczyk-Zreda, 2010, p. 7).

The human response to stress is a complex process that involves both physiological and psychological reactions. At the physiological level, stress triggers the release of stress hormones such as cortisol and adrenaline, which stimulate the body to fight or flight. This increases blood pressure, speeds up the heart rate, causes faster breathing and increased alertness.

However, the stress response can also affect a person's behavior and thought process. It is common then to experience anxiety, restlessness, irritability, fatigue or difficulty concentrating. This can lead to the development of mental illnesses such as depression or anxiety disorders.

According to Bartkowiak (2009, pp. 13-16), stress is the body's response to various elements that cause an overload on the psyche and create emotional tension in a person. While it is needed in small amounts for individuals to be able to perform, an excess of it can negatively affect a person's health and well-being. It is important to understand that stress is a complex process that connects both body and mind.

Short-term symptoms of stress include increased heartbeat, increased sweating, trembling, shallow breathing, muscle spasm, decreased limb temperature and other symptoms. Long-term exposure to stress, on the other hand, can cause abnormalities in the body due to the constant release of adrenaline, which increases the supply of energy to muscles at the expense of other organs. Its effects can include digestive problems, deviations from normal eating habits, feeling cold, cardiovascular diseases, asthma, migraine and body pain, libido disorders, weakness and other ailments (Bartkowiak, 2009, pp. 13-16).

Stress can cause a variety of reactions and affect the body in both positive and negative ways. Typically, symptoms of stress are divided into three categories (Pocztowski, 2018, pp. 469-470):

- physiological (e.g., circulatory problems, hypertension, digestive diseases, high cholesterol, headaches, breathing problems, muscle tension, chills),
- emotional/psychological (e.g., states of tension, anxiety, irritability, boredom, difficulty focusing, depression, lowered self-esteem, dissatisfaction with work),
- behavioral (e.g., increased absenteeism, instability and frequent accidents, reduced productivity at work, impulsive or aggressive behavior, impaired communication skills).

One of the extreme symptoms of particularly prolonged occupational stress is the so-called phenomenon of occupational burnout. This syndrome was first described in 1974 by H.I. Freudenberg. He defined it as a state of chronic exhaustion, resulting from an overload of demands imposed by the environment or a particular person. The phenomenon is characterized by various symptoms, namely (Rogala-Pawelczyk and Parkitna, 2003, p. 8):

- physically - can manifest themselves through migraines and general fatigue,
- behaviorally - expressed through the individual's unstable mood and strong susceptibility leading to quick irritation,
- mentally - which can manifest as a sense of resignation, depression, lack of motivation and constant monotony.

Professional burnout is not just the standard feeling of not having the strength to perform one's duties. Burnout is a condition resulting from an exaggerated level of commitment and work overload that reduces strength to a minimum (Bartkowiak, 2009, pp. 74-77). It is a progressively stigmatizing and multi-stage process, characteristic especially of people who identify work with a life goal and perform their duties for long periods of time under emotionally exhausting circumstances.

These individuals experience strong, uninterrupted tension, and this can carry serious and adverse consequences. According to Pocztowski (2018, pp. 470-471), work in occupations that require establishing repeatedly recurring and strong relationships with others, such as health care, education, uniformed services, the justice system, customer service outlets or managerial positions, is considered particularly stressful.

Burnout is the result of prolonged mental exhaustion, a sense of exploitation and disbelief in the meaning of performing specific tasks. Its level depends on the stress-inducing elements of the employment environment and the personal characteristics of the individual.

According to Bartkowiak (2009, pp. 74-77), occupational burnout is characterized by the fact that it is always the final stage of the partial disappearance of fantasies, dreams regarding the ability to find a deeper meaning of existence precisely in the

place of employment. Burnout is often the result of a chronic imbalance between excessive demands placed on a person and an abnormal level of support. Individuals experiencing this condition feel that they have used up all their resources and are unable to go on because they have exhausted all their capabilities, their capacity. The consequence of occupational burnout as an element associated with occupational expulsion is depressive states.

Coping with stress is a process that serves to adapt to difficult situations. Every person makes an effort to solve a problem that poses a significant challenge to him. The decision on how to deal with it depends on the specifics of the situation and the character traits of the individual himself.

When encountering difficult situations that cause stress, people's emotions become very intense. The focus then is usually on trying to regulate and control them instead of looking for ways to overcome the difficulties. In contrast, when it comes to challenges that are perceived as positive or negative, emotions may already be more varied. Therefore, a person does not need to devote as much energy to opposing them and can concentrate more on facing the difficulties at hand (Ogińska-Bulik, 2006, p. 89).

The way a person perceives an event, influences how he or she will behave in subsequent stages of life, which may result in a modification of the original interpretation of the situation.

Accordingly, the initiatives taken by a person are directed at reducing negative circumstances and controlling emotions, related to the difficulties at hand. According to Bartkowiak (2009, pp. 28-29), stress coping has two key functions that in most cases form a synergy, these are:

- instrumental (task-based) - which focuses on resolving difficulties and improving the individual's relationship with the environment. The individual takes action to reduce the impact of the stressor or eliminate it altogether by correcting the potentially harmful environment or his own behavior.
- emotional (self-regulation of emotions), which is aimed at reducing emotional tension and controlling negative emotions (Bishop, 2000, p. 198).

Coping with stress depends on the perception of the threat, but at the same time can introduce changes in the assessment of the situation. Successful coping with stress usually requires both controlling emotions and actions with which to transform a stressful situation into a favorable one.

An important element in the fight against stress can be a properly developed and implemented personnel management system, combined with an effective incentive system. It will undoubtedly influence productivity in the right way, as well as allow to counteract and level out or at least minimize the effects of stress in the short term.

4. Motivation as Part of Minimizing Stress in the Workplace

Motivation can be defined as a comprehensive concept referring to the various factors and processes that guide and stimulate human behavior. It is considered an important element that affects the interpretation of human activity, including its direction, intensity and course (Lubrańska 2017, p. 136).

Motivation refers to two different concepts. First, it is a mental state that causes an individual to take action to reduce internal tension. Second, it is a personality trait that affects an individual's tendency to engage in certain behaviors. When one talks about work motivation, one then examines a person's characteristic behaviors to determine whether he or she is motivated in any way for a particular job (Osuch, 2012, p. 102).

As Berny, Leśniewski and Górski (2012, p. 80) state, motivation is a key factor affecting the effectiveness of any person's actions. It can be defined as the stimulus that spurs people to perform given activities. This is because motivation provides energy and influences the persistence and intensity of actions, making it possible to achieve goals and plans. It is a set of forces that make people behave in a certain way (Griffin, 1997, p. 458).

Following the research on work motivation produced over the past several decades, one can draw the conclusion that interrelated external and internal factors creating synergy are able to influence people's behavior. As noted by Pocztowski (2018, p. 228), work motivation is a sequence of activities in which an employee identifies unmet needs, identifies conditions and solutions to meet them, takes action to achieve goals and perform tasks. Successes and failures are evaluated, and the employee is rewarded or punished, which affects the level of fulfillment of needs. This, in turn, can lead to the emergence of new needs or a change in current ones

Motivation influences behavior, goals and achievements, and can take different forms, which depend on the values that each individual pursues. Taking these into account, two types of motivation can be distinguished, namely: intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation (Lubrańska, 2017, pp. 136- 137).

Intrinsic motivation is the force that drives people to act because of individual beliefs, needs and goals. It is the stimulus that occurs spontaneously and leads people to behave or act in a certain way (Griffin, 1997, p. 458). What makes intrinsic motivation so important is that it is one of the main elements that determine performance and success in life. It is based on three main factors:

- autonomy,
- competencies,
- affiliation (Deci and Ryan, 2000a, pp. 68-78; Deci and Ryan, 2000b, pp. 227-268).

Intrinsically motivated people do not need rewards to achieve a goal. The very process of pursuing it is motivating enough for them (Szulawski, 2017, pp. 70-71). They derive satisfaction from their work and from the self-discipline that leads to the acquisition of the designated activities.

Extrinsic motivation, on the other hand, is the force that prompts people to act due to incentives or rewards from the surrounding environment (Sęczkowska, 2023, https://www.welbi.pl/motywacja-zewnetrzna-na-czym-polega-przyklady/).

There are different types of extrinsic motivation, namely these include material rewards, praise, punishment, or social pressure. This motivation is often based on the fear of punishment or the hope of receiving a reward, which in many cases can lead to unhealthy pressure, competition and stress, but it can also positively influence behavior and goal achievement, especially when combined with intrinsic motivation (Pocztowski, 2018, p. 234).

Good performance or rewards can confirm an employee's competence and increase his or her desire to continue working. Extrinsic motivation is particularly important in the context of work. Bosses often use various motivational tools, such as bonuses, praise, competitions or awards, to increase their employees' commitment (Huculak, 2015, p. 420). These techniques can help achieve much better results, as well as have a positive impact on crew morale and the perception of the organization as employee-friendly.

From the point of view of motivation as a stressor, it can also be positive or negative. Negative motivation is mainly based on fear of the consequences of not doing the job or doing it in an unsatisfactory way; such as losing part of the salary or demotion (Zając, 2014, p. 188). The individual then acts under pressure to avoid negative consequences, and not because they want to achieve something or contribute to the success of the company.

Employees who constantly live in fear of punishment may feel discouraged and dissatisfied with their work, stressed and often professionally burned out. Positive motivation, on the other hand, involves the pursuit of goals (Bańka, 2016, p. 20).

These can include higher pay, promotion, bonuses, greater autonomy, or recognition (Zając, 2014, p. 188). Given this approach, an employee acts to achieve goals and results that are valuable and desirable to him or herself. Positive motivation focuses on reinforcing employees' good behavior and performance, which leads to greater commitment, productivity and job satisfaction.

It is important for employers to use positive motivation appropriately and effectively by setting clear, or measurable, goals and outcomes, rewarding employee performance on an ongoing basis, and showing appreciation (Moczydłowska, 2008, p. 148). As a result, working individuals, are more aware of their successes and more

motivated to continue creating good results and a better atmosphere in the workplace.

Taking into account the above observations, motivational factors can be divided into three basic groups, namely (Półtoraczyk, 2011, p. 228):

- Tangible financial (i.e., factors related to remuneration: base salaries, bonuses, financial gratuities, various types of allowances, social benefits of a financial nature, stocks or shares in the company, etc.).
- Tangible non-financial (all components that do not directly contribute to the employee's income, but generate costs for the company: covering or subsidizing the costs of training, courses and studies, financing participation in conferences, allowances, subsidizing pre-school care, providing private health care, offering group insurance and employee policies, passes to the gym or sports facilities, tickets to cultural and entertainment centers, business tools such as a car, phone, laptop or apartment).
- Intangible (factors due to which the company does not generate additional costs: praise and awards for good work, received titles, certificates and diplomas, prestige associated with working in a well-known and respected company, holding a senior position, promotions in the company's hierarchy, greater scope of responsibility, the opportunity to participate in decision-making, use of modern work tools and priority in its exchange, flexible working hours, etc.).

In today's labor market, managers should create comprehensive and personalized incentive systems that are transparent and fair to both employees and the organization. Unfortunately, some of them mix up the concept of action with purpose, making them focus only on the impact on employees, without analyzing the results of the consequences in question.

As a result, unstructured and incorrect motivational tools are created in companies, which should be structured and linked together into a coherent whole (Karna and Knap-Stefaniuk, 2017, pp. 161-171). In addition, it is important to consider not only financial and non-financial benefits, but also intangible and psychological elements when creating an incentive system (Soroka-Potrzebna, 2016, pp. 882-890).

Of course, salary measures often increase the level of employee productivity, but more and more attention is being paid to the fact that this is a short-term or even counterproductive motivator. Therefore, it is worth building a motivational system based on a variety of incentives, taking into account the various needs of employees, in order to achieve long-term effects and improve work efficiency.

Because a properly functioning motivational system, (Pęcek and Walas-Trębacz, 2018, pp. 17-18) is an integral part of personnel policy, and its task is to influence a better perception of the organization in the environment, increase employee

involvement, as well as their productivity, and brings a positive impact on minimizing the generation of stressful situations in daily existence.

5. Research Results and Discussion

The survey on the impact of stress and the incentive system in the workplace on the process and degree of employee satisfaction with their jobs was conducted using a survey form available online from May 1-13, 2024. It was participated by 478 respondents, while for formal reasons the responses of 423 respondents were considered for further analysis.

In the surveyed group, the vast majority were men, 62.5%, while women accounted for 37.5% of the sample. From an age point of view, those aged 18 to 25 and 26 to 35 accounted for 72% of all participants included in the survey. The remaining individuals fell into the age categories: 36 to 45 years (22%) and over 45 years (6%).

About 35% of the respondents were those whose tenure at their current company was between 1 and 3 years. The next group were those who have been employed for 4 to 6 years (31%), followed by those who have been in their current position for less than 1 year (20.5%).

Those who have been working in one company for the longest time, from 7 to 10 years, accounted for 9% of the respondents, while those with more than 10 years of seniority accounted for 4.5%. The largest group of respondents (48%) were white-collar workers

The next most numerous groups were physical workers (31%) and mental-physical workers (21%). The vast majority of respondents were employed in large enterprises (60.5%). About 28% of respondents were employed in medium-sized enterprises, 10% in small enterprises, and only 1.5% in micro enterprises.

Among the people surveyed, about 86% confirmed that workplace stress is a phenomenon they are familiar with and frequently affects them. As the survey showed, for 11% of the respondents, stress in the workplace is a phenomenon that hardly affects their daily existence or is completely foreign (3%).

Among the respondents who agreed with the statement that they experience stressful situations at work, the two largest groups were those claiming that stressful situations are experienced by them several times a week (31.3%), several times a month this feeling accompanies 30.4% of respondents.

The next groups were individuals who feel stress in the workplace every day (20.9%), while more than 17% of respondents describe the intensity of this phenomenon as "rarely occurring."

Figure 1. *Frequency of feeling stressed in the situation at the current job*
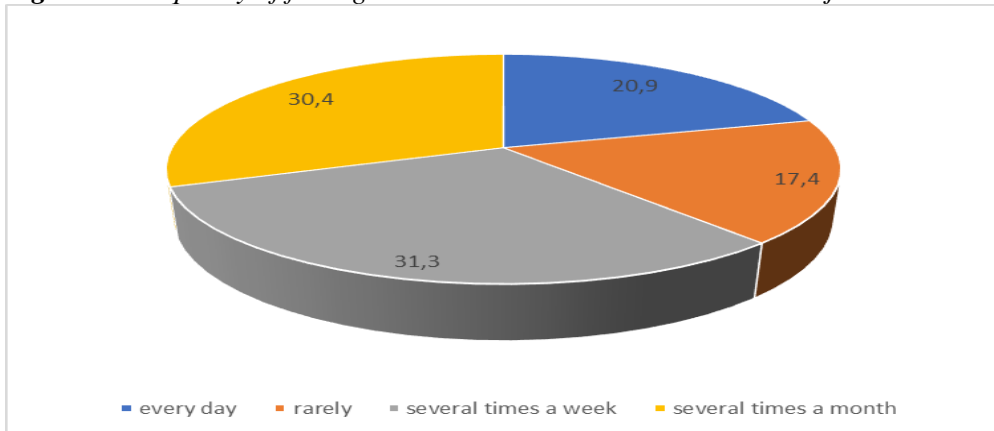
Source: Own research.

The most common and acute stressor, according to the respondents surveyed, is the awareness of the specter of dismissal. On a 5-point scale, this factor was rated at 3.22. The work performed on a daily basis for the vast majority of employees surveyed is often a key source of income, financial stability and a sense of security regardless of the position held.

Awareness that it can be lost can create anxiety about the loss of liquidity and future difficulties in supporting oneself and one's family, and can consequently lead to a sense of uncertainty about one's continued existence. The next most common stressors declared by the respondents were excessive responsibilities often associated with work overload and excessive responsibilities associated with their positions (3,14).

An important stressor is also the time pressure associated with the activities, which many of the respondents could not cope with. (3,04). Other frequently declared factors causing stress and frustration among employees were also the lack of substantive support from both the bosses and co-workers in equivalent positions, as well as frequent interpersonal conflicts of various kinds arising in the workplace.

In addition, unclear requirements for the scope of duties performed, as well as material liability imposed on employees for duties poorly performed in the opinion of the bosses, were also important stressors.

As the survey showed, for about 31% of the respondents the source of stress is the very coming to work and doing it, which is often the result or consequence of long-term stress. About 27% of those surveyed said that the source of this stress is the bosses themselves and their inept style of managing both the company and employees, as well as their inappropriate, unfriendly approach to employees.

**Figure 2.** *Stress factors related to the place of employment*
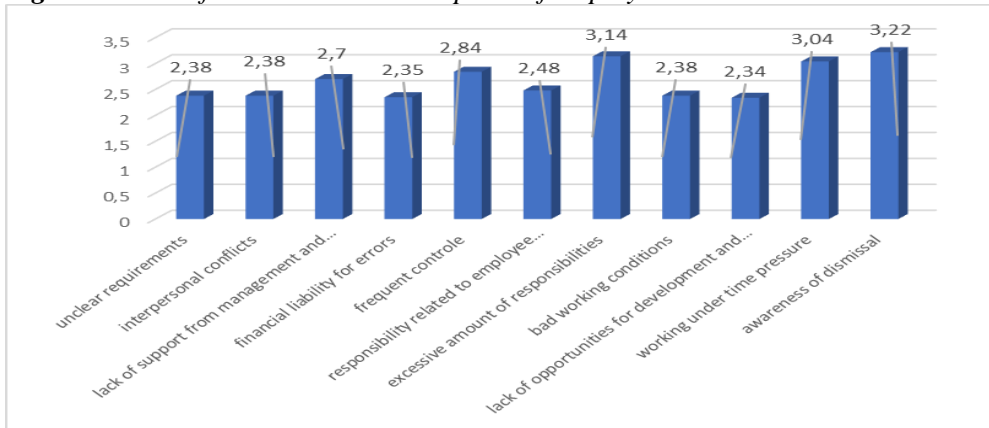
Source: *Own research.*

For more than 21% of those holding managerial or executive positions in particular, a stressful factor is the process of managing subordinate staff and holding staff accountable for their duties, as well as the process of evaluating and selecting employees, especially in the largest companies, where employee turnover tends to be the highest.

For more than 17% of the respondents, the source of stress are co-workers, as well as the often hostile atmosphere prevailing among the crew of people working in equivalent positions, where employees often cannot count on help or substantive support in situations that are critical for them, especially in the initial period of employment in a given company. This often generated a lot of stressful and conflict-causing situations. In the case of 2.6% of respondents, the source of stress is difficult and demanding customers that employees encounter on a daily basis while performing professional activities, precisely related to direct customer service.

**Figure 3.** *The greatest sources of stress at work according to respondents*
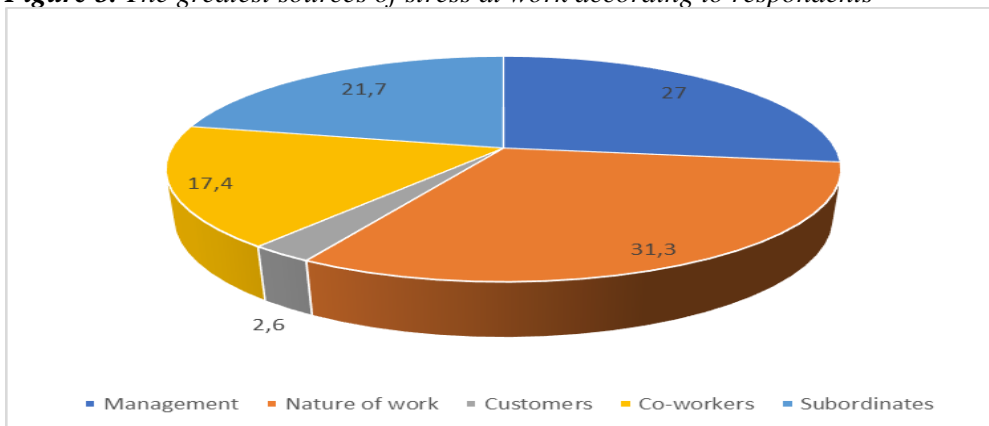
Source: *Own research.*

An important element in the process of combating stress is the proper recognition of the symptoms accompanying stressful situations. In most cases, respondents declared increased nervousness (2.90) as the most common symptom of stress related to their place of employment and work. Immediately following it, in very close average evaluation parameters were: confusion in the head (2.58), faster heartbeat (2.57), sweaty palms (2.56) and headache (2.55).

Other declared symptoms also included trembling hands, abdominal pain, irritability, and sleep problems. Among the significant consequences of experiencing stress in the workplace, and chronic stress in particular, is (as declared by the respondents) a pronounced reluctance to perform work, and consequently, in the long run, increased and ever-worsening employee absenteeism.

Figure 4. *Symptoms of stress related to the workplace*
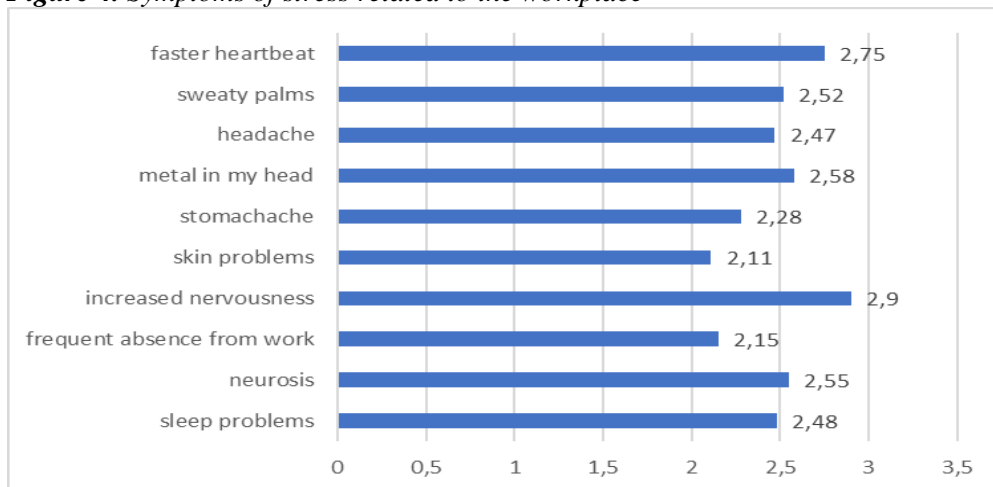
Source: Own research.

According to the vast majority of respondents (88.7%), stress, especially long-term stress, can have many negative consequences, reflecting particularly on the health situation of those in this condition. The rest of the respondents, especially the youngest in both age and seniority, were unable to take a clear position on this issue (8.7%), while 2.6% of the respondents felt that stress is unlikely to affect health in the future. In their opinion, stressful situations should not have chronic effects affecting the health of employees in the future.

An important element in the daily performance of work activities is the ability and development of effective ways to cope with stress. According to the respondents, the most effective ways to minimize or level out this condition may be: more frequent breaks during work activities, which, according to the respondents, may involve mental rest and detachment of thoughts from stressors, at least for a while (63.5%).

Figure 5. *Assessment of the effects of stress on long-term health consequences*
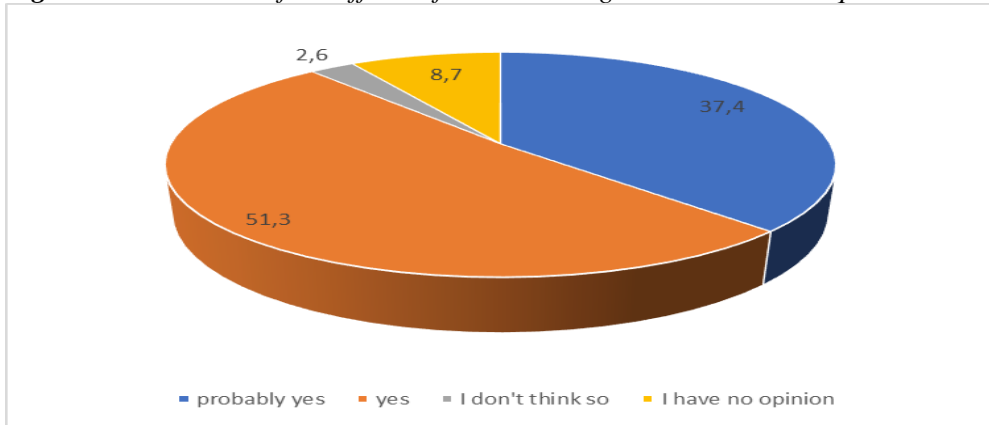
Source: Own research

Another of the declared ways was physical activity during breaks between work activities, especially those of a stationary nature (46.1%), as well as proper planning and distribution of time to perform the tasks entrusted to the employee (41.7%), thus counteracting the above-declared pressure of time needed to perform the duties imposed by the employer.

However, a very common and widely used way to combat the symptoms of stress is, unfortunately, still widely used pharmacology (30.4%) to reduce the feeling of mental discomfort in the employee. Meetings, as well as conversations with co-workers or professionals experienced in psychological assistance in stressful situations, are also an important way (30.4%).

Less common ways of coping with stress were pursuing hobbies (21.7%), using various types of relaxation techniques (26.1%), or a well-balanced diet (9.6%).

**Figure 6.** *Known and used measures to combat stress at work*
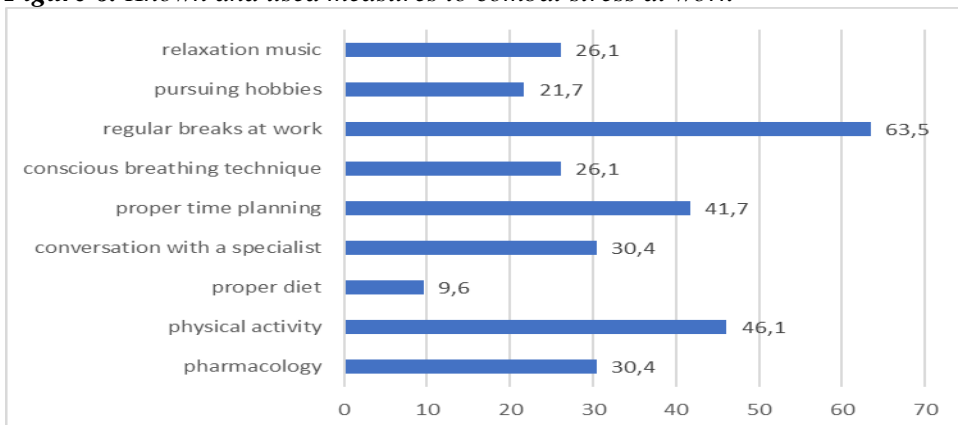
Source: Own research.

The survey also made it possible to determine the degree of satisfaction of employees with their work, as well as to identify motivational elements that affect the compensation of the acute effects of stress declared above.

As the survey showed, more than 33% of the people surveyed responded that despite the many difficulties and stressful situations, they are definitely satisfied with their current place of employment and their work, as well as the functioning of the incentive system at the workplace.

For 30.4% of people, the duties performed rather allow them to develop and realize themselves professionally. More than 20% of respondents are those who are rather not satisfied with either their position or the atmosphere at their workplace. More than 13% of respondents would most willingly and as soon as possible change their current job.

**Figure 7.** *Respondents' satisfaction with their work*
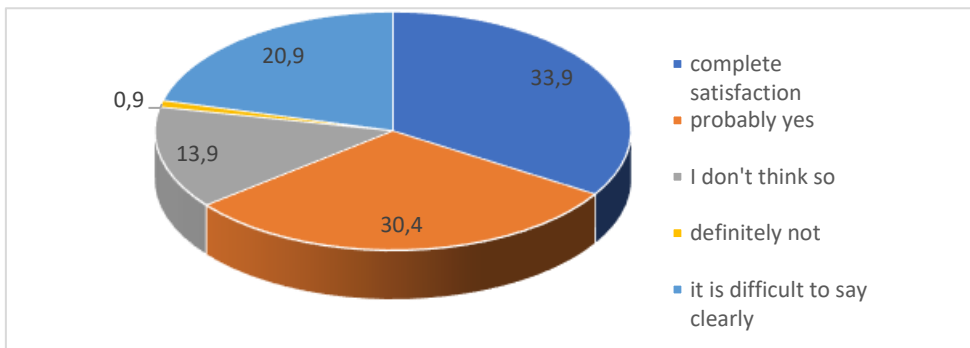
Source: Own research.

According to the survey, in more than half of the respondents (54.8%), the workplace unfortunately does not offer any means or formalized programs to help employees deal with stress. This may be due to the owners' lack of interest in this phenomenon and the personnel policies in place at the workplace in question, or insufficient financial resources that could be allocated for this very purpose.

Only for about 27% of those surveyed, their workplace provides employees with access to various forms of assistance to combat stressors, or there is a policy in place to level stress in the workplace. The remaining respondents (18.3%) do not know or are not aware of how this issue works at their companies.

According to more than 78% of those surveyed, extensive tools and measures to combat stress or avoid stressful situations should be the responsibility of the employer. Which, in their opinion, would significantly boost the morale of the crew, as well as warm up the workplace climate and the effectiveness of the duties performed by the crew.

Figure 8. *The company's offering of programs or services aimed at helping employees cope with stress*
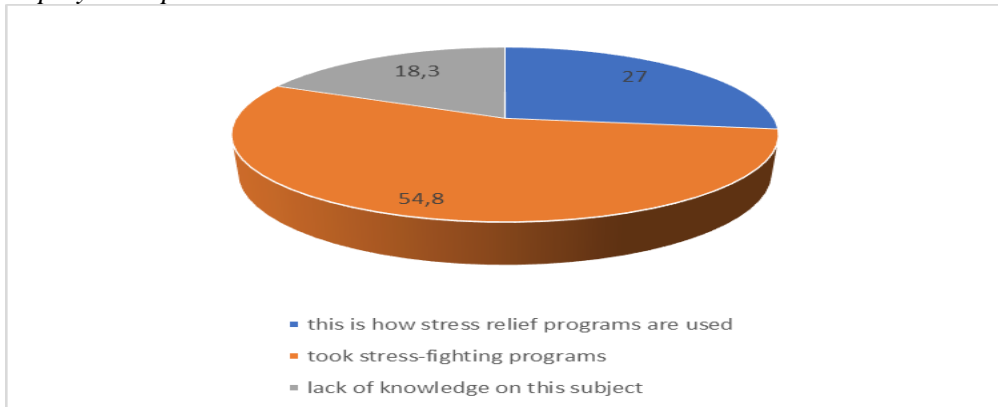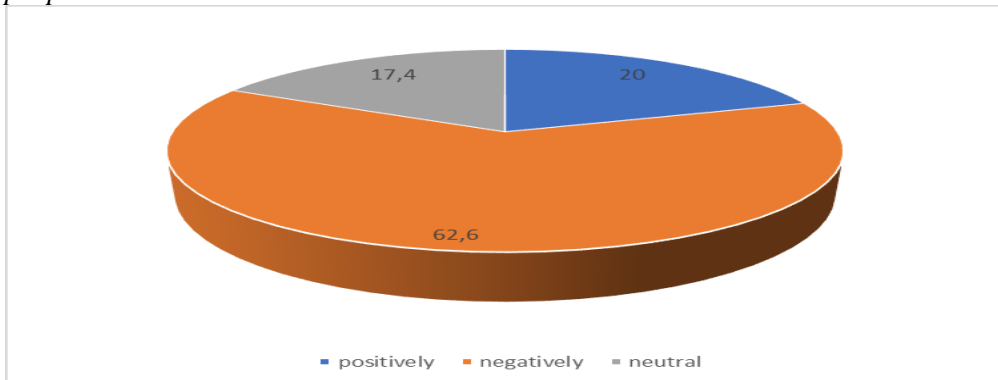

Source: Own research.

More than 16% of the respondents did not express their opinion on the subject, and more than 6% of the respondents said that it is rather not or definitely not the responsibility of the company's management to level stress, because according to this part of the respondents, stress is such a common phenomenon in human life that it is the employee himself who should develop appropriate coping mechanisms in his body.

More than half of the respondents unequivocally stated (62.6%) that stress induced in the workplace negatively affects their daily existence as well as their motivation and productivity at work. For a large proportion of respondents (20%), however, a moderate level of stress is an important stimulant and a positive influence on work motivation, thereby raising an employee's productivity and motivation in the workplace (depending, of course, on the intensity and frequency of its occurrence).

Figure 9. *The impact of stress in the workplace on the motivation of the surveyed people*
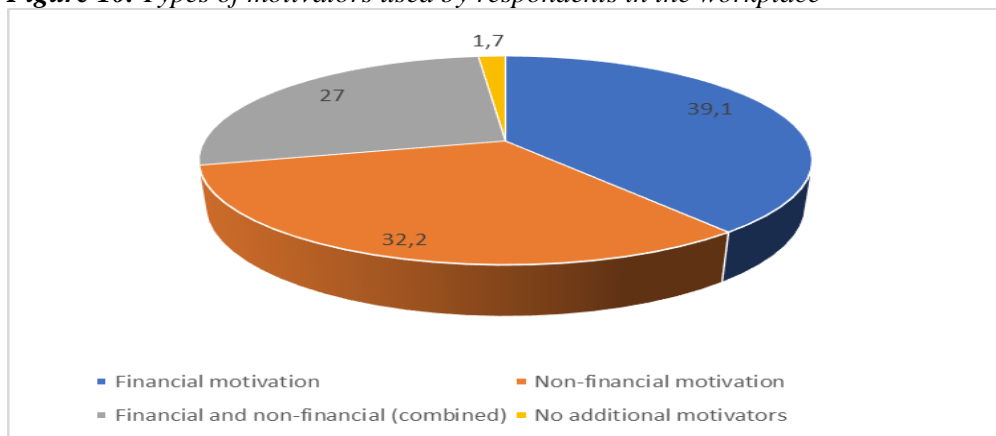

Source: Own research.

According to the majority of respondents (72.2%), reducing the number of stressors in the workplace would definitely have a positive effect on motivation, quality and efficiency of work performed.

On the other hand, according to 13% of respondents, leveling stressors to a minimum and building an organization that is too employee-friendly would have rather negative motivational effects in the form of loosening the atmosphere and morale in the workplace, thus lowering the efficiency as well as productivity of the workforce. About 1.7% of respondents had no clear opinion on the subject, or said that these measures were unlikely to have an impact on the motivation process.

The survey revealed that on the issue of feeling motivated to work in their workplaces, respondents have divided opinions. Only about 8% of respondents were strongly in favor of the full effectiveness and satisfaction with the principles of the motivation system in place at their workplace. About 24.3% of the surveyed units said that they were rather satisfied with the existing motivational system at their workplace, while on the other hand, more than 27% of people said that the motivators at their workplaces were rather unsatisfactory. More than 20% of respondents explicitly expressed that they were not satisfied with the current incentive system.

More than 39% of respondents confirm that the company that employs them has only a financial incentive system, which, in their opinion, does not fully reduce stress and improve the perception of the organization as more friendly. The use of non-financial motivators in the workplace was declared by more than 32.2%, while combined types of motivators, i.e., financial and non-financial, were declared by 27% of respondents. In the case of 1.7% of respondents, no additional forms of work incentives were recorded to motivate them to improve the effectiveness of their work and satisfaction with their employment at that place.

Figure 10. *Types of motivators used by respondents in the workplace*

Source: *Own research.*

Among the most frequently cited objections directed at shortcomings in the incentive system were:

- No clearly defined rules for the incentive system,
- Too few non-wage incentive forms,
- Difficult access to obtaining additional incentives, due to the excessive requirements for obtaining them,
- Lack of appropriate approach to the employee,
- Rarely occurring motivational impulses,
- Failure to include all employees in the motivation process,
- Lack of use of developed and effective personnel marketing instruments.

6. Conclusions

Stress is an increasingly common phenomenon in human life, especially in the work environment. It can result from a variety of factors, such as excessive workload, lack of control over a task, interpersonal conflicts or opaque communication. These elements affect motivation levels by increasing anxiety, lowering the sense of competence and making it difficult to focus on tasks.

It is important for supervisors to be aware of the negative effects of stress and take appropriate measures to reduce it. Creating a healthy work environment, promoting work-life balance, offering support and stress management tools are key components that can help increase employee motivation.

The main objective of the study, which was to find out how stress in the workplace affects employee motivation and how effective the motivation system is at workplaces, was realized. The results obtained proved that stress occurs in the workplace for many people.

Stress usually has a negative impact on the employee's motivation, but at the same time it also stimulates them to be more committed during work. On the other hand, the principles and instruments used to motivate the employee contribute rather little to reducing the level of stress in the workplace.

As the survey showed, the vast majority of respondents succumb to the phenomenon of stress in the workplace, which does not positively affect their state of motivation or health. Typically, these individuals are young, between the ages of 18 and 35, holding positions in their current company for 1 to 6 years. These individuals can experience stressful situations several times a month or even a week, which is also not a good sign.

One can conclude that they are in a state of perpetual tension and imbalance of peace of mind. Nearly 1/3 of respondents admitted that the biggest source of stress for

them is the nature of work itself, which is usually associated with performing excessive duties under too much time pressure. An additional, as well as the biggest stressor related to the sphere of professional life is the awareness of the possibility of firing a particular employee.

The majority of respondents also expressed that long-term consequences affecting their health can be caused by the effects of induced stress, and among them is: increased nervousness, faster heartbeat, sweaty palms, irritability, hand trembling and feeling tired. Each work unit tries to cope with this phenomenon by all means appropriate to its personality traits.

Unfortunately, for more than half of the respondents, there are no programs or services in the workplace to help employees cope with stressful situations, implemented by the employing company, although they believe that reducing the level of this phenomenon in the workplace would have a positive impact on their motivation. A large proportion of those surveyed also said that, on the one hand, stressors in the work environment negatively affect their motivation, while, on the other hand, they stimulate the individual to be more committed to the tasks at hand.

As a result, they feel satisfaction with the position they are taking on and are professionally fulfilled. Although there are usually various types of motivational systems in place at the companies in question, their effectiveness is not as satisfactory as expected. This can be caused, for example, by a lack of clear goals and rules, injustice, lack of consistency, individualization, development opportunities and the non-existence of adequate communication or feedback.

Therefore, it is necessary to ensure the development of a proper stress reduction system and counteracting stressful situations in every organization. A properly developed motivational system, especially non-financial, and effective and diversified use of personnel marketing instruments in the workplace can be helpful in the process of minimizing stress levels as well as creating the image of an employee-friendly organization.

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