

Exploring Pathways to Enhance Employee Resilience to Cope with Work Stress

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ABSTRACT

With the acceleration of digital transformation and intensified workplace competition, work stress has become a core factor affecting employee well-being and organizational performance. A 2023 World Health Organization (WHO) report indicates that approximately 35% of workers worldwide experience psychological problems such as anxiety and burnout due to chronic work stress. As a key psychological capacity for coping with stress, the cultivation and improvement of employee resilience has become a research focus in organizational management and occupational health. Based on literature research and theoretical analysis, this paper systematically explores multiple pathways to enhance employee resilience, incorporating classic frameworks such as resource conservation theory and psychological capital theory. Research indicates that enhancing employee resilience requires more than a single-dimensional intervention; rather, it requires a coordinated system of "individual empowerment, organizational support, and social protection": At the individual level, emotional management, cognitive restructuring, and health management skills must be strengthened; at the organizational level, flexibility systems, mental health support, and a positive culture must be improved; and at the societal level, a solid external foundation must be established through policy regulations, cultural guidance, and public services. This article's findings can provide practical references for companies to optimize human resource management and reduce employee turnover. They also offer theoretical insights for subsequent research in the field of occupational mental health, ultimately contributing to a mutually beneficial relationship between employee personal development and organizational sustainability.

KEYWORDS

Employee Resilience; Workplace Stress; Resource Conservation Theory; Organizational Support; Occupational Mental Health

1. INTRODUCTION

Since the third decade of the 21st century, the wave of digitalization has profoundly reshaped the workplace landscape—with blurred boundaries for remote work, stricter performance appraisals, and intensified industry competition—turning workplace stress from an isolated phenomenon into a widespread problem. The "2023 China Workplace Mental Health Survey Report" reveals that 82% of employees in my country's internet, finance, and healthcare industries have experienced sustained work stress over the past six months. 45% of these employees have experienced reduced productivity and interpersonal conflict due to stress, and 18% have resigned due to prolonged high stress. This highlights the importance of stress coping skills for employee retention and organizational stability. "Resilience" originates from psychology and has been extended to organizational behavior. It refers to an individual's ability to quickly adjust their mindset, restore work function, and grow in the face of adversity and stress. Unlike traditional "stress relief" approaches, which rely on passive endurance, resilience emphasizes active adaptation. Its core objective is to build employees' long-term resilience

through capacity building and resource accumulation. Current academic research on employee resilience focuses primarily on theoretical definitions and influencing factors, while practical exploration of "systematic improvement pathways" remains insufficient. Some companies rely solely on superficial interventions such as team building and single-session psychological counseling, failing to achieve effective results. Some employees, lacking scientific methods, are trapped in a cycle of "stress-anxiety-low productivity." Based on this, this article focuses on "enhancing employee resilience to cope with work stress." By integrating theoretical and current conflicting approaches, it explores three-dimensional intervention pathways: individual, organizational, and societal. This research is rigorously based on authoritative literature, industry reports, and policy documents, and avoids fabricated case studies to ensure its conclusions are actionable. The research's value lies in providing employees with practical resilience-enhancing methods to help them overcome stress dilemmas. It also provides a reference for companies designing "resilience-oriented" human resource plans and for society to improve its occupational health protection system. Ultimately, it aims to build a stress response ecosystem characterized by "individual resilience, organizational support, and social protection," thereby promoting a shift from "high-pressure exhaustion" to "healthy development" in the workplace.

2. THEORETICAL BASIS OF EMPLOYEE RESILIENCE AND WORK STRESS

To explore pathways to enhance employee resilience, it is necessary to first clarify the core meanings and theoretical connections between "resilience" and "work stress" to provide a logical foundation for subsequent path design. Conceptually, the theoretical foundation of work stress is Hobfoll's (1989) "Conservation of Resources Theory," whose core concept is that work stress is essentially "an individual's perceived loss of resources" or "the unavailability of expected resources." "Resources" here encompass material, physical, and personal characteristics. When employees face "task overload," "role conflict," or "career bottlenecks," stress arises. Long-term inability to replenish resources can lead to burnout and turnover. The theoretical underpinning of employee resilience is Luthans et al.'s (2004) "Psychological Capital Theory." This theory defines psychological capital as "an individual's positive psychological state," encompassing four dimensions: self-efficacy, optimism, hope, and resilience. Resilience specifically refers to "the ability to bounce back quickly and maintain work motivation in the face of adversity." Employee resilience can be broken down into three sub-capacities: first, "psychological adjustment," or the ability to control emotions and avoid negative states under stress; second, "resource reconstruction," or the ability to identify available resources in response to stress; and third, "growth transformation," or the ability to leverage stressful events to enhance coping skills [1]. Together, these three components constitute the psychological defense against stress. Theoretically, work stress and employee resilience exhibit a dynamic interaction. On the one hand, moderate stress can stimulate resilience potential—after overcoming moderate stress, employees' psychological adjustment and resource reconstruction abilities strengthen, forming a positive cycle of "stress-coping-growth." On the other hand, excessive or prolonged stress depletes resilience reserves. If employees experience continuous "resource depletion" and lack external support, their resilience declines, ultimately leading to a negative cycle of "stress overload-resilience deficit-work disability." Therefore, the core logic for improving resilience lies in "capacity development + resource replenishment," aligning resilience levels with stress intensity and avoiding a negative cycle. While theoretical research on employee resilience is mature, the connection between theory and practice is insufficient. Some companies understand resilience solely as "psychological toughness," neglecting key dimensions such as "resource reconstruction" and "growth transformation," resulting in limited intervention effectiveness. Subsequent intervention design must be anchored in theory to ensure that intervention targets align with the core sub-competencies of resilience, while also integrating the actual sources of stress to achieve "precise intervention."

3. CURRENT STATUS AND CONFLICTS BETWEEN EMPLOYEE WORKPLACE STRESS AND RESILIENCE

To design an effective resilience-enhancing pathway, it is necessary to first clarify the realities of employee workplace stress and resilience, identifying the core conflicts and ensuring targeted intervention. Current employee stress is characterized by diverse sources and long-term intensity. The "2023 China Workplace Stress Sources Survey Report" reveals that "excessively high performance goals" (68%), "career development uncertainty" (56%), and "difficulties in balancing work and life" (52%) are the primary sources of stress. New stressors such as "intense interpersonal competition" (43%) and "blurred boundaries of remote work" (38%) have emerged [2]. The internet industry's "flexible overtime" and "always-on" nature leads to a lack of physical and mental rest. The medical industry, however, faces chronic high alert due to "doctor-patient tension" and "frequent night shifts." Furthermore, stress persists throughout the career cycle: new employees face pressure to adapt their skills, mid-level managers face promotion bottlenecks, and veteran employees struggle with technological iterations, all of which can easily trigger chronic stress reactions. A 2022 Beijing Normal University study showed that employees experiencing chronic stress have cortisol levels 23% higher than normal, leading to memory loss and irritability. Employee resilience, on the other hand, has a "weak foundation and uneven development." The "2023 China Employee Resilience Status Survey" shows that only 28% of employees actively use mindfulness and other emotional management methods, while 35% tend to avoid stress. Most employees rely on personal resources like family support when faced with stress, and less than 15% utilize organizational EAP services and industry training. Significant differences exist across industries and positions: Employees in high-pressure industries like finance and the internet industry have an average resilience score of 3.2/5, slightly higher than those in education and administration (2.8/5). However, grassroots employees (2.7/5) are significantly lower than management (3.5/5). This is primarily due to management's greater control over resources, leaving grassroots employees passively following suit. The core conflict between these two is the mismatch between stress intensity and resilience: first, short-term peak stress exceeds resilience limits; second, long-term cumulative stress depletes resilience; and third, the conflict between diverse stress sources and a singular focus on emotional relief, with interventions often focusing on emotional relief rather than cognitive adjustment. Furthermore, the lack of intervention actors exacerbates this conflict: some companies relegate stress management to individual employees and are reluctant to invest in support systems; social occupational health services are inadequate; and employees lack scientific knowledge, often seeking help only after their resilience has depleted, missing the opportunity. These contradictions make improving employee resilience a pressing and pressing issue.

4. INDIVIDUAL LEVEL: THE SELF-EMPOWERMENT PATH FOR EMPLOYEE RESILIENCE

Individuals are the core carriers of resilience. Improving resilience requires strengthening self-empowerment. Through proactive practice, they build a solid foundation for coping with stress from the perspectives of psychological capacity and resource health.

4.1. Cultivating Psychological Capabilities: Strengthening Emotional and Cognitive Defenses

Psychological capacity is the core foundation of resilience, requiring a two-pronged approach of emotional management and cognitive restructuring. Emotional management follows a three-step process of "awareness-regulation-release." First, record the emotions associated with stressful events in a diary to identify triggers. Then, use mindfulness meditation, deep breathing, and other methods to relieve immediate stress. A 2021 Harvard Medical School study showed that 10 minutes of

mindfulness daily can reduce stress hormones by 20%. Apps like "Tide" offer free guidance. Finally, release emotions through sharing with colleagues, exercising, or engaging in company-wide psychological counseling sessions to avoid pent-up emotions. Cognitive restructuring relies on Seligman's optimism theory, using the "ABCDE model" for training: A represents a stressful event, B represents the perception of the event, C represents the cognitive outcome, D represents refuting negative perceptions, and E represents developing a positive state. Long-term practice can help employees break free from catastrophic thinking and reduce internal stress [3].

4.2. Resource and Health Management: Strengthening Skills and Physiological Foundations

Resource accumulation and physical health are the fundamental foundations of resilience. Skill improvement is promoted through a "goal-learning-practice" approach: Integrate career planning with identifying skill gaps, systematically learn through platforms like Chinese university MOOCs and Coursera, gain practical experience through industry communities, and then proactively take on tasks requiring new skills to consolidate competence through practice. According to resource conservation theory, skill improvement replenishes personal resources, reduces stress at its root, and enhances self-efficacy, which is the core of resilience. Health management focuses on sleep, exercise, and diet: Follow hygienic sleep principles, maintain a regular sleep schedule, and minimize the use of electronic devices before bed. The "China Sleep Research Report 2023" shows that employees who sleep 7-8 hours a day are 35% more able to cope with stress than those who sleep less than 6 hours. Choose moderate-intensity aerobic exercise, such as brisk walking or swimming, three times a week for 30 minutes each time to promote endorphin secretion and relieve anxiety. Reduce your diet from high-sugar and high-fat foods and increase your intake of deep-sea fish and nuts rich in omega-3s to stabilize your mood. The core of a personal path is initiative, and improving resilience should be viewed as a long-term investment [4]. For example, an internet programmer reduced overtime anxiety and increased productivity by 20% in six months by practicing "10 minutes of mindfulness daily, weekly skill development, and monthly hiking." This demonstrates that only by internalizing these methods into habits can one truly enhance resilience and cope with chronic work pressure.

5. ORGANIZATIONAL LEVEL: BUILDING A SUPPORT SYSTEM FOR EMPLOYEE RESILIENCE

Organizations are the core context for employees' work and a key factor in improving resilience. They must provide external support to employees through system optimization, resource investment, and cultural cultivation to alleviate the "stress-resilience mismatch." On the one hand, systems and resource provision must be used to reduce stressors and alleviate development anxieties. In terms of work systems, flexible design should be implemented. For example, Microsoft will implement a "flexible get off work schedule plus one day per week for remote work." After its implementation in 2022, employees' work-life balance will improve by 40% and stress will decrease by 25%, minimizing conflicts between commuting and family matters. For task management, a "priority negotiation mechanism" should be established. For example, one consulting firm uses weekly task confirmation to reduce unnecessary overtime. In assessments, a focus on KPIs should be reduced. Some departments at ByteDance are piloting a "OKR + process feedback" program to encourage employees to focus more on their growth. In terms of career development, supporting resources are provided: one-on-one career counseling clarifies the path. For example, Baidu's mentoring system requires senior employees to provide one year of guidance to new employees, helping them establish three-year goals. Specialized training is provided to address capability gaps. JD.com's "Jingying Plan" uses "rotational work combined with executive mentoring" to help high-potential employees gain experience and reduce anxiety caused by future uncertainty, creating a positive cycle of "development-stress reduction-resilience enhancement." On the other hand, "psychological and

cultural support" is needed to fill intervention gaps and strengthen psychological security. Mental health support focuses on effectiveness, relying on the EAP employee assistance program, covering aspects such as stress management and emotional regulation. Alibaba's EAP provides a full-process service of "assessment-solution-tracking", with a participation rate of 60%. At the same time, a 24-hour consultation portal is set up through WeChat and internal apps to ensure privacy, and managers are trained to identify employee stress and prevent problems from escalating. Actively fostering a culture strengthens implicit support: Regarding tolerance, Huawei's "2012 Lab" incorporates a "tolerance checklist," excluding innovation errors from assessments, encouraging employees to experiment and make mistakes. Regarding collaboration, Tencent has established a technical support community where employees can post questions and seek help, strengthening interpersonal support. Regarding recognition, Meituan has established a "Resilient Employee Award" to honor employees who demonstrate resilience under high pressure, enhancing their sense of self-worth and making them more resilient under pressure [5].

6. SOCIAL LEVEL: EXTERNAL SUPPORT PATHS FOR EMPLOYEE RESILIENCE

Improving employee resilience requires building an external support system at the societal level. Through policy regulations, cultural guidance, public services, and educational reforms, we can alleviate workplace stress at a macro level and create a favorable environment for cultivating resilience. From the perspective of institutional constraints and guiding concepts, policies must establish a solid bottom line for stress prevention and control. On the one hand, we must strengthen the enforcement of working hours and strictly implement the working hour regulations of the Labor Law. In 2023, the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security cracked down on excessive overtime work at over 1,000 companies in sectors like the internet and catering industry, investigating and handling over 300 cases. Going forward, a regular oversight mechanism should be established, with open reporting channels such as the 12345 hotline and the Labor Supervision App. Performance standards should also be standardized. For example, Jiangsu Province issued the "Guidelines for Enterprise Performance Management Systems" in 2022, requiring performance targets to be negotiated and results to be appealed, thus eliminating last-place elimination and forced overtime. We must also promote occupational health legislation to include mental health protection, requiring companies to conduct regular assessments and establish stress warning mechanisms. Cultural guidance should address the misconception that "high pressure equals dedication." Mainstream media can leverage CCTV's "Workplace Health Class" to highlight resilience, and social media can create the hashtag "#HealthyWorkplaceChallenge#." Industry associations can develop conventions, such as the internet industry's "Healthy Workplace Guide." Furthermore, companies should disseminate best practices, disclosing the effectiveness of flexibility programs and EAP services through social responsibility reports, so that companies recognize that improving resilience is a long-term investment in reducing turnover and improving efficiency. From the perspective of resource supply and long-term cultivation, public services need to fill support gaps [6]. A three-tiered psychological service network can be established: communities, district and county hospitals, and municipal hospitals. Communities can establish workplace counseling centers offering free assessments, district and county hospitals can open occupational psychology clinics, and municipalities can establish crisis intervention centers. Shanghai and Shenzhen have already piloted this initiative. The government can also leverage vocational skills improvement initiatives to launch free resilience courses on the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security's "China Vocational Training Online," provide training subsidies for employees of small and medium-sized enterprises, and foster workplace mutual aid groups to share information on stress management and provide free legal advice. Educational reforms must strengthen the foundation: universities can add resilience modules to career planning courses, teaching resource conservation theory and the ABCDE model; vocational colleges can integrate time management and interpersonal communication skills into professional literacy courses;

and companies can collaborate with companies to conduct pre-internship training to help students understand the characteristics of industry pressures and build resilience, thereby reducing the initial period of workplace stress adaptation.

7. CONCLUSION

This article focuses on "enhancing employee resilience to cope with work stress." Through literature research and theoretical analysis, it identifies relevant theoretical foundations, current challenges, and proposes a path to improvement from the perspectives of individuals, organizations, and society. Research indicates that employee resilience is not an innate, fixed trait but can be enhanced through intervention. The key is to build a three-pronged collaborative system: "individual empowerment, organizational support, and social security." Individuals strengthen their emotional management skills and other abilities to build a solid foundation; organizations provide support through flexible systems and other means; and society relies on policies and regulations to provide a strong foundation. All three are essential: relying solely on individuals can be unsustainable due to resource constraints; relying solely on organizations is subject to industry disparities and policy gaps; and relying solely on society can lead to passive dependence. Practically, the conclusions provide guidance for multiple stakeholders: For employees, the individual path helps them shift from passively bearing stress to proactively coping, balancing physical, mental, and professional development. For enterprises, the organizational path optimizes human resource management, reduces turnover, improves efficiency, and achieves win-win outcomes. For society, the societal path improves occupational health protection, promotes a shift from high-pressure, exhausting workplaces to healthy development, and contributes to the national health strategy. This study has two limitations: First, it focuses on literature and theoretical analysis, lacking empirical data; second, the approach is too generic and lacks specificity. This can be further verified through data collection through questionnaires and interviews, or differentiated approaches can be designed for high-pressure industries and specific groups. The sources of workplace stress will evolve in the future, and resilience research needs to be dynamically updated. For example, to address the pressure of AI-induced occupational displacement, a "skills iteration + cognitive restructuring" approach can be explored; to address the loneliness and stress of remote work, a "virtual team support + emotion management" approach can be designed. However, the "individual-organization-society" synergy remains unchanged. Only by continuously working together can we enhance employee resilience, help them thrive under pressure, and promote the healthy development of the workplace ecosystem.

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