

## WORK STRESS OF FACILITIES MANAGERS IN THE SRI LANKAN CONTEXT

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### ABSTRACT

*Work stress has become a global phenomenon in modern day workplaces. Sri Lankan organisations is no exception and Facilities Managers are increasingly encountering stress issues relating to work day by day. Facilities Managers work environment include both hard Facilities Management (FM) and soft FM functions which is complex and constrained by time, as they run to manage and support the operational functions of their core business. Hence the pressure on Facilities Managers to produce high quality results in limited time is severe. Thus, the impact of this would be reflected on organisation's core business through unwanted loss in terms of cost and low quality services due to workload. Therefore, it is vital to address this growing issue in order to survive in today's competitive world and cultivate a healthy profession with good ethical standards. This study focuses on work stress of Facilities Managers working in Sri Lankan organisations. A comprehensive literature review was carried out and identified the factors influencing work stress of Facilities Manager. Questionnaire survey and semi-structured interviews were used as two separate techniques to explore how work stress of Facilities Manager impacts performance in an organization and to identify the manageability level of stressors by Facilities Manager. Research findings revealed the common problems associated with work stress of Facilities Managers such as contradictory requirements placed at work, multi-disciplinary task, keeping the workplace on top shape, hardly hear good comments from end user and high quantitative demand of work, reasons behind them, and strategies to mitigate work stress, while addressing potential barriers in implementing those strategies.*

**Keywords:** Facilities Managers; Sri Lanka; Stressors; Work Stress.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

In the final decade of the last millennium, the Facilities Management (FM) industry emerged as one of the fastest growing sectors (Reeves, 1999). Nowadays, the importance of FM is readily acknowledged in many companies which recognise the necessity of properly managing elaborate and expensive support facilities (Taylors, 1995). The tasks are multi-disciplinary and cover a wide range of activities, responsibilities, and knowledge, because every aspect of an organisation will come under the purview of FM. Kaya and Alexander (2005) suggested that organisations see FM as belonging to one of five areas; a property issue, a people issue, an operational issue, a hard cost issue or core to overall business success.

Facilities are second only to human resources as the largest 'asset' for an organisation, and the role of facilities manager is to ensure that the physical infrastructure is strategically aligned to the organisation's core business – incorporating financial, social and environmental objectives over the entire life cycle of property investment and ownership. The role is becoming critical as built infrastructure increases in complexity and value and has more pervasive social [and environmental] impact as a user of natural resources (Jane, 2007).

The FM industry encompasses a range of services. The 'hard' services (technical services, building services, etc.) and the 'soft' services (security, cleaning, etc.) are the general divisions of the industry. The reduction of the operational cost and focusing of their core business functions are done by using combined facilities support

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services. It organizes the workplace with the labour force, the public and work within it (Aston, 1994). Facilities Managers may perform various functions in an organisation including technical stuff and machinery operating. Therefore, they have to upgrade their knowledge continuously with the modern world, if not they will have to face issues regarding their jobs, which creates the basis for the stress.

Stress results from the interaction of the employee and the conditions at work. It occurs where demands made on individuals do not match the resources available or meet the individual's needs and motivation (Jex, 1998). Further to the same author, stress will be the result if the workload is too large for the number of workers and time available. Equally, a boring or repetitive task which does not use the potential skills and experience of some individuals will cause them stress (Park, 2007).

Effective FM, combining resources and activities, is vital to the success of any organisation. Moreover, complex jobs create the work stress in high level. This is supported by Manshor *et al.* (2003), stating that employees may experience more stressful working conditions and feel pressured if they are instructed to do a more difficult job function and to take up responsibilities and when the work is perceived harder than the work done by other working teams. Adjustments required by an individual at work which necessarily sacrificing the needs of home affairs can cause stress that may influence the performance and production of the entire organisation.

In the current context, FM has reinforced its importance in the sustainability of the business organization. Moreover, FM has a wider scope integrating people, place process and technology. Facilities Manager needs to engage in various tasks and take in-charge of emergencies ensuring the continuity of the business. FM is increasingly becoming an important function in the built environment. The workload for a Facilities Manager would be comparatively higher as they need to handle emergencies and ensure the business continuity, which will result in the stress for a Facilities Manager. Therefore, it is essential to identify the working stress of Facilities Manager for his better performance. Hence this research is conducted to investigate the stress level of Facility Manager in Sri Lankan context. Furthermore, it has carried out in accordance to stress level of FM in Sri Lanka in order to increase the performance of Facilities Manager, which is an emerging profession in Sri Lanka.

## **2. WORK STRESS IN FM PROFESSION**

Anderson and Sullivan (1994) stated that usually management must be a part of business resources however Facilities Managers have a great impact on strategic decisions and to demonstrate the contribution to achieve the business targets and goals efficiently and effectively. Therefore, FM is the very unique and essential function to the organisation.

When an organisation intends to respond to the changing business practices, the current range and scope of facility activities need to extend the limits, such as providing technical solutions to problems arising, but to ensuring the facilities effectiveness is maximized and occupancy costs minimized (Meyer, 2003). McLennan (2000), recommended that the trend in work practices is towards more responsive working arrangements, global dispersal of work, and new multi-venue and multi-location ways of working. In the current workplaces will have a tendency to be more flexible, more people centred and more responsive (Grimshaw, 2007).

Regarding the practical scenario, now a days FM to organisations in all sectors of the economy is now increasingly recognised (Atkin and Brooks, 2000). The attraction of FM is becoming increasingly common as forward-looking organisations are beginning to realise FM as a function with clearly defined objectives, strategic and commercially oriented discipline (Laird, 1994).

In present moving world of technology Facilities Managers require a broad and diverse skill set, much more in line with management and business services. FM role meets the challenges and barriers that confront the organisation it is supporting, as an enabler (Lu, 1997).

### **2.1. RESULTS OF WORK STRESS**

Various adverse resultants for personal and the workplace around the organisational level were identified through the many examinations and surveys due to the occupational stress (Park, 2007). The stress gives unwanted loss in terms of cost and weakness to the organisation and the individual (Ross, 2005). Organisation gets losses from the employee's absenteeism, tardiness, poor communications, employee's job satisfactions,

employee sick, compensations etc. directly and indirectly due to the employee stress (Ekundayo, 2014). According to Quick *et al.*, (1999), productivity reduction, diminishing levels of customer service, absenteeism, turnover, drug usage and other destructive behaviours are some examples for the adverse effects of occupational stress.

Consequences of occupational stress can lead to unwanted feelings and behaviours such as job dissatisfaction, lower motivation, low employee morale, less organisational commitment, lowered overall quality of work life, absenteeism, turnover, intention to leave the job, lower productivity, decreased quantity and quality of work, inability to make sound decisions, more theft, sabotage and work stoppage, occupational burnout, alienation, and increased smoking and alcohol intake (Shen and Sun, 2007). According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO, 2005) physiological problems have a considerable impact on the employer such as reduced productivity and lowered morale.

According to Karasek *et al.*, (1988), the outcomes of occupational stress can result in significant economic and social costs for both employers and employees. Moreover, if not managed properly occupational stress may lead to increase in absentee rates, internal conflicts and low employee morale (Christo and Pienaar, 2006).

## **2.2. STRESS MANAGEMENT**

There are a number of ways by which the risk of work stress can be reduced. Cox and Griffiths (1995) identified three major prevention methods such as primary prevention, secondary prevention and tertiary prevention. The primary prevention reduces stress through ergonomics, work and environmental design, and organisational and management development. The secondary prevention reduces stress through worker education and training and tertiary prevention reduces the impact of stress by developing more sensitive and responsive management systems and enhanced occupational health provision (Cox and Griffiths, 1995).

The organisation itself is a generator of different types of stresses. Moreover, Cox and Griffiths (1995), stated that a good employer designs and manages work in a way that avoids common risk factors for stress and prevents as much as possible foreseeable problems. It might therefore be better to identify any mismatch between demands and pressures, on the one hand, and workers' knowledge and abilities, on the other, set priorities for change and manage the change towards risk reduction (Fernet *et al.*, 2004).

## **2.3. BENEFITS OF TACKLING STRESS**

Kumar and Chakraborty (2013) mentioned that the benefits of tackling stress may include improved performance, increased productivity, sound wellbeing, enhanced organisational image, and improved employee retention, improved quality of life and so on. A cultural aspect was advocated by Friedman and Greenhaus (2000), where the authors state that a supportive work-family culture empowers psychological drive to confront problems and issues around the employees, which eventually attracts the employee to the job. This inherently creates a pleasant working environment for the entire work place.

From an employer's perspective, Hurley and Estelami (2007) stated loss of expertise, experience, knowledge and relationships can be reduced. Furthermore, quality of working life where employees feel happier at work and perform better, management of change which includes introducing a new pay system or new patterns of work is easier when stress is managed effectively, employment relations where problems can be resolved at work rather than at an employment tribunal and attendance levels go up and sickness absence goes down.

## **3. RESEARCH METHOD**

The research initiated with a literature review to locate the common stress issues relating to work; and the importance of managing work stress in order to enhance their professional career. The survey approach was adopted as the best suitable method for the research among Facilities Managers working in Sri Lankan organisation to ascertain their perception on work stress issues and solutions to mitigate them. Sampling strategy for data collection was convenience sampling under non-probability sampling technique. Since it allows the researcher to pick samples representing various Facilities Managers who work in different working environment, it is more effective to analyse the time management issues and the techniques used to overcome those issues. Questionnaire survey was conducted to reveal the common problems associated with work stress of Facilities Managers, reasons behind them, and strategies to mitigate work stress, while addressing potential

barriers in implementing those strategies based on respondents' comments on a 5 point Likert scale and semi-structured interviews were used to develop a guideline to mitigate work stress of Facilities Manager. Questionnaires were distributed among 62% Facilities Managers and semi-structured interviews were conducted among 3 experts having expertise in Facilities Management, Human Resource Management, and Psychology. Factorial ANOVA test (to consider the effect of more than one factor on differences in the dependent variable) was used to analyse data collected through questionnaire survey, and data collected through interviews were analysed using content analysis to arrive at suitable conclusions and recommendations.

#### 4. DATA ANALYSIS

The data collected through questionnaire survey conducted among FM professionals practicing in Sri Lanka and semi-structured interviews conducted among practitioners having expertise with regard to this research topic. Presented data were analysed from various perspectives to understand the interrelationships between variables and underlying truths to demonstrate a clear understanding on the research findings.

##### 4.1. PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

Respondents of the questionnaire survey were FM professionals working across Office, Hospital, Factory, Condominium, Hotels and other organisations in the private sector, government sector and semi government sector and at different managerial positions and having different work experience respectively as identified in Figure 1, 2, and 3.

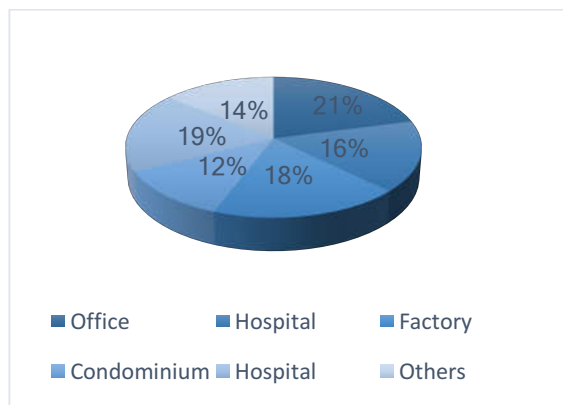


Figure 1: Respondent Profile Based on Types of Organisation

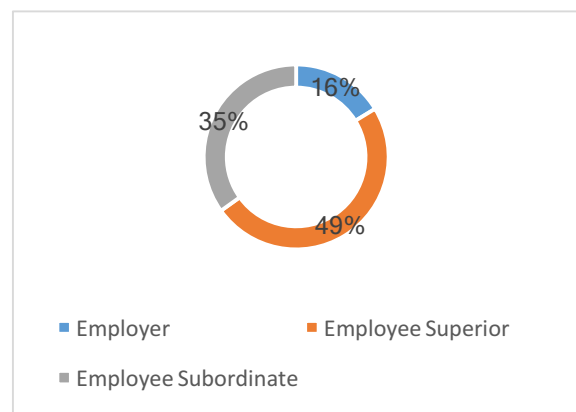


Figure 2: Respondent Profile Based on Managerial Position

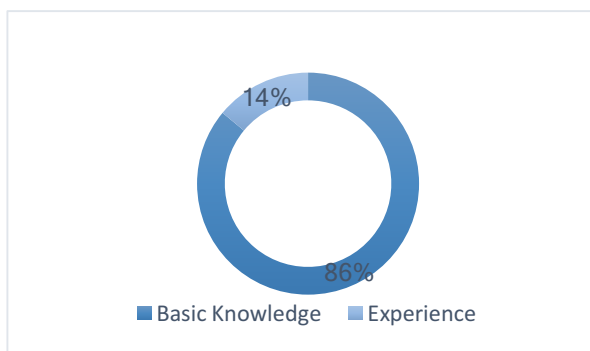


Figure 3: Respondent Profile Based on who Experience Issues in Relation to Work Stress the Most

#### 4.2. ESTABLISHING THE PROBLEM OF WORK STRESS

The sample was verified to ascertain if the problem of work stress is evident in the sample so that conclusions could be drawn for the population. Figure 4 reports on the level of awareness of work stress among the sample and Figure 5 illustrates the perception of the Facilities Managers with regard to the severity of this issue in the Sri Lanka.

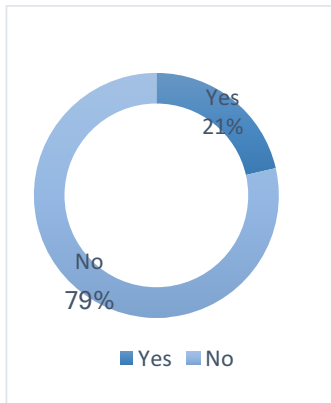


Figure 4: Awareness of Work Stress

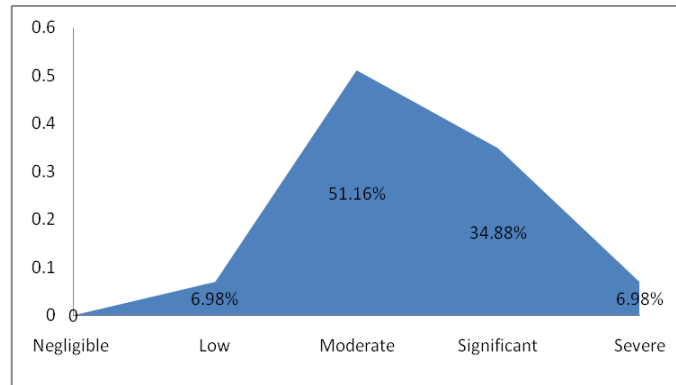


Figure 5: Severity of Work Stress Issue

Figure 4 provides conclusive evidence that 79% of the respondents in the sample have admitted the lack of awareness of work stress and Figure 5 proves the severity of work stress issues to be substantial with 93% of respondents rating the severity to be at a moderate to significant level. Based on the results on the sample it can be interpreted that the population has a serious issue on work stress. Therefore, the basic research problem of this study has been verified with the conformance from the Facilities Managers on existence of work stress to be significant although they are less familiar with the concept of work stress mitigation.

Having established the problem of work stress, the communication mechanism was used to identify the existence and to see whether these issues are brought to light by Facilities Managers working in organisations to their employer's/top management. Figure 6 illustrates the results of the respondents with regard to the method in which they came to know the existence of work stress. Figure 6 clearly states that most individuals have discovered work stress issues through personal experience which is approximately 15% and the next majority being through discussion with peers approximately 11.5%, followed by a small percentage of people through observation approximately 3.5%. A significant point has to be emphasised on the absence of a proper organisational communication mechanism in Sri Lankan organisations to report on work stress issues. This issue needs to be addressed by organisations in order to facilitate effective communication to implement solutions.

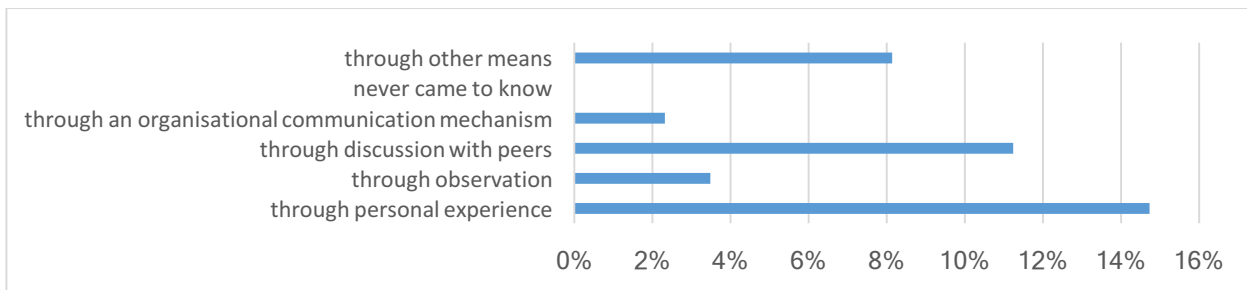


Figure 6: Communication Severity

#### 4.3. ANALYSIS ON ISSUES PERTAINING TO WORK STRESS

Existence of work stress issues were analysed using a statistical tool, Factorial ANOVA (Analysis Of Variance) in the statistical analysis package SPSS. The Factorial ANOVA test provides an estimated marginal mean value for each work stress issue based on respondents' comments on a 5-point scale rating. This will

look like the Facilities Manager populations' perception on each issue and rank them accordingly giving priority to the top priority factors.

In addition to it, Factorial ANOVA is capable of testing the significance of each issue across varying categorical variables. For instance, in the given case of analysis, each issue is statistically verified whether work experience / the person experiencing stress the most have an effect on the issue. ANOVA will conduct an F test and give an F value along with the level of significance for the F value. The level of significance is also known as the p value (probability of occurrence of the event). A confidence interval of 95% was adopted based on rule of thumb, which means the benchmarking p value is 5% (0.05). If the p value for a particular issue is less than 0.05, it means a significant effect is caused by the categorical variable (work experience / the person experiencing stress the most) and vice versa. Statistically this is known as rejecting the null hypothesis H<sub>0</sub>: the particular factor does not have any significant effect on the issue or there is less than 5% chance that the result would have been due to random reasoning.

Table 1: Results of Factorial ANOVA for Work Stress Issues

Type of issue	Estimated Marginal Mean	Work Experience in hard FM/soft FM/total FM		Experiencing stress the most		Rank
		F	Significance	F	Significance	
Physical Issues						
Increased error in work / less productive	3.51	2.205	0.000	0.578	0.458	5
Unpleasant environment with employees	3.53	0.482	0.266	0.128	0.653	3
Burnout (Physical or mental collapse caused by overwork or stress)	3.53	0.413	0.082	0.506	0.000	3
Eating disorders (Skipping meals due to workload / priority to finish work before diet)	3.86	2.786	0.040	0.227	0.628	1
Psychological issues						
Less control over work	3.40	0.580	0.008	1.530	0.000	6
Lack of commitment	2.98	0.193	0.376	3.552	0.015	8
Depression and anxiety	3.60	1.213	0.004	1.154	0.000	2
Trouble sleeping/ insomnia	3.14	0.196	0.939	0.567	0.688	7

Table 2: Results of Factorial ANOVA for Reasons Behind Work Stress.

Reasons	Estimated Marginal Mean	Work Experience in hard FM/ soft FM/ total FM		Managerial Position		Experiencing stress the most		Rank
		F	Significance	F	Significance	F	Significance	
High quantitative demand of work	4.19	0.793	0.460	1.018	0.371	1.882	0.165	6
Excessive time pressure	4.30	0.940	0.399	0.258	0.774	0.501	0.610	2
Need to hit targets/deadlines	4.28	0.750	0.529	1.386	0.261	1.576	0.211	4

No separation/ distribution of hammering the responsibility (Facilities Manager has to take the responsibility)	4.40	0.541	0.290	0.093	0.330	1.060	0.401	1
Hardly hear good comments from end user	4.30	1.102	0.001	1.680	0.187	1.411	0.024	2
Contradictory requirements placed on you at work	4.05	2.145	0.110	0.767	0.520	1.187	0.327	7
Multi-disciplinary task	4.23	0.627	0.007	0.138	0.113	0.564	0.000	5
Handling emergency situations	3.95	0.444	0.162	1.326	0.584	1.257	0.019	10
Difficulty in integrating people, place, process and technology	3.98	0.531	0.029	0.896	0.264	0.770	0.265	9
Keeping the workplace on top shape	4.00	0.689	0.011	0.180	0.830	1.712	0.005	8

Table 3: Results of Factorial ANOVA for Solutions to Mitigate Work Stress

Solutions	Estimated Marginal Mean	Work Experience in hard FM/ soft FM/ total FM		Managerial Position		Experiencing stress the most		Rank
		F	Significance	F	Significance	F	Significance	
Steps which could be taken by the employer								
Adopt the style of a flexible firm	4.37	1.101	0.033	0.228	0.299	0.158	0.571	6
Support and understanding from superiors	4.28	1.137	0.002	0.704	0.545	1.841	0.000	9
Delegate work among employees to avoid workload affecting one individual	4.58	0.821	0.059	1.548	0.008	0.257	0.656	2
Provide regular and constructive feedback	4.33	0.475	0.022	1.293	0.407	1.657	0.158	8
Maintain adequate number of workforce to avoid work overload	4.44	1.185	0.003	1.468	0.220	1.701	0.168	3

Conduct job satisfaction survey and mid-year review	4.35	0.144	0.518	0.763	0.409	3.770	0.032	7
Provide right set of people with different layers of subordinates (Strong team)	4.67	0.749	0.038	1.840	0.335	0.489	0.248	1
Steps which could be taken by the employee								
Have positive attitude with dedication and self-control	4.44	0.204	0.512	2.480	0.736	0.306	0.005	3
Seek knowledge, do not assume the work until knowledge is gained	4.42	0.510	0.026	1.910	0.545	0.168	0.903	5

## 5. RESEARCH FINDINGS

### 5.1. OVERVIEW OF WORK STRESS

Analysis on survey findings revealed the lack of awareness about work stress mitigation policy among Facilities Managers in Sri Lanka. The underlying reason was figured to be the culture of the local community, where, by nature they are naïve to think about personal welfare over professional work. It is because the mentality of the local workforce gives high priority to work for a boss rather than individual space and does not concern much about their knowledge and workload. The corporate world has also held the employees in dark utilising this social character of Sri Lankan professionals and have not created enough awareness on work stress mitigation. The education system or state authorities also have not given any concern to this phenomena, which was revealed by experts in the interview.

Despite the lack of awareness on work stress mitigation policy, a vast majority of FM professionals confirmed the existence of work stress on their job to be very significant. Research problem of this study was confirmed through this acceptance.

### 5.2. ISSUES RELATING TO WORK STRESS AND REASONS BEHIND THEM

The existence of work stress among Facilities Managers is evident from physical, psychological, and societal issues. The significant issues were eating disorders, stress/depression and unpleasant environment with employees and burnout.

Other issues found in literature such as aggressiveness, impulsive behaviours, lack of job satisfaction, prevents exhibition of creative skills, unable to relax, tense more often feelings of powerlessness, less interest for work, lack of confidence in taking up challenges were not significantly present among Facilities Managers in Sri Lanka. Work experience in hard FM/soft FM/total FM and person experiencing stress the most influences the impact of these issues. Research findings clearly demonstrated that stress levels are high for Facilities Managers having basic knowledge rather than experienced in most of the reasons. Therefore, it is better to address this issue with some concern despite its unpopularity, since its effects could be extremely hurtful.

When considering reasons for work stress, no separation/distribution of hammering the responsibility was accepted unanimously by the Facilities Managers as one of the prime reason for work stress. The other significant reasons that were identified through research findings were hardly hear good comments from end user, excessive time pressure, need to hit targets/deadlines, multi-disciplinary task, high quantitative demand of work, contradictory requirements placed at work, keeping the workplace on top shape; the reasons were uniform across experiencing stress the most and across work experience in hard FM/soft FM/total FM, except



for handling emergency situations, integrating people, place, process and technology. It is because only employee superior has practices available to trigger these issues.

### **5.3. PRACTICALITY OF WORK STRESS MITIGATION INITIATIVES**

The problem of work stress among Facilities Managers career was attempted to solve from two perspectives. One being the initiatives from the individual himself and the other being initiatives from the organisation employee is attached to. New methods in addition to those prescribed in literature were found through the expert interviews. The questionnaire survey was good enough to validate the practical applicability of work stress strategies found in the literature to the Sri Lankan context.

Analysis on research data proved positive attitude with dedication and self-control with respect to work and strictly adhering to it, and seeking knowledge and understanding from superiors to be the most valid practical strategies that could be followed by an individual. These two strategies were also backed by the experts in their interviews. Particularly having a good superior could help Facilities Managers reduce their work stress situation due to the understanding and care from their counterpart. This idea was stressed by the psychological expert to be a more vibrant strategy. However, for it to be effective the individual's counterpart has to be approachable to hear his problems. If there is a mismatch between the pair this strategy would not work but rather flop.

Focusing on a broader perspective organisation can provide right set of people with different layers of subordinates (Strong team), delegate work among employees to avoid workload affecting one individual, provide timely information to enable staff to understand the reasons for the change, provide regular and constructive feedback, conduct job satisfaction survey and mid-year review and maintain adequate number of workforce to avoid work overload affecting one individual. However, for all these strategies to take effect, the culture of the organisation has to be changed to support and care the work stress of employees.

Having analysed the initiatives for work stress mitigation from both perspectives, it is important to discuss each party's contribution. Individuals should be independent of the organisation and formulate work stress mitigation policies to suit their personal requirements and life style. This proves to be more effective and has less chances of affecting the organisation in a negative manner. To reach a truly successful balance in work and entire society individual effort alone would not be sufficient. Therefore, organisations also should join hands in creating policies at work place to support work stress mitigation initiatives. Moreover, it is extremely crucial for Sri Lankan to focus on this matter. Role of government with regard to this whole issue was excluded for detailed analysis since it could indirectly support to enhance the balance of individuals.

In fact, the initial strive from corporate heads towards work stress mitigation policies, lack of demand from employees for such policies, management of the firm not encouraging work stress mitigation initiatives and personal incapability of developing individual strategies could be the potential barriers that could prevent in implementing the strategies identified. Hence, these barriers need to be eradicated or at least weakened for the strategies to take effect.

## **6. CONCLUSIONS**

The research has captured Facilities Managers having their professional practice in Sri Lankan organisations. The nature of work of the profession and the current lifestyle of those professionals as average Sri Lankans, creates great challenge in reducing the work stress. Hence, first of all every individual should try their best to adopt strategies to reduce the work stress they encounter and strictly stick to it. However, for an individual to follow a strategy the environment they work and knowledge they are having should be favourable for them. This highlights that they should possess in breadth knowledge and practical skills in some specific field. Therefore, they should take initiatives to develop a good practical knowledge to work. If there has been a problem encountered it has to be taken in to account by Facilities Manager and has to be discussed with the superior who is having experience in various fields and a proper solution should be taken as soon as possible. It has been reported that lack of proper organizational communication mechanism was the major reason for the work stress being unnoticed.

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