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**Justyna Jolanta Dziedzic**

University of Social Sciences, Lodz, Poland

[jdiedzic@san.edu.pl](mailto:jdiedzic@san.edu.pl)

ORCID ID: 0000-0002-8292-0892

# Organizational Identity and Workplace Stress: Investigating the Impact of Organizational Culture on Stressors

## ABSTRACT

**Objective:** The study explores the intersection of organizational identity and work-related stress, focusing on how corporate culture shapes employees' well-being. It specifically investigates how the unique dimensions of an organization's identity contribute to stress factors, influencing individual performance and collective outcomes.

**Methodology:** This research employs a qualitative analysis of the literature. Case studies from Amazon and UBER were used to examine the impact of organizational culture on stress and to understand how different organizational identity factors affect employee well-being.

**Findings:** The study highlights that stress in the workplace is not only due to workload but it is also linked to factors inherent in organizational identity, such as cultural conflicts, lack of control, and role ambiguity. Firms with rigid, hierarchical cultures exhibit higher stress levels, whereas those promoting autonomy and social support show lower stress-related issues. A model of stress-inducing organizational identity was introduced, derived from the Uber and Amazon case study.

**Value:** This research contributes to understanding the role of organizational identity in shaping stress and offers insights into fostering a healthier work environment through identity-conscious management practices.

**Recommendations:** Organizations should align their identity with employee well-being strategies by promoting a culture of transparency, autonomy, and support. Implementing policies that reduce role ambiguity and offer social support can mitigate stress-related outcomes, improving employee satisfaction and organizational efficiency.

**Key words:** organizational identity, organizational stress, organizational culture, professional stress, work stress

**JEL Codes:** M12, M14, J81

# Introduction

Stress is a factor that causes a change and distortion in the human body to physical, mental, and social forces and pressures, creating a state of mental tension (Reber & Reber, 2005, p. 748). Physical disorders began to be linked to mental factors, indicating the important role of the nervous system in responses to environmental stressors as early as the 18th century. An example of this is nervous exhaustion, manifested by anxiety, chronic fatigue, and excessive worrying, which make it difficult to function daily (Beard, 1869; Shorter, 1992).

The research results confirm that occupational stress is a common and significant problem for individuals, organizations, and societies. Stress negatively affects employees' mental and physical health, performance, and organizational functioning, leading to absenteeism, burnout, and increased employee turnover (Hennekam et al., 2020; Khamisa et al., 2016; Salas-Vallina et al., 2021). In the European Union, the costs associated with employee stress and mental illness account for a significant percentage of GDP. These costs, including sickness absence and other adverse effects of occupational stress, are estimated to average 9.6% of gross domestic product (GDP). These are direct and indirect healthcare costs due to reduced productivity and sick leave (EU OSHA, 2023).

Due to the rising costs and adverse effects of occupational stress, state decision-makers and organizations are taking several measures to reduce it. The European Union, as part of its strategy for 2021–2027, emphasizes the creation of policies on the mental health of employees and the reduction of work-related stress (EU OSHA, 2023). These solutions tend to adopt a broad, positive concept of health, i.e., promoting health, safety, and well-being at work and not limiting oneself to only overcoming diseases; moreover, there is a comprehensive approach to integrating health, safety, and well-being at work; active involvement and joint responsibility of the employer and employee are postulated.

Self-regulation in an organization can be achieved by creating a supportive environment, for example, institutionalizing health and safety services. A supportive environment helps employees better manage stress and promotes their mental and physical health, positively affecting productivity (Knies et al., 2022; Parent-Lamarche & Biron, 2022).

Therefore, this article assumes that understanding the relationship between stress and organizational identity is crucial to discovering how work culture shapes the employee experience. The work focuses on analyzing stressful aspects of organizational identity and their impact on the functioning and well-being of employees. In particular, it examines how organizational culture and management practices can affect the level of stress in the workplace and how the organization's identity and dynamics are reflected in the employees' daily experience.

## Conceptual framework: Defining stress and organizational identity

The term 'stress' derives from the Latin word *stringer*, meaning 'to tighten' (Oxford English Dictionary, 2021). It comes from engineering and refers to the physical force acting on a material, an analogy to the later use of the term in psychology to describe the pressure exerted on an individual (Selye, 1976; Levi, 1984). More precisely, the term refers to external pressure that affects a person, which in turn causes tension in them. Hans Selye, an endocrinologist who studied the phenomenon of stress for 50 years, introduced this concept into the everyday language (Selye, 1950). He defined stress as the body's response to harmful stimuli, describing the so-called general adaptation syndrome, consisting of three phases: alarm, immunity, and exhaustion. The introduction of the issue of stress into medicine has increased interest in diseases that are invisible at first glance and may have their source in the psyche.

In both everyday language and in the scientific literature, the term 'stress' refers to three different aspects: the stressor (the cause of tension), the stress response (a state of tension), and its health effects (adverse consequences for the body) (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Selye, 1976). This broad and ambiguous concept makes creating a single, universal stress theory difficult. There are many approaches to defining it in the literature, which results from differences in understanding whether more emphasis should be placed on external

stressors (physical or mental) or the subjective reactions of the individual to these stressors. Hans Selye, one of the pioneers of stress research, defined stress as a non-specific response of the body to any requirements, but not all researchers agree with this approach (Selye, 1976; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Most stress researchers agree that different meanings of the term can be identified since stress mediates between a stressor-stimulus and a response (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; McEwen, 1998). Colloquially, the concept of stress is used in two meanings: 1) external circumstances, addressed to requirements, burdens, unpleasant events, or difficult situations that must be faced; and 2) the experienced tension, unpleasant reactions, or unpleasant emotional experiences (Strelau & Doliński, 2003).

Stress can be understood as a stimulus, as a reaction, and as an intermediary process (Selye, 1976; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). In experimental psychology and ergonomics, stress is defined as an external stimulus – a hostile work situation or harmful event that puts pressure on an individual. This can include excess responsibilities, conflicts at work, lack of support from superiors, or job insecurity. Stress is something objective that has a potentially negative impact on the individual and increases the risk of adverse effects such as burnout or health problems. (Selye, 1976; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

In psychophysiology and psychology, reflection is undertaken on work-related tension, which includes stress as a psychological and physiological response of the body to a threat. This approach is based on the concept of General Adaptation Syndrome, GAS, proposed by Hans Selye (Selye, 1976). According to this theory, stress goes through three main phases: 1) Alarm response – mobilization of the body through physiological and hormonal changes, such as an increase in adrenaline or cortisol levels, preparing the body for the ‘fight or flight’ response. 2) Immunity phase – the body enters a state of adaptation in which adequate resources are mobilized to meet the threat. In this phase, optimal adaptation occurs, but only temporarily. 3) Exhaustion phase – if the stressor persists for too long, adaptive resources are depleted, leading to physical and mental exhaustion of the body. Long-term stress at this stage can lead to serious health problems, such as heart disease or depression (Selye, 1976; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). In the exhaustion phase, people are more

susceptible to disease, and in extreme cases, they may even collapse or die (Myers, 2003).

Strong negative emotions such as fear, anxiety, anger, hostility, and other emotional states cause stress and related physiological and biochemical changes beyond the baseline level of activation (Strelau & Doliński, 2003).

While the approach to stress – as a stimulus and as a response – directly captures measurable factors (properties of the environment or measurable stress reactions), the approach to stress as an intermediary process focuses on the cognitive, evaluative, and motivational processes that mediate between the stressful stimulus and the response to this stimulus. According to this approach, stress reactions result from the interaction between a person and the environment (Chmiel, 2003, p. 172).

The stress management model developed by Latack and Havlovic (Latack & Havlovic, 1992) distinguishes between attitude and coping methods. In this approach, the struggle can be directed at a problem or an emotion. Problem-oriented struggle involves modifying the interaction between the person and the environment, such as seeking help or taking action to overcome the threat (Latack & Havlovic, 1992). Emotion-focused struggle focuses on regulating the individual's emotions through strategies such as avoidance and relaxation techniques (Latack & Havlovic, 1992). In addition, Latack and Havlovic distinguish two dimensions of struggle: the explicit (observable) and the latent (unobservable). Each type can be aimed at exercising control over the situation or escaping. In most cases, active coping methods (e.g., through control) are more effective than passive methods, such as problem avoidance, as long as the situation allows for active intervention (Latack & Havlovic, 1992). In addition, this model distinguishes two types of stressors: incidental (event stressors) and chronic (chronic stressors). Incidental stressors are discontinuous and involve short-term situations, while chronic stressors are long-term and continuous (Latack & Havlovic, 1992).

Chronic stressors are a different type of stress that does not have to result from a single event but develops gradually, becoming a permanent element of an individual's life. These types of stressors are related to the social environment or the role that a person has and are characterized by longer duration,

often from the moment they appear until they are resolved. Unlike incidental stressors, which have a specific beginning and end, chronic stressors occur regularly in everyday life, resulting from the nature of an individual's roles and activities. Examples of such stressors include difficulties in interpersonal relationships in the workplace, constant conflicts in the family, or a chronic lack of social support. Chronic stressors are particularly dangerous because their long-term effects can lead to serious health problems, both mental and physical (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Latack & Havlovic, 1992).

A stress transaction can be assessed as harm, loss, threat, or challenge in the primary assessment (Strelau & Doliński, 2003). Stress responses can be divided into five groups: affective (emotional) responses, cognitive responses (changes in the way one thinks), physical responses (changes in the body, such as increased blood pressure), behavioral responses (changes in behavior, e.g., avoidance or aggression), and motivational responses (effects on levels of commitment and motivation) (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Strelau, 2006; Hobfoll, 1989). These reactions can vary in intensity, and their severity depends on the type of stressor and its duration. In the short term, rest and relaxation can help mitigate the negative effects; however, in the case of long-term exposure to a stressor, an individual may experience chronic agitation, which can lead to physical disorders such as coronary artery disease and mental disorders such as burnout.

Long-term exposure to workplace stressors, such as adverse physical and psychosocial conditions, can increase the risk of health disorders and injuries (Goldberger & Breznitz, 1982; Szabo et al., 1983; Devereux et al., 1999; Melamed et al., 1999).

The stress response is part of a unified system of body and mind. Emotional arousal is only a part of the sympathetic nervous system. Alerted by any of the many cerebral conduction pathways, the sympathetic nervous system accelerates heart rate and breathing, increases blood supply to skeletal muscle, and releases fat stored in the body, adapting the body to fight or flight. In response to commands from the cerebral cortex, the outer part of the adrenal glands secretes the stress hormone cortisol linked to death (Myers, 2003).

Stress is not only an internal phenomenon but it is also a relationship between the individual and the environment; according to Strelau and Doliński (2003), it includes a disturbance in the balance between the individual's resources and the requirements of the environment. Stress occurs when a person's resources (e.g., time, energy, skills) are insufficient in the face of external demands. Individual differences are significant in susceptibility to occupational stress. There are three primary variables: genetic properties – e.g., sex, physical build, health condition; acquired properties – e.g., age, education, belonging to a social class, skills; dispositional properties – e.g., coping styles, and personal preferences (Strelau & Doliński, 2003).

Social support in the workplace is crucial in relieving stress and can manifest itself in several ways. One significant aspect is social inclusion, which refers to the number and strength of a person's relationships with other employees within their social network. Satisfactory relationships, i.e., a positive organizational climate and friendly professional relations with superiors, co-workers, and subordinates, significantly impact the employee's well-being. Perceived support means the belief that when needed, one can count on help, advice, guidance, and empathetic understanding from others, which provides a sense of security. On the other hand, the support received refers to a situation when, after the stressor, the person experiences direct help from other employees or superiors, which helps to alleviate the perceived stress.

Emotional support, which includes empathy, care, trust, and interest, is a critical element that allows employees to cope with stress. Instrumental support is also important, and refers to the direct help that employees can receive, for example, through physical support in performing tasks. Information support provides advice, suggestions, and tips to help one solve problems. Evaluative support consists of providing feedback and social comparisons, which can support the individual in evaluating his or her own actions and self-assessment (Hobfoll, 1989; Strelau & Doliński, 2003).

The function of social support in the workplace is to relieve stress, which is usually referred to as the buffer effect. It occurs when social support mitigates the impact of stressors on stress responses and brings beneficial effects

when intense occupational stressors are involved. Direct effects refer to the positive impact of social support in the workplace on the individual's condition, regardless of whether he or she experiences work stress (Chmiel, 2003).

Occupational stress is a complex process of which intensity and effects depend on various factors. The literature presents several key models explaining the mechanisms of occupational stress.

**Table 1.** The most influential models of occupational stress

| Model                              | Explanation                                                                                                                                           | Source                                                                                                                                                                    |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Model Michigan                     | It describes occupational stress based on the organization's characteristics, leading to psychological stressors such as role conflict and ambiguity. | Kahn, R. L., Wolfe, D. M., Quinn, R. P., Snoek, J. D., & Rosenthal, R. A. (1964). <i>Organizational Stress: Studies in Role Conflict and Ambiguity</i> . New York: Wiley. |
| Person-environment fit model       | It assumes that occupational stress depends on adjustment of the individual's characteristics to the requirements of the work environment.            | French, J. R. P., & Caplan, R. D., Harrison, R. V. (1982). <i>The Mechanisms of Job Stress and Strain</i> . London: Wiley.                                                |
| Vitamin model                      | It suggests that various aspects of work act like vitamins; a lack or an excess of them can harm mental health.                                       | Warr, P. (1987). <i>Work, Unemployment, and Mental Health</i> . Oxford: Clarendon Press.                                                                                  |
| Requirements-control-support model | It emphasizes that occupational stress results from high job demands and low control and social support.                                              | Karasek, R. A. (1979). Job demands, job decision latitude, and mental strain: Implications for job redesign. <i>Administrative Science Quarterly</i> , 24(2), 285–308.    |
| Effort-reward imbalance model      | It assumes that an imbalance between the effort put into work and the rewards received leads to occupational stress.                                  | Siegrist, J. (1996). Adverse health effects of high-effort/low-reward conditions. <i>Journal of Occupational Health Psychology</i> , 1(1), 27–41.                         |

Source: Author, after: Kahn et al., 1964; French et al., 1982; Warr, 1987; Karasek, 1979; Siegrist, 1996.

One of the critical models explaining the mechanisms of occupational stress is the Requirements-Control-Support (DCS) model. It assumes that the primary sources of stress result from two aspects of work: psychological demands and freedom of decision-making. This model suggests that the most robust stress responses, such as exhaustion or cardiovascular disease, occur in people who

work with high demands and low control, called high tension (Karasek, 1979). In addition, stress can arise due to adverse events and when the expected positive events do not occur (Łosiak, 2008a, 2008b).

Low-voltage work occurs when the requirements are low, and employees have a lot of decision-making freedom. On the other hand, active work, in which both demands and control are high, promotes personal development and motivation, related to the concept of eustress – positive stress that stimulates activities such as problem-solving (Chmiel, 2003). The most adverse health effects occur with a combination of high demands, low control, and low social support, which is referred to as iso-voltage. Social support, such as emotional integration, mutual aid, and trust, can alleviate psychological tension (Karasek & Theorell, 1990; Chmiel, 2003).

There may also be an imbalance between effort and reward in professional life. External effort refers to the requirements of work, and internal effort is associated with the excessive involvement of the employee (Chmiel, 2003; Siegrist, 1996). Awards for employees come in three forms: financial (adequate remuneration), respect (respect and support), and security (e.g., promotion prospects, stability of employment, appropriate professional status). An imbalance between effort and rewards leads to chronic stress and negative health consequences (Chmiel, 2003; Siegrist, 1996).

## Addressing workplace stressors

Stressors in the workplace, such as an overabundance of responsibilities, unclear roles, or lack of support from superiors, are the subject of research in the field of ergonomics and management. This research aims to identify factors that negatively affect employees' health and develop strategies to minimize or eliminate them, which in turn leads to improved working conditions and stress reduction (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Sauter et al., 1990). The ergonomic approach focuses on the physical aspects of the work environment, such as office ergonomics, equipment placement, and working in appropriate lighting

conditions to minimize physical stress and strain. In workplace management, it is crucial to improve the organizational structure, interpersonal relationships, and human resource management in such a way as to increase role clarity, team support, and development opportunities, which reduces the level of psychological stress.

Stressful occupational stimuli can be divided into four categories: work content, working conditions, employment conditions, and social relations at work (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Sauter et al., 1990). Each category affects different aspects of the work environment that can cause stress. The content of the work refers to the nature of the tasks performed by the worker, while the working conditions include physical factors such as noise, lighting, and temperature. Employment conditions refer to job stability and remuneration, and social relations refer to interactions with superiors, co-workers, and subordinates. Stress levels increase with the intensity of stressors – the higher the workload or the faster the pace, the greater the risk of adverse effects such as burnout or deterioration of health (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Sauter et al., 1990). Burnout is mainly characterized by exhaustion, malaise, reduced efficiency, decreased motivation, and dysfunctional attitudes and behaviors at work (Chmiel, 2003).

Noise, inappropriate temperature conditions, air pollution, and working at height have a significant impact on the well-being and stress level of employees (Gobel et al., 1983; Goldberger & Breznitz, 1982; Ashford, 1988; Barnett et al., 1993).

Individuals can cope with pressure and adapt to difficult situations, returning to balance once stressful periods are over. Research on adaptation mechanisms and resilience indicates that factors such as social support, previous experiences with stress, and overall mental and physical health affect how well a person copes with pressure (EU OSHA, 2023).

Researchers (Wegman & McGee, 2004; Sauter et al., 1990; Levi, 2002) confirm the relationship between physical hazards in the workplace, called objective stressors, and the psychological reactions of employees. These stressors include artifacts of organizational culture, such as improper lighting conditions, excessive temperature, vibrations, or air pollution, which can be accurately

measured and monitored. Regardless of employees' subjective feelings, these stressors affect their mental health, increasing the risk of stress, fatigue, and even anxiety and depressive disorders (EU OSHA, 2023).

Noise can lead to physical and psychological consequences, regardless of how the employee subjectively evaluates their work environment. Prolonged exposure to high-intensity noise can damage the middle and inner ear, and at lower levels, it can hinder communication and speech understanding. Constant noise exposure can cause stress, anxiety, and nervous tension, increase the risk of heart disease, and reduce work efficiency (Ward & Fricke, 1968; Cohen, 1980; Miller, 1974).

## Stressogenic organizational identity: Key dimensions

A literature review indicates that stress focuses on organizational culture, not its identity (Schein, 2010; Hofstede, 1991; Schneider et al., 2013). Work culture influences the employee, and stress is subject to social relationships in which members of the organizational culture are entangled (Schein, 2010; Hofstede, 1991).

A stressful organizational culture occurs when the internal functioning and structure of the organization cause a substantial emotional and mental burden on employees. Research by Monteiro et al. (2017) shows that a supportive organizational culture is more important for employees to fight stress than the mere presence of work-life balance services. An organizational culture that promotes support from supervisors and colleagues positively impacts the ability to balance professional and personal responsibilities.

One aspect of stressful work cultures is inefficient time management, which leads to overloading or underburdening employees. When tasks are incorrectly distributed, and employees are forced to exert themselves or perform tasks below their qualifications, their stress levels increase. On the one hand, an excess of responsibilities results in physical and mental exhaustion, and on the

other hand, too little work, especially when tasks are monotonous, causes frustration and reduces commitment. Both of these phenomena lead to lower job satisfaction and, in the long run, to burnout (Mańkowska, 2022).

An important stressful factor in the organizational culture is the lack of control over work processes, especially in the context of the pace of work. Employees feel powerless when they cannot control how and when they perform their tasks. Situations in which technological systems or supervisors dictate the pace of work are particularly stressful because they take away the individual's sense of control over their own work environment. A lack of autonomy in managing time and pace can lead to chronic stress and negatively affect mental and physical health (Wilson & Corlett, 1995).

In organizations with a stressful culture, there needs to be more social support. Relationships with superiors, co-workers, and subordinates have a key impact on the overall well-being of employees. When these relationships are strained, or employees lack support in difficult moments, their stress levels increase. A negative work atmosphere, lack of trust and cooperation, as well as interpersonal conflicts, lead to chronic emotional tension and can result in health problems such as sleep disorders, cardiovascular problems, and even depression (Wilson & Corlett, 1995; Mańkowska, 2022).

Stressful identity is not the same as occupational stressors related to a specific job's performance or a profession's characteristics. In the latter case, there may be professions that burden or vice versa – do not burden employees, low prestige of work, and difficult relationships between employees and superiors. Identity, on the other hand, is something that distinguishes an organization from others; it has a set of specific characteristics that resonate with employees.

Stress experienced by members of an organization may result from its organizational identity, the source of which is a specific organizational 'genotype', and not only from the organizational culture or work norms prevailing in it. In this context, the question about the organization's identity becomes more accurate. Table 2 shows the key dimensions of organizational identity that can generate stress and affect the functioning of employees, leading to increased levels of tension in the workplace.

**Table 2.** Dimensions of stressful organizational identity

| Dimension                                     | Characteristics                                                                                                                                                                |
|-----------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Volatility and volatility dimension           | The processual nature of organizations of a variable nature managing crises and instability, balancing                                                                         |
| The dimension of internal pressure to achieve | The need to grow and succeed                                                                                                                                                   |
| Conflict-generating dimension                 | Organizational tradition based on the conflict-generating role of the team                                                                                                     |
| The dimension of heterogeneity                | Transnationality, multiculturalism, and virtualization bring fluidity to the boundaries of understanding events, forms of organization, and its characteristics by its members |

Source: Author, after Albert & Whetten, 1985; Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Hatch & Schultz, 2002; Gioia et al., 2000; Whetten & Mackey, 2002.

The dimensions of stressful organizational identity include various aspects of the organization's functioning that can generate employee stress. Volatility and instability are characteristics of an organization of a dynamic, processual nature, often teetering on the verge of crisis, which leads to a sense of uncertainty and increased tension among employees (Albert & Whetten, 1985). Internal pressure to achieve adds to the stress, especially in organizations with high expectations, where success and growth are priorities, often resulting in chronic stress and burnout (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). The conflict-generating dimension refers to an organizational tradition that fosters frequent conflicts, negatively affecting team relations and increasing tension (Hatch & Schultz, 2002). Heterogeneity, on the other hand, refers to the transnational and multicultural nature of organizations, where the virtualization of processes and the blurring of boundaries can lead to difficulties in understanding the processes and events taking place, which additionally generates stress (Gioia et al., 2000). These dimensions form a complex structure of organizational identity that can be a source of chronic stress, negatively affecting employee health, productivity, and the working atmosphere (Whetten & Mackey, 2002).

If stressful properties characterize organizations, their identity can be analyzed from this perspective. An important element in this context is the relationship between the employee and his or her identity, personality, and susceptibility to stress resulting from organizational conditions that exceed

the individual's ability to cope. An example of such a relationship can be an organization with an unstable identity, striving for continuous and permanent change, functioning in conditions of constant external influences. An employee unable to adapt to these turbulent conditions may perceive the nature of such an organization as highly stressful, which can lead to negative health consequences and reduced efficiency in the long run. Table 3 presents the key directions of organizational identity which is stressful.

**Table 3.** Dimensions of stressogenic organizational identity

| Dimension                         | Explanation                                                                                                                                                                  | Example                                                                                                                                                                 |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Variability and instability       | Organizations that constantly evolve, manage crises, or face ongoing uncertainty create unpredictability and high-stress levels for employees.                               | Startups or tech firms frequently pivot or adapt to market changes, making employees anxious about job security (Kantor & Streitfeld, 2015).                            |
| Internal pressure for achievement | Environments that emphasize continuous growth, success, and high performance. Employees feel the pressure to meet or exceed targets constantly.                              | Sales-driven firms with strict KPIs and performance benchmarks that push employees to achieve results at any cost, risking burnout (Crispin, 2021).                     |
| Conflict-oriented                 | Workplaces with a tradition of internal conflict, where competition, disputes, and power struggles dominate team dynamics, leading to stress.                                | Corporations like Uber, where aggressive competition and frequent team conflicts are part of the company's internal culture, lead to high stress levels (Fowler, 2017). |
| Heterogeneity                     | Transnational or multicultural organizations where diverse perspectives and fluid roles create ambiguity. Employees may struggle to adapt to varying expectations and norms. | Global enterprises like Amazon, where multicultural teams and transnational management often cause communication barriers and role confusion (Levin, 2017).             |

Source: Author, after: Wilson & Corlett, 1995; Mańkowska, 2022; Cox & Leiter, 1992; Kline & Boyd, 1991; Keita & Sauter, 1992; Quick et al., 1992; Marrow, 1972; Miller, 1974.

Table 3 illustrates how various dimensions of stressogenic organizational identity manifest in real-world settings. It provides detailed examples of how instability, internal pressure for achievement, conflict tendencies, and organizational heterogeneity contribute to heightened stress levels among employees, ultimately

impacting their well-being and organizational performance. Working in an environment with an inadequate organizational culture and limited opportunities for professional development further exacerbates these risks, emphasizing the importance of caring for healthy relationships and effective management.

In stressful organizations, managers are also particularly exposed to stress (Dextras-Gauthier et al., 2023; Salas-Vallina et al., 2021). They are burdened with responsibility for employees, budget, management processes, and decision-making at many levels of the organization. They are responsible for the organization's functioning, which can generate high stress levels, especially when meeting the expectations of employees, shareholders, partners, associates, and customers. The pressure from this role is also associated with the need to manage many organizational factors, including the responsibility for building appropriate motivation processes and managing employee remuneration and gratification systems. Managers must meet high multitasking requirements and have broad competencies in various areas, contributing to their stress load (Mintzberg, 1973; Yukl, 2010).

## Case studies: Amazon and Uber

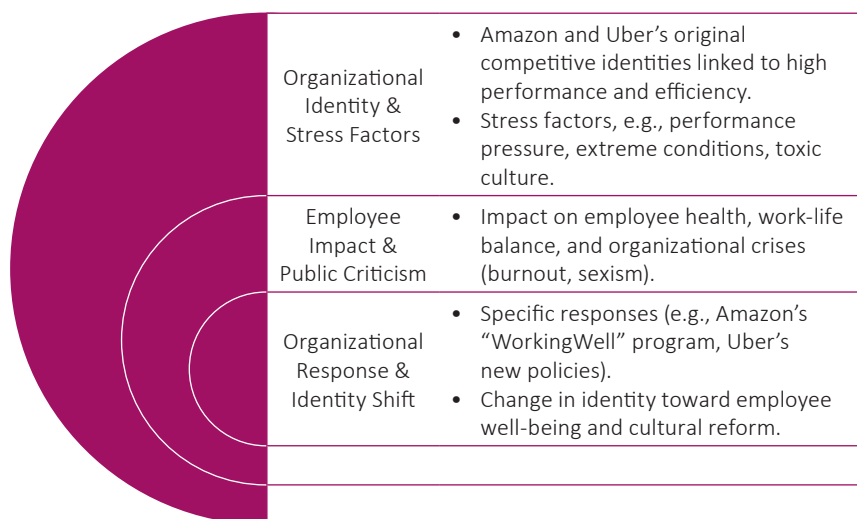
Amazon, a global e-commerce company, has become a symbol of an organization that generates stressful working conditions. Employees were under pressure from a high-performance, competitive work culture. Data-driven efficiency led to close monitoring of results and achieving high goals. The 'rank and yank' system classified employees according to their performance, and the weaker ones were at risk of being fired. As a result, many of them experienced burnout and mental health problems (Kantor & Streitfeld, 2015; Crispin, 2021). In warehouses, workers had to contend with long hours, lack of interruptions, and extreme conditions, resulting in exhaustion and health problems. White-collar workers, mostly at headquarters, lack work-life balance, resulting in chronic stress and burnout (Crispin, 2021). In response to criticism, Amazon has introduced improved warehouse working conditions, flexible breaks, and higher

wages. The “WorkingWell” program was also launched to support employees’ mental and physical health (Kantor & Streitfeld, 2015).

Uber, known for its innovative business model, became the subject of an international scandal in 2017. A former employee, Susan Fowler, described widespread sexism and management ignoring complaints in her blog (Fowler, 2017). The company promoted aggressive competition (“corporate Darwinism”), and the lack of support in human resource management contributed to a toxic work atmosphere (Levin, 2017). As a result of the accusations, Uber was forced to change. The new president, Dara Khosrowshahi, has introduced policies to prevent discrimination and stress and new conflict resolution procedures (Levin, 2017).

Amazon and Uber have created organizational identities based on aggressive competition and performance, contributing to a stressful work environment. A culture of corporate “Darwinism” and an emphasis on efficiency defined these companies’ identities. However, they were forced to change their identities to a more well-being-oriented one under public pressure and internal crises.

**Model 1.** Stressogenic organizational identity: Case studies Amazon and Uber



Sources: The Author.

Model 1 illustrates how Amazon and Uber's stressogenic organizational identities, based on aggressive competition and a focus on performance, contributed to creating stressful working conditions. These conditions led to internal crises and a shift toward a more employee-well-being-oriented approach. The model also demonstrates how organizational identity and stress factors directly lead to negative employee impact and public criticism, forcing organizations to implement responses and shift their identity toward a more employee-friendly and well-being-oriented culture.

## Conclusion: Rethinking organizational identity to address workplace stress

In light of the case studies on Amazon and Uber, it becomes evident that organizational identity significantly influences individual and collective stress experiences. These companies' aggressive, high-performance cultures, marked by rigid expectations and competitive environments, contributed to a heightened sense of pressure among employees. This illustrates how a misalignment between organizational identity and employee well-being can exacerbate stress, leading to burnout, dissatisfaction, and ultimately decreased organizational performance. The challenges in these cases suggest that organizations that fail to integrate support structures, clear communication, and balanced workload distribution into their identity risk perpetuating a cycle of stress that can affect long-term sustainability.

Moreover, the evolution of these companies' identities – from performance-driven to more well-being-focused – demonstrates that organizational culture and identity shifts can mitigate stress and improve employee outcomes. This underscores the importance of proactive identity management. Companies must regularly reassess their organizational identity to meet evolving employee needs and external pressures. By doing so, they can create environments that not only reduce stress but also foster resilience and a stronger sense of purpose among employees, ultimately benefiting both individuals and the organization.

The development of civilization, the increase in the pace of life, and phenomena such as time pressure, pandemics, the development of social media, competition, and social pressure on achievement exacerbate stress in modern society. In addition, organizational identity can be an essential factor to analyze because of the central role of working life in many people's lives. Organizational identity, which increases employee stress, goes beyond the organizational walls, affecting employees' family life and environment. Poor work-life balance is a factor of psychosocial risk at work, which is why family-friendly cultures favor employees (Monteiro et al., 2017, p. 2). The nature of the organization, which causes emotional, relational, and mental tensions among and between employees may deteriorate its way of functioning, deteriorate its effectiveness and the efficiency of the organization's members. In addition, employee absenteeism may increase due to such events (Blanc et al., 2002). In a broader context, stressful organizations can also affect societies.

In future research on stressful organizational identity, it is worth focusing on several key directions. First, it would be essential to analyze further how different types of organizations – for example, global corporations, small and medium-sized enterprises, and nonprofits – differ regarding stressful identities and their impact on employees. This research could also include a sectoral analysis, examining how different industries (e.g., technology, education, medicine) affect the formation of these stressful dimensions. Another area of research may be to deepen the understanding of the adaptive mechanisms that help employees cope with stressful organizational identity. Analyzing effective stress management strategies at the individual, team, and organizational levels could provide valuable guidance for management practitioners and organizational psychologists.

Future research could investigate the impact of organizational identity on work-life balance. How can stressful organizational identity be effectively reduced by introducing policies and practices that foster work-life harmony? Answers to these questions could help design more welcoming work environments that reduce stress and improve employees' overall well-being.

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