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**M. Narikbayev KAZGUU University**

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«Approved for Defense»

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«\_\_» \_\_\_\_\_ 2022

**MASTER'S DISSERTATION (PROJECT)**

**«The impact of HRM practices and policies in Kazakhstani companies on  
personnel stress management»**

**Program 7M04106 - «Business and Management»**

**«25» May 2022**

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**Nur-Sultan, 2022**

**Abstract of “THE IMPACT OF HRM PRACTICES AND POLICIES IN KAZAKHSTANI  
COMPANIES ON PERSONNEL STRESS MANAGEMENT”**

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The purpose of the research paper is to determine the impact of HRM practices and policies on employees' stress level and to develop practical recommendations to minimize it. Four practices and policies were used to investigate the study in a mining company located in Nur-Sultan city: organizational change, KPI, training and development, and onboarding program. Quantitative and qualitative methods were taken for analysis by involving 40 participants for survey and 6 respondents for an interview. The results show that organizational change and KPI have a negative impact on work related stress by increasing it. Staff training and onboarding program have positive effect by minimizing occupational stress. The limitations of the research include the sample of participants, the age and tenure of the workers. The study can be useful for further investigation of HRM practices and policies in the mining industry in Republic of Kazakhstan.

**Keywords:** Kazakhstan, occupational stress, organizational change, KPI, training and development, onboarding program.

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## **Introduction.**

In today's reality, in order to remain competitive and economically sustainable companies should invest primarily in their employees. It is essential to use practices and policies that fit to the company's structure, which consequently affects the correct use of staff knowledge and skills, their involvement and high productivity in relation to the company. When the HR department is able to establish this process, the rates of turnover will diminish, whereas productivity and effectiveness will be enhanced.

However, the practices and policies used in Kazakhstani organizations cannot fully have a positive effect on psychological health of employees; as a result, the HR department very often faces the problem of work-related stress of personnel (Tkachenko, 2017).

According to WHO (2020) work-related stress is a response that results from discrepancy between worker's knowledge and capacity to job requirements accompanied by pressure from the company. As claimed by HSE in CIPD (2021), more than 17.9 million working days were missed due to occupational stress in 2019-2020 years.

Often in Kazakhstani companies, it requires more resources and time from employees than they have (Tkachenko, 2017). Stress-related burnout, decreased interest in working, and increased staff turnover are consequences of that. The situation can be exacerbated if staff do not feel mutual support by each other or by the heads of companies or managers.

There are many different practices in human resource management, and each of them has a specific role in personnel stress management, some of them cause stress, others compensate that stress. For example, KPI, organizational changes, or requirements that exceed employees' abilities, as previously stated, cause stress and resistance. While bonuses, open communication, onboarding programs and training reduce stress and promote job satisfaction.

An exploration company based in Nur-Sultan with 204 employees was taken to investigate this research issue in-depth. In the case of this company, the following practices such as onboarding program, organizational restructuring of staff, training, KPI, and company policies

including employee value, high quality service delivery and innovation will be reviewed and explored deeply. Through these policies and practices, the researcher will analyze the degree of stress in an exploration company.

**The aim and objectives of the study.**

The aim of the thesis research is to develop practical recommendations for the management of certain practices and policies affecting stress management in the exploration company “AMG” in Nur-Sultan city, Republic of Kazakhstan.

**The purpose of the investigation involves next objectives:**

- To examine certain practices and policies used in “AMG” company;
- To identify the impact of certain policies and practices used in “AMG” company on stress management;
- To diagnose the practices used to develop recommendations;
- To develop practical recommendations for the management of practices and policies influencing stress management at “AMG” company in Nur-Sultan, in the Republic of Kazakhstan.

The object of the study is the policies and practices implemented in the “AMG” geological exploration company with 204 employees.

**The main issues put forward in the study:**

1. What are the HRM practices of LLP “AMG” that exacerbate staff stress?
2. What practices and policies increase job satisfaction and reduce work related stress?
3. What practical recommendations are needed to minimize stress from practices that increase it?

Key hypotheses that can be defended:

1. KPI and organizational change intensify workplace stress and promote turnover.
2. Onboarding programs and staff developments minimize stress and increase job satisfaction.

## **Research method.**

The study used a set of research methods (description, analysis and synthesis by using secondary sources, qualitative and quantitative methods of research).

By methods of description, analysis and synthesis, the author will compare and analyze practices and policies used to “AMG” Company in Nur-Sultan with foreign experience of using these processes and their impact on personnel stress.

The quantitative method determines the general employee attitudes towards the 4 HRM practices and policies. The survey of 20 questions involved 40 participants. The qualitative research method in the form of semi-structured interview was chosen to analyze certain practices and policies in detail by involving 6 respondents from different departments. The interview will consist of 5 questions and is conducted with signing of consent form by respondents including ethical standards.

## **Results.**

The results of the conducting research demonstrate a balance between practices and policies that increase and minimize occupational stress.

It was revealed that organizational changes and KPI enhancing work-related stress, while an onboarding program and an employee training and development program minimize stress by increasing job satisfaction.

## **Literature review.**

### **1. Stress and its impact on employees and organization.**

In most cases the word stress is associated with negativity, causing unpleasant feelings such as irritation and anxiety; it is a consequence of impairment of health and life in general.

Each researcher interprets stress differently, for example, Jain, Giga, and Cooper (2013) studied that stress was conceptualized as a stimulus or reaction in response to a specific



action. Hungarian scientist Hans Selye first used the term stress in the experiment in the 1960s when biological stress induced homeostatic disorder by causing disease in experimental animals (Jackson, 2014). Thereafter, Selye began to study general adaptation syndrome which was transferred to the theory of stress and its impact on the human body, describing the immediate response of the organism under stressors (Becker, 2013).

Starcke and Brand (2016) distinguish two types of stressors: acute and chronic. Acute stressors cause short irritation stimuli and are not periodic, in contrast to chronic stressors, which are constant in a person's life and do not allow them to relax. It is noted that acute stressors lead to cortisol increasing, which is produced in the adrenal cortex and protects individuals from stress. However, if a person is under extended stress, the production of cortisol starts to exceed permissible rate which is released into the blood, resulting in insomnia, disruption of the brain, persistent irritability and chronic fatigue. (Poryadin, 2009)

According to Poryadin (2009) stress causes mental, cardiovascular and endocrine diseases. There are three stages of stress compensation, the compensatory and the sub compensatory stages are less traumatic in comparison with the third stage – decompensation (Poryadin, 2009, p.13). The latter is the most dangerous stage and is often referred to distress, causing a breakdown of compensatory reactions and homeostasis disruption (Poryadin, 2009, p.14).

Starcke and Brand (2016), Poryadin (2009) demonstrate that stress is the reason for mental and physical deterioration, for an exhaustion of the body, and if an employee is in this state he would not feel satisfied with work and therefore would not fully contribute to the company's success.

Kellow et al. (2012) noted that company executives in the European Union and researchers have highlighted workplace stress as one of the major challenges of the 21st century.

There are a lot of sources for work related stress and there are classifications put forward by researchers on the issue. For example, the classification by Karasek et al. (1998), identifies

five types of sources of occupational stress: lack of decision-making, lack of social support, physical demands, job insecurity and psychological demands. Whereas ASSET (Faragher et al., 2004) concentrates on 7 types of sources by pointing on work-life imbalances, lack of corporate relationships, overload, job security, control, resources, pay and benefits. Comparing these classifications, it can be concluded that they complement each other, for instance the category of lack of social support identified by Karasek et al. (1998) is complemented by the category of lack of corporate relationship from the ASSET classification (Faragher et al., 2004). During analyzing each category, it can be seen that the sources of occupational stress are detrimental to employees' performance and well-being, which was also investigated in a study of stress over 40 years by various researchers (Billing et al., 2014).

According to Wolever et al. (2012) employees with normal levels of stress cost organization less than employees with high levels. For the reason that workers, who are vulnerable to stress are less productive and have a greater prognosis for disorders such as diabetes mellitus, hypertension, urinary disorders, obesity, cancer, psychological disorders, and musculoskeletal disorders.

The psychological consequences of occupational stress include cognitive factors such as lack of interest in work, job dissatisfaction; emotional disturbances such as apathy, anxiety, and depression. (Karasek, Kasl cited in Baker, 1985). As a result, studies have demonstrated the relationship between the mental state outcomes and work related stress. Behavioral consequences of workplace stress include disturbed sleep, impaired appetite, making work mistakes, reduced productivity; self-destructive behaviors consist of using alcohol, cigarettes, and sometimes psychoactive substances (Baker, 1985).

Hyvonen et al. (2011) found that workers with high work capacity and high effort are more susceptible to illness, and this process is comparable to the Effort-Reward-Imbalance Model. Earlier it was argued that work related stress has a negative impact on the physical and mental well-being of the staff. In leading companies, which occupy a niche position in the

world, mental health well-being should be viewed as a strategic asset, as stated by van Scheppingen et al.(2013), because employees with a healthy mental state are at the core of innovation and creativity. Very often, work-related psychological stress leads to low staff morale, absenteeism, high turnover, decreased productivity and presenteeism (Limm et al., 2011). The last term is a problem for companies, all countries of the world, including Kazakhstan. In Kazakhstan, the presenteeism of employees is a term of going to work in a sick state, and it is a frequent phenomenon. It happens because lower wages will be paid during sick leave, which is not enough to cover basic needs.

A company which was taken as the subject of exploring the impact of policies and practices on stress of workers belongs to the mining industry. This industry has an increased prevalence of stress, as there are health and life risks associated with underground work. Street et al. (2018) investigated research about stress of mining workers in Australia, and discovered that among 897 employees more than 40.7% have very high work-related stress. It happens due to high workloads, imbalance between personal life and work, lack of corporate relationships. The result is 31.4% non-attendance of employees, 28.3% of presenteeism in the mining industry in Australia, that lead to reduced productivity and profit. According to Street et al. (2018) absenteeism as an outcome of work-related stress and costs \$153.8 million for mining companies in Australia, representing more than 8% of profits.

### **1.1 Stress assessment and stress management.**

Various tools are used to assess occupational stress of employees and take actions to deal with it. Many methodological recommendations pointed out that in order to adequately assess work-related stress it is necessary to do a self-analysis and understand how dangerous a given stressor is, how it will affect the mental and psychological state of an individual. Akanji (2015), Johnstone & Feeney cited in Subramaniam (2017) defined that there are two categories of people during assessing occupational stress, the first is people assessing stress by the occurred problem and the second is people focusing on emotion. The first category

includes people for whom the problem that caused stress is the main attribute of the stressor, and the level of stress depends on how solvable the problem is. The second category includes people who, regardless of the problem, perceive it emotionally.

The next theory is that, in the same company people could react differently to occupational stress, where the main role is played by three factors: 1. Personality 2. Control over the problem 3. Support (Spector cited in Subramaniam, 2017). Support plays a significant role, e.g. studies by Conner et al. cited in Subramaniam (2017) on the effect of support during workplace stress showed high variability between supervisor support and stress reduction during challenges.

It should be noted that reactions to occupational stress differ between men and women. Women are emotionally labile and tend to resort to help, men deny the existence of stress by drinking alcohol and cigarettes when stress occurs. (Sandmark et al. cited in Subramaniam, 2017)

Analyzing the research data, the occurrence of stress depends on individual perception, factors like support, assessment of the situation and gender.

In the next chapter, the researcher will conduct a literature review and analysis on certain practices and policies used in the “AMG” mining company in Nur-Sultan city. Foreign sources with the following practices and policies will be researched: organizational change, KPI, onboarding program and staff training.

## **2. The impact of HRM practices and policies on work related stress.**

### **2.1 Organizational change.**

Globalization is a process that contributes to the integration of the economic, political, and cultural system around the world. Clayton, Sheppard et al, Simbula et al cited in Foy (2015) emphasized that globalization generates organizational change in all companies in the world, in order to stay afloat, be competitive and economically stable.

However, organizational change is not always successful and the reason for this may be the damage to employees due to new interventions (Fugate et al. 2012).

While changes should promote collaboration and cohesion among staff, the opposite effect is often found (Bordia et al; Cartwright and Schoenberg; Jimmieson et al; Oreg, in Wisse and Sleebos 2016). And one of these effects is occupational stress. Johnson et al. (2006) found that after staff is informed about the organizational change, the mental and physical state of some employees deteriorates; fear, insecurity, and anxiety arise. This state is caused by the thought that the change will cause negative consequences, such as learning additional processes, increased responsibility, or not guaranteeing the safety of the work. The latter is a threat to employees because there is uncertainty about job retention. (Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt, 1984) However, the forecasts are not always true, and employees often misjudge the situation and make wrong conclusions.

Johnson et al. (2006) found that after workers are informed about organizational change, blood pressure increases, which is a predictor of stress. Furthermore, Dahl, Greubel and Kecklund cited in Wisse and Sleebos (2016) in correlational studies of stress and medication dependence demonstrated that the high risk of taking medication is associated with organizational change.

Smollan (2012) divided organizational change into three phases 'before change', in the 'process of change' and 'after change' to define which phase causes occupational stress. It was found that the "process of change" stage was the most stressful, since at this stage there is a change in such factors as workload, work speed, nature of work and role of uncertainty. (Smollan, 2012).

Organizational change always captures these factors to increase employee productivity, and in the end mental stress and emotional exhaustion are occurred (Karasek, 2004). Armstrong-Stassen's (2005) study about organizational change of middle and lower-level managers in the public sector found that over 73% of employees experienced a negative consequence e.g.

increased cigarette use as a result of increased workload during the transition phase.

Following Smollan (2012) organizational change caused several uncertainties, employees did not know what to expect in the future, whether they would remain in their previous job, whether they could cope with the new conditions, whether they would maintain good relationships with their colleagues, whether they would lose their role and status at work. All of these questions caused uncertainty, fear and stress. Furthermore, poor communication during organizational change played an influential role in causing stress. Misreporting and exclusion from decision-making processes caused a storm of aggression and dissatisfaction among workers. (Pick et al, 2012).

The next reason for stress due to organizational change is lack of support. Insufficient support of the staff as a result of the change caused an upset feeling, aggression, accusations towards management about incompetence and cynicism (Smollan, 2012). These feelings reduce job satisfaction, the employee's sense of worth and need by leading to depression and stress.

It follows that employees are afraid to work under new realities, under situations that are not clear to them. And if management does not take action in time to reduce the factors highlighted by Smollan (2012) and other above-mentioned researchers, occupational stress is unavoidable, which means that the organizational changes will be failed during implementation.

## **2.2 KPI and employee evaluation.**

KPI or Key Performance Indicator is an indicator used to measure the success of a company. "AMG" Company implemented KPI 1 year ago in order to present the professionalism and transparency of the company in achieving its plans. Moreover, the practice was introduced to demonstrate the high quality of services provided to clients. According to Mallow (2017), KPI is the key to attracting potential customers, because it provides necessary information about the company's performance and achievements. Without the KPI, it is possible to indicate the quality of services, but with it, the company is in a winning position.

Mallow (2017) argued if the company has fulfilled the planned KPI, it is an enhancement of the company's reputation and success. However, if the organization has failed in accomplishing planned KPI it is the reverse of favorable outcomes. As a result, the achievement of KPI depends on staff, more precisely on how responsibly they complete the task. Organization will require the personnel to achieve the planned purposes of the corresponding KPI. Depending on how realistic the objectives are, the employee's emotional and physical well-being is affected. With an unrealistic set of KPI, employees try to achieve them with all possible efforts, postponing family, rest and health, which results in subsequent professional stress. Mallow (2017) observed that 8 out of 10 employees become anxious and frustrated when KPI are not achieved. Wisse and Sleebos (2016) stated that work demands have a negative impact on employee health or a positive impact on stress. For example, JD-R; Demerouti et al; Bakker cited in Wisse and Sleebos (2016) investigated that a highly targeted KPI with limited resources reduces employee productivity, increases pressure from management, causes disruption in work schedule and subsequently irritability and emotional exhaustion, which are signs of occupational stress. Furthermore, Mallow (2017) argued that employees with families in pursuit of achieving highly laid down KPI were in imbalance between family and work, and this led to conflict between personal responsibilities at home and functional demands at work. Consequently, stress arises or is exacerbated by pressure from external factors to which one does not have sufficient resources, as defined by WHO (2020).

However, predicting that KPI only exacerbates occupational stress is not possible, as companies try to set tasks that are achievable for employees, and they are often aimed at increasing productivity. For example, a study by Clarke A. (2017) on the implementation of wellbeing into KPI showed that after the experiment, participants became more calm, relaxed and achieved their goals without aggression and anxiety.

In many companies, KPI is not only a performance improvement, as Mallow (2017) pointed out, but it is also a measure of employee performance. Hussain and Naja (2016) argued that

performance appraisal of workers consists of several indicators and the most important one is employee performance, however, when productivity is reduced and there is an unsatisfied evaluation as a result, the employee feels upset. Salary, career progression, rewards, and reputation are at stake and if the appraisal is unsatisfactory then the worker would become depressed which is a sign of stress.

To sum up, if KPI consists of unrealistic demands, there are all the predictors for stress, which is detrimental to the productivity and effectiveness of the employee and the company. However, if KPI is realistic and in line with employee capabilities and knowledge, then the employee's psycho-emotional state will be healthy, balance will be maintained, organizational results will be better, and the employee's work efficiency will be higher.

### **2.3 Onboarding program.**

Maurer (2019) argued that employee onboarding is a process that allows a newcomer to be integrated into the company, into the corporate culture, in order to maximize his productivity.

The impact of the onboarding program on stress is understudied, but by drawing parallels between performance after undergoing the onboarding program and subsequent job performance, the link between the employee and stress can be identified, given literature review conducted on occupational stress earlier.

According to the Harvard Business Review cited in Chen (2020), employee onboarding has two aspects, the first is learning how the work process is done and all the necessary information used on a daily basis, and the second is the importance of learning the language of your workplace. So it was noted in the research that the more new employees do not understand the acronyms relating to work, the more they feel like an outsider. This leads to anxiety, worry and fear of not fitting in and not finding a common language with colleagues, which causes occupational stress. This finding is confirmed by Bridges cited in Chen (2020) when a new employee enters a new work environment, the first thing that worries him or her is not the job change itself, but the psychological transition, accompanied by uncertainty,



disorientation and feelings of fear. And the onboarding program, or organizational socialization, is a process that reduces stress (uncertainty, fear) and increases the newcomer's ability to contribute to the new work environment.

Consequently, Gallup (2017) noted that 88% of employees who were not provided with an onboarding program experienced work-related stress in the workplace, which was represented by the uncertainty associated with new tasks, roles and corporate relationships. Allison (2018) confirmed that as a result of the lack of an onboarding program, newcomers were unable to build relationships with co-workers and could not fully understand what was required of them. However, according to Glasdor (2018), it is noted that not all companies have a successful new worker onboarding program. According to a survey by Careerbuilder and Silkroad Technology, it was observed that 9% of new employees quit because of a poorly aligned onboarding program, in addition, over 30% of employees said that their managers were not involved in supporting them during the onboarding process. These results lead to the fact that people need an adaptation program and it should be properly structured with support from a mentor (manager) for the successful completion of tasks, for socialization in a new workplace, for minimizing professional stress, and avoiding redundancy.

If companies get this process right, employee retention will increase by 83 % and productivity by 70 % (Glasdor, 2018). Onboarding program in over 60 % of respondents in the Allison (2018) study, caused satisfaction, a sense of job readiness, gave a sense of value as well as a sense of acceptance by colleagues. In a 90-day analysis of the impact of the newcomer onboarding program on Twitter, it was found that 100 percent of new employees were satisfied with the onboarding program and felt comfortable from the first day. 86% of employees reported that their manager helped them during the onboarding program, which reduced their anxiety and increased their feeling of security (Chen, 2020). Therefore, an effective onboarding program has a positive effect on newcomer, by minimizing fear and anxiety and increasing job satisfaction. Beer, Caldwell and Floyd cited in Chen (2020) showed that

employees who established rapport with newcomers, supported new workers during the onboarding program, provided advice and created an organizational culture in which newcomers showed innovative and creative approaches to work, and improved company revenue by 6 %.

To summarize this section, onboarding programs minimize job stress if they are correctly structured and if the new employee feels comfortable and confident in his/her work environment from the first day. These feelings are in opposition to work stress, which causes consequences in the form of frustration, dismissal, and diminished reputation for the company.

#### **2.4 Training and development.**

Training is the process of improving knowledge, acquiring new skills in order to achieve the organization's target and KPI. Several researchers have found that it is necessary to provide employees with continuous learning and development as it mediates work stress. (Liao, 2011).

According to Sesen & Ertan (2021) there is a relationship between lack of training, workload, and high levels of stress. This assertion is proved through Bandura's (2012) concept of self-efficacy in a study by Sesen & Ertan (2021) where it is noted that an individual's beliefs about mobilizing motivation, necessary resources and knowledge leads to the achievement of tasks. And if people have low self-efficacy as a result of insufficient knowledge and work overload, it will not be possible to achieve the desired results, and negative stress symptoms will follow.

Research by Jehanzeb & Bashir (2013) indicates that staff training and development programs are a complex process, but have a positive impact on both employees and organization. Some researchers have found that after training, workers have increased resources that contribute to a better quality of work, proper organization and work planning, improved teamwork and communication skills, increased employee commitment, and reduced time spent on certain processes (Jehanzeb & Bashir, 2013; Sesen & Ertan, 2021). For a company, all of the above can increase productivity, efficiency and revenue.

Training is necessary, following Nassazi cited in Rodriguez & Walters (2017), as 72 % of employees who participated in seminars and training were able to improve their abilities to achieve organizational goals and improve their KPI. In the section on the effect of KPI on stress, it was observed that insufficient resources with high KPI lead to decreased employee performance, emotional burnout and irritability, which are signs of occupational stress. According to Asim cited in Sesen & Ertan (2021) when tasks are not performed properly because of lack of necessary skills and the final results do not exceed expectations, the individual loses motivation to continue working, which is characterized by frustration. However, if, as Jehanzeb and Bashir (2013) pointed out, companies provide opportunities to gain new knowledge and skills, then employee morale, confidence, a sense of security and job satisfaction would increase, and employee motivation and engagement would rise. The latter two values contribute to lower employee turnover, increasing staff productivity and company output.

When a company invests in its employees, they feel valued and accountable to the company, and this has a positive effect on the organizational results. Moreover, investing leads to improving production processes, creating innovative technologies, and maintaining competitiveness. According to Jehanzeb and Bashir (2013), the American Society for Training and Development found a correlation between investment in staff and higher profits. According to Rodriguez and Walters (2017), organizations that financed more than \$1,500 per employee in training generated more than 24 % of the gross profit.

In summary, training as a practice in HRM is an essential resource that positively influence on worker by minimizing work related stress. Because new knowledge helps to unleash new talents, find more pragmatic solutions, and when personnel have the necessary tools to solve complex problems, they have no worries and disappointments. The direct link between training and job satisfaction also contributes to minimal work stress. In addition, a supportive

environment where there is continuous development leads to successful task performance (KPI), increased productivity and staff effectiveness.

### **Methodology.**

The researcher used two types of research methods, quantitative and qualitative. The quantitative method was used to analyze the attitudes of mining employees towards the practices and policies in the company and to assess their impact on occupational stress. A questionnaire consisting of 20 questions was used for the study. A qualitative research method, namely the in-depth interview was used to allow participants to provide their own view on the research issue. Qualitative and quantitative types of research come from different paradigms, quantitative methods, have a limited set of questions and answers, while qualitative research is interpretive in nature (Arnold & Lane cited in Subramaniam, 2017)

The design of qualitative research is empirical, where the main method is a semi-structured interview consisting of 5 open-ended questions. This type of interview provides opportunities for the interviewer to ask additional questions and gives participants more opportunity to reveal their point of view. The questions are prepared in such a way that they do not create leading questions using a particular interviewer's opinion.

The design of the quantitative method is a questionnaire consisting of questions in several categories. With quantitative research it is possible to find answers to a question through the analysis of quantitative data, i.e. data presented in numbers and figures (Taylor, 1998). In addition, with a questionnaire, it is possible to collect data from a large number of participants in a short period of time.

The purpose of this study is to determine the validity of the hypotheses proposed by the author of the study, to determine the current situation of the company under study and create a comprehensive image to improve the working atmosphere and minimize stress in the current environment.

### **Sample size of the study.**

For this study, a non-probability sample was used, namely convenience type. The population was categorized by the mining company “AMG”. This company has been in Kazakhstan for over 5 years, positioning itself as an international exploration company using new innovations in subsoil use. To achieve the objectives of the quantitative research 43 questionnaires were distributed to the management and engineering units. The engineering and technical division consists of three units: geologists, geophysicists and drillers. Forty questionnaires were returned in response.

The questionnaire was designed on a five-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree and 5=strongly agree). The response rate was 93%. Practices and policies affecting staff stress were investigated as part of the questionnaire.

Each category was analyzed by averaging the responses.

In order to achieve the qualitative research objectives, 6 respondents of the company participated in the interview. The respondents were from different departments, 3 respondents were from geophysical, drilling and geological departments, 1 respondent from accounting department and 1 respondent from HR department. Participants have different work experience in this company, the longest being more than 3 years. The number of questions in the interview was 5, these questions were prepared in advance, but for clarification and more detailed analysis additional questions were used. The duration of the interview ranged from 30 to 50 minutes.

It should be noted that the survey was conducted anonymously, in order to preserve the privacy and security of each participant, as in providing data interviews will be used other names/values to preserve confidentiality of staff.

### **Data collection.**

The required information was collected using a questionnaire. The questionnaire was used to collect objective data and present information in a numerical format.

Description.

Table 1. Data Analysis of the survey

| Categories   | Questions  | Values |       |       | Average of values                      |                                      |
|--|------------|--------|-------|-------|--|--------------------------------------|
|  |            |        |       |       |  |                                      |
| Assessment of the employee's current status, whether they are under stress | 1, 2, 3    | 92,5 % | 97,5% | 50%   | 80 % - feel satisfied in the workplace | 17% - feel insecure                  |
|  |            | 5%     | 2,5%  | 42,5% | 3% - undecided                         |                                      |
| Organizational change increases stress in the workplace                    | 4, 6, 7    | 50%    | 55%   | 45%   | 50% - inclined to this statement       | 35% - not inclined to this statement |
|  |            | 45%    | 22,5% | 37,5% | 15% - undecided                        |                                      |
| KPIs increase stress in the workplace                                      | 12, 13, 15 | 35%    | 57,5% | 57,5% | 50% - inclined to this statement       | 45% - not inclined to this statement |
|  |            | 60%    | 40%   | 37,5% | 5 % - undecided                        |                                      |
| Employee appraisal increases stress in the workplace                       | 14         | 45%    | 45%   |       | 45% - inclined to this statement       | 45%- not inclined to this statement  |

|   |            |                                    |        |        |  |                                       |
|---|------------|------------------------------------|--------|--------|--|---------------------------------------|
|   |            | 10%                                |        |        | 10% - undecided                        |                                       |
| An adaptation program minimizes stress in the workplace | 8, 10, 11  | 85%                                | 92.5 % | 95%    | 91% - inclined to this statement       | 1 % - not inclined to this statement  |
|   |            | 2.5%                               | -      | -      | 8%- undecided                          |                                       |
| Staff training and development helps to minimize stress | 16, 17, 18 | 92.5%                              | 95%    | 82,5 % | 90% - inclined to this statement       | 2,5% - not inclined to this statement |
|   |            | 5%                                 | -      | 2,5%   | 7,5% - undecided                       |                                       |
| A sense of the employee's value to the company          | 19         | 67,5 % - agree with this statement |        |        | 7,5% - don't agree with this statement |                                       |
|   |            | 25% - undecided                    |        |        |  |                                       |
| The company is committed to innovation                  | 20         | 92,5 % - agree with this statement |        |        | 7,5 % - undecided                      |                                       |

### Discussion.

#### Quantitative research.

As previously stated, the questionnaire was carried out in the "AMG" mining company of Kazakhstan. This company has been on the Kazakhstani market for over 5 years, in the first three years the company had a small staff of no more than 70 people and now it has grown to over 200 people. The company is young and striving to implement international standards. The main mission of the company is to always look to the future and develop. One of the company's strategies is to enter into the international arena and compete with leading mining companies in the world.

Turning directly to the questionnaire, 40 employees of "AMG" mining company participated in the survey, the rest were not available as they were in other cities and did not have access to the internet.

Of the 40 surveyed participants, 28 were male and 12 employees were female, representing 70% and 30% respectively. The age of the employees was divided into four categories: 20-25 years old, 25-30 years old, 30-35 years old, 35 years old and over. The following illustration shows the proportion of the age of employees. According to this diagram, the mining company is dominated by the young generation from 20 to 35 years old.

Figure 1. **The age of employees.**

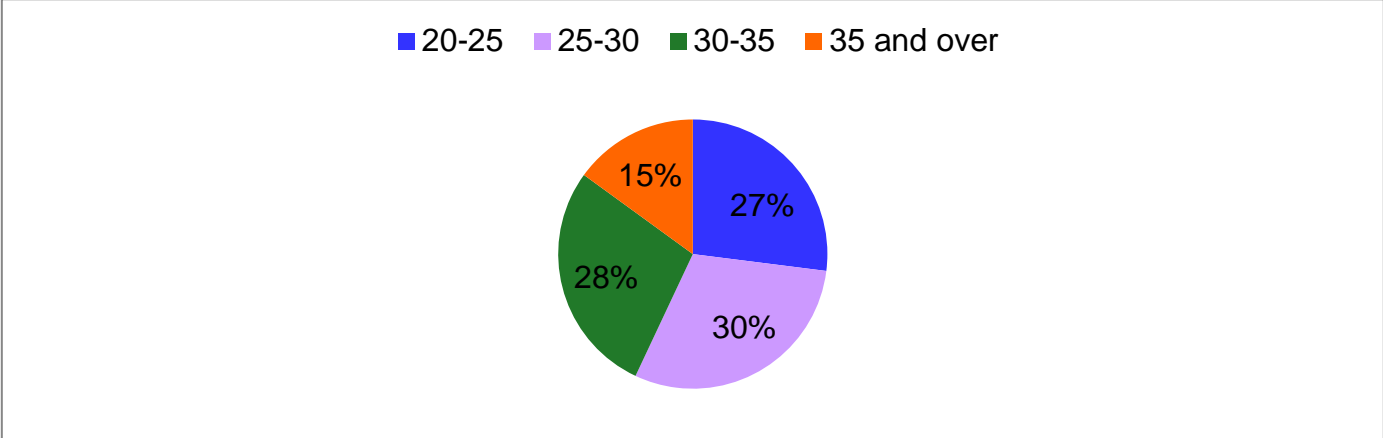


Figure 2. **The experience of workers.**



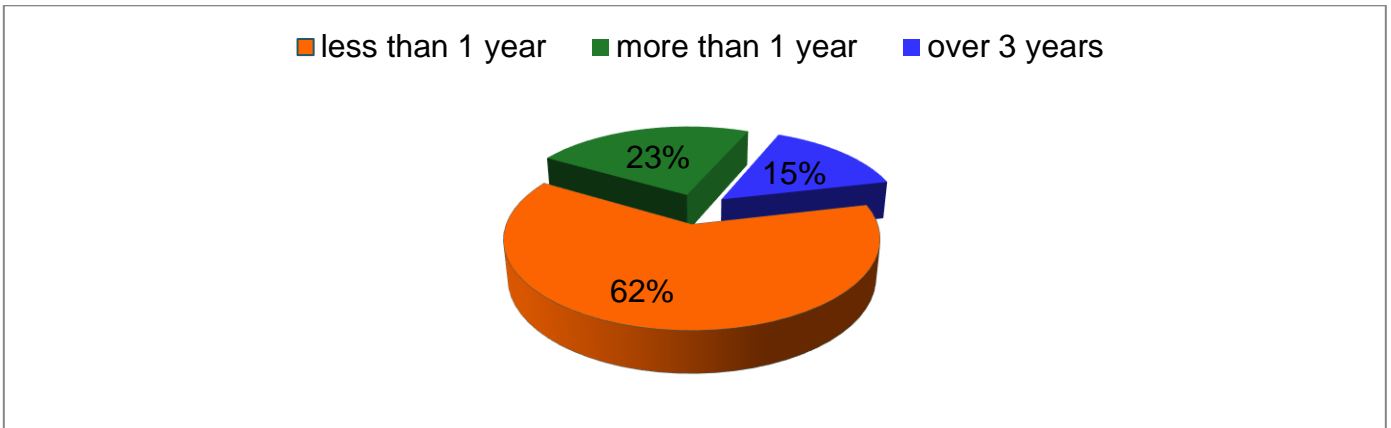


Figure 2 illustrates work experience of workers in the exploration company. Regarding diagram, the percentage of employee's experience with no more than 1 year is the highest compared to the tenure of workers with more than 3 years at "AMG". This fact leads to 2 assumptions:

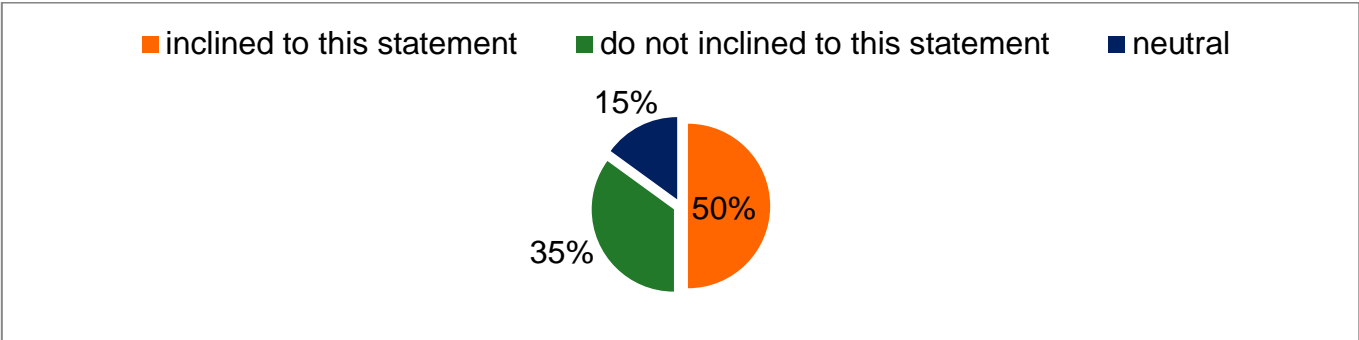
1. Assumption: The "AMG" company had just started to expand and hire more employees;
2. Assumption: There is staff turnover in the company.

The next questions focused on analyzing staff attitude towards practices and policies of HRM. The 1 category questions provided for determining the current status of employees. Table 1 shows that 80% of workers feel satisfied and fully concentrated on their job, which means absence of work stress. While 17% do not agree with expressions that "the work is enjoyable", "they can easily concentrate on work", but agree with the expression that "they change work activities or make distractions to overcome with feelings of fatigue". It can be assumed that 17% of employees feel exhausted, which according to Karasek, Kasl cited in Baker (1985) is a cause of stress.

The next category of questions describes employees' attitudes towards organizational change. Questions 4, 6 and 7 are structured to confirm or deny the hypothesis posed by the researcher that organizational change affects stress by enhancing it. These questions are veiled by the researcher in order to allow employees to answer them objectively. Question 4, with the following expression "I feel insecure when working conditions change" from Table 1 presented that 50% of employees concurred with that expression. According to studies by Johnson et al.

(2006) and Smollan (2012) uncertainty and anxiety are consequences of informing workers about organizational change and presented feelings are the main reasons of stress. It follows that half of the survey participants are exposed to occupational stress as a result of organizational transformations at work. In question 7, the analysis presented that 45% of participants pointed a lack of support in the organizational process. This phenomenon, according to the study of Smollan (2012), increases uncertainty, anxiety and restlessness, which are predictors of work related stress. However, it should be noted that 35% of employees in Figure 3 disagree with the statement that organizational change increases stress and believe that this factor has no effect on stress.

Figure 3. **Organizational changes affect staff stress by increasing it.**



Questions 8, 10, 11 related to the third category of questions towards to analyzing the relation of employees on to onboarding program.

Figure 4. **Employee onboarding program reduces occupational stress.**

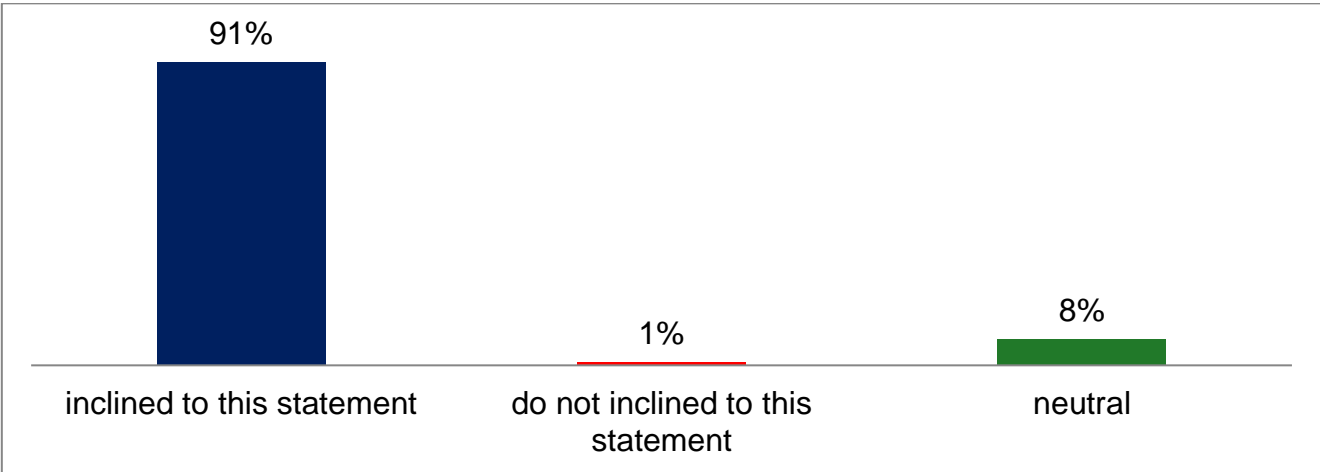
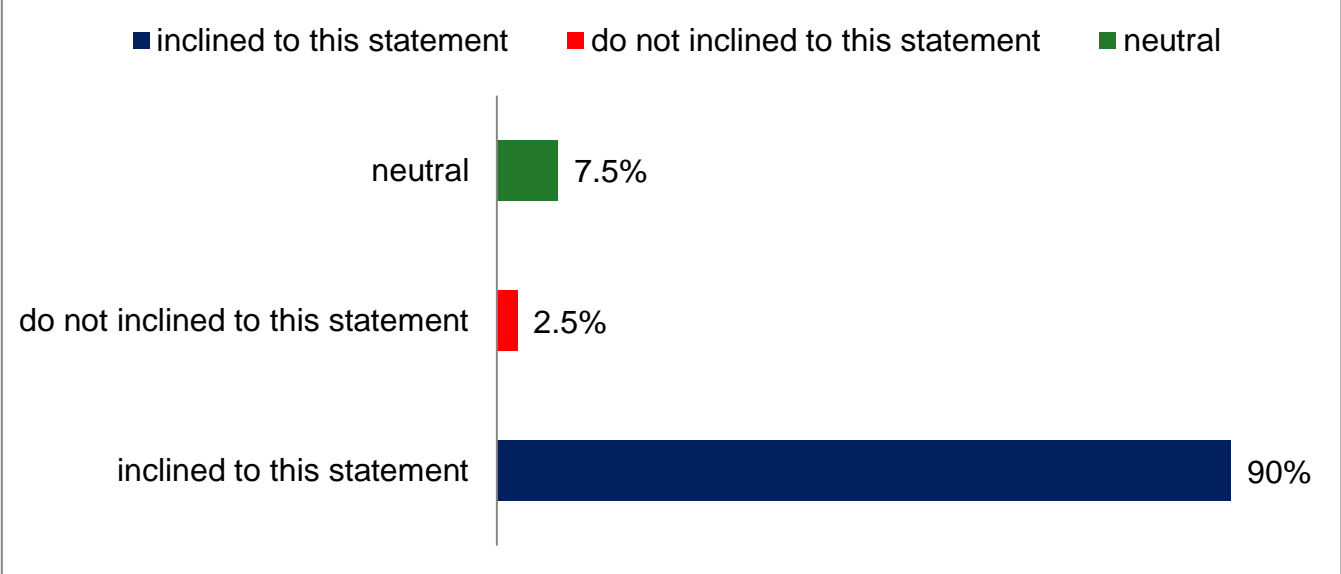


Figure 4 demonstrates the percentage of workers who agree or disagree with statement “Onboarding program reduces occupational stress”. It was noticeable that over 90 % of employees concur with expression. Furthermore, questions 10 and 11 lead to the conclusion that company has a favorable environment for new workers; during the probationary period colleagues support and helps them to complete tasks. In addition, Table 1 shows that 92.5% of employees said that managers supported them during probationary period, which is essential for new workers. The analysis is supported by the findings of Conner et al. (2013), where there was a strong correlation between management support and reduced work stress. Questions 12, 13, 14 and 15 referred to the statement that achieving a stated KPI and employee appraisal enhances work related stress. During comparing the data in Table 1, it was revealed that employees' answers do not vary significantly in terms of ratio, i.e. there are employees who agree with these expressions by 50% and those who do not agree by 45%. According to Mallow (2017) a high KPI leads to fatigue, emotional burnout, and an imbalance between personal life and work, all of which cause work stress. As a result, it can be assumed that 50% of employees are more stressed at work because of their KPI is misplaced and available resources are insufficient. These results partly support the hypothesis posited by the researcher. The percentage of employees in relation to the expression 'employee appraisal increases stress' is not possible for a definite choice, given the fact that workers who agree and disagree with the statement are equally presented.

15, 16 and 17 questions related to the statement that staff training and development program minimize occupational stress. Figure 5 demonstrate that 90% of employees concur with this statement. Results of the question 17 presents 82% of respondents who agree with the statement that company uses practices of learning and development which is encouraged by top managers. Also it confirms the findings of Jehanzeb and Bashir (2013) that training generates the reduction of work related stress by increasing job satisfaction. Considering these results, training and staff development in a mining company is well presented and

encouraged, which is beneficial for entering into the international arena and for competitiveness with leading companies. For the reason that training is the acquisition of new knowledge and innovative approaches.

Figure 5. Staff training and development minimizes professional stress.



In the exploration company two policies were taken under investigation, the employee value policy and innovation. According to the Table 1, it can be seen that the value policy of employees does not match assumptions of the researcher; only 67.5% of employees feel valued, 25% found it difficult to answer. We can assume that 25% of employees did not understand the question, or do not know how valuable they are to the company. 7.5% of workers disagree with the statement. This phenomenon is possible, taking into account various factors affecting employees. Question 20 is about the company's willingness to be innovative, 92.5% of workers confirmed expression, which corresponds to the strategy of the mining company.

**Qualitative research.**

As previously mentioned in the methodology, the researcher conducted semi-structured interview of the qualitative research with 6 employees. All the interviewees were from different departments and their work experience ranged from 1 to 3 years.

Main interview questions.

Table 2.

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | What do you understand by workplace stress and how does it manifest itself?       |
| 2 | How do you think organizational change affects employees in your company?         |
| 3 | How do you think KPI affects employees?   |
| 4 | How do you think training affects employees in your company?                      |
| 5 | How do you think the onboarding program affects the new employee at your company? |

To the question 1 the answers of employees varied, 2 participants agreed that stress in the workplace can be understood as prolonged fatigue and irritability. 3 employees said that workplace stress is about constant anxiety, irritability and reduced concentration in performing assigned tasks. 1 respondent stated that the imbalance between work and personal life, chronic fatigue and pressure is the reason for occupational stress. Analysis of the participants' answers lead to the conclusion that under different interpretations of work related stress, all employees agreed that stress is characterized by negative symptoms.

Question 2 was about investigating the impact of organizational changes on work related stress. Respondents in the interview indicated that company frequently undergo to the organizational changes, however, often the form of providing this changes suffer in the process. 2 participants mentioned that once a year there is financial problems, given the fact that in this industry there is a seasonality of work. And once, when the company was faced with a pay problem, there was a decision to reduce working hours, employees were notified at the last time. And, as respondents noted, most of the staff were anxious and unsure about the short-term nature of these changes. Also, some workers were surprised that the decision was

made unilaterally, without discussion. After managers explained the situation, employees calmed down.

4 employees said that organizational changes do not affect in any way, and if challenges are coming, they will cope with them and believe that organizational changes only improve the work environment and learn them to be resilient and determined. They also noted that in today's world this is an important attribute for development of the company and maintaining a place in a competitive environment. Hence, the majority of respondents disagreed with the researcher's hypothesis that organizational change increases work stress. In summary, the organizational changes that are implemented in the company suffer from inappropriate communication, which confirms the conclusions drawn by Pick et al. (2012) that inappropriate communication causes increased work stress.

A question about employees' attitudes towards given KPI yielded the following results. 5 out of 6 participants reported that sometimes KPI is too high and impossible for achieving due to insufficient information and short deadlines. Sometimes more time is needed than required. "Stress arises when deadlines are tight, we start spending more time at work, sometimes staying late and getting tired". This proves the fact that KPI causes work related stress and an imbalance between personal life and work. 1 employee stated that KPI is a reason for being anxiety about losing bonuses, but simultaneously KPI help to be disciplined and allocate time correctly. To sum up, a mining company needs to revise KPI for reducing workload and prevent emotional burnout of workers; because, it results of an occupational stress.

Both in the questionnaire and in interviews respondents demonstrated a positive opinion on training and adaptation program. Training in the mining company is encouraged, and it was noted that the company pay great attention for developing workers knowledge in their specifics and in the general training courses like leadership or excel. When good results are achieved, the company provides bonuses by cash or promotion. All respondents noted that the advantage of this company is the training and development of personnel, which increases the

productivity and efficiency of employees.

The onboarding program helped 4 respondents to easily without stress join the company. The interviewees noted that when new workers arrive, there is a mandatory procedure for introducing the newcomer. The HR department introduces to new worker information about the company; introduces with each department; explains the functional responsibilities, goals, mission and strategy of the company. In addition, during the probationary period, one mentor is assigned to every new employee in order to help in completing tasks or building good relationships with colleagues. This process helps to minimize fear, anxiety, and also decrease an occupational stress of the newcomer. 2 respondents noted that this practice was introduced recently and they did not participate in these procedures as newcomers. They stated that at first time it was difficult for cope with tasks and build relationships with colleagues.

It follows that an onboarding program is necessary, and its implementation in the mining company demonstrates how much more atmospheric the acclimatization of new employees will be and how it will be contribute to rapid integration into the new working system.

The results confirm conclusions made by the researcher regarding training and adaptation programs and shows how positively they influence on corporate spirit of the company and minimizing work related stress caused by other factors.

### **Limitations.**

There are several limitations of the research. Firstly, the studied practices and policies in the survey covered only one mining company in Kazakhstan and findings could not fully capture the attitudes of all employees in the mining sector. Secondly, in the study participated only 40 employees out of 204 and results do not include the perceptions of all workers at “AMG” company in Nur-Sultan city. Third, the age and tenure of staff were insufficient for a complete study of work-related stress; longer periods of employment and a greater number of workers within the various age categories were needed. Fourthly, there were limitations in the

availability of secondary sources of some practices and policies; as a result some of the practices were under-researched. Taking these limitations into account, further research is needed to investigate in a more detailed way the impact of practices and policies on employees' work-related stress. It should also be noted that the identified outcomes are based on self-reports by using a single questionnaire and an interview, which may lead to insufficient data being used.

### **Conclusion and recommendations.**

In this study, the objectives were to examine the practices and policies used in “AMG” mining company and determine their impact on staff stress. The researcher sought to understand what role they play in relation to increasing/minimizing work stress. As a result of this analysis, the researcher came to the following conclusion.

The practices and policies used in the mining company maintain a balance between stress enhancers and stress suppressors. However, if the two stress-boosting categories by organizational change and KPI will be tweaked, the work stress caused by these practices would be eliminated.

Through qualitative and quantitative research analysis, it was found that **organizational change** affects occupational stress due to lack of support and lack of communication due to changes. The HR department needs to take control of these deficiencies and correct them. During organizational changes, it is possible to use Kotter's 8-step model, in which any organizational changes go through successive stages of gradual transition from one structure to another. Since the Kotter model includes a stage of discussion and open communication it is possible to organize a town hall meeting with employees. In this meeting, it is possible to informally discuss company strategies and required incremental changes with staff. This meeting format may prepare employees for upcoming changes, and discussions may lead to different solutions. Employee contributions during the process of finding new solutions will create a sense of being part of the process. This, in turn, not only increases job satisfaction,



but also has a positive psychological impact. Moreover, a pulse check questionnaire can be performed during the Town Hall Meeting. This questionnaire will help to determine how useful the meeting was, whether changes are necessary, how relevant the changes are in the company. Analysis of the data will provide a general idea of the attitude of employees to changes. It was also noted that during changes, there is a lack of support from managers; this problem needs to be addressed by the HR department through coaching training or seminars where all employees will participate, starting from managers up to employees of engineering departments.

The next stressor is **KPI**, based on the results of the questionnaire and interview; it was found that in the mining company, there are two factors that increase stress - lack of information and high stated KPI. The HR Department should make an audit of the KPI criteria and, if changes are necessary, implement them. Furthermore, it is necessary to send some employees (e.g., HR managers or top managers) to training courses on how to form KPI criteria in order to use knowledge for further correct formation of KPI. After the audit and revised criteria, it is essential to organize a meeting with staff members for open communication, to explain all the criteria and to answer questions if they arise. This practice will help each employee to have sufficient access to information for further use in achieving goals.

According to the results, the **onboarding program** in the exploration company is well formed . However, after the probationary period is completed, a questionnaire should be handed out to new workers to evaluate the employee onboarding program. This feedback will help subtract deficiencies and improve the program.

Considering the results of the quantitative and qualitative methods, the employee **training program** is also well formed. However, the human resources department needs to not overdo with the practice of training and development of staff. For this purpose, it is necessary to make audits every six months and review the list of courses for relevance and effectiveness for workers. After taking courses, to conduct a questionnaire in order to find out the practical

value of the acquired knowledge. Therefore, each employee will be responsible and realize the importance of training.

In summary, the aim and objectives of the study have been achieved. It was determined that organizational change and KPI as a stressors increases work related stress if they are not correctly structured. However, employee training and onboarding programs minimize stress level that analyzed with primary and secondary sources. Theoretically, this research contributed to the study of the impact of practices and policies on employee stress in a Kazakhstani companies. These results will be useful for further and more detailed research in the human resource management field and also in the Kazakhstani mining companies.

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## APPENDICES

Appendix 1.

### Questionnaire

|   |                  |  |             |
|---|------------------|--|-------------|
| Gender  |                  |  |             |
| Male  |                  | Female   |             |
| Age   |                  |  |             |
| 20-25   | 25-30            | 30-35  | 35 and over |
| How long have you been working here?  |                  |  |             |
| Less than 1 year  | More than 1 year | More than 3 year   |             |
| Please indicate how much you agree with this statement.                         |                  |  |             |
| I enjoy with my work  |                  | 1. Strongly disagree<br>2. Disagree<br>3. Undecided<br>4. Agree<br>5. Strongly agree |             |
| I can easily concentrate on my work   |                  | 1. Strongly disagree<br>2. Disagree<br>3. Undecided<br>4. Agree<br>5. Strongly agree |             |
| I try to change activities or distract myself to overcome feelings of tiredness |                  | 1. Strongly disagree<br>2. Disagree<br>3. Undecided<br>4. Agree<br>5. Strongly agree |             |
| I feel insecure when working conditions change                                  |                  | 1. Strongly disagree<br>2. Disagree<br>3. Undecided<br>4. Agree                      |             |



|   |  |
|---|--|
|   | 5. Strongly agree  |
| It is not difficult for me to independently make any decision regarding the performance of my work. | 1. Strongly disagree<br>2. Disagree<br>3. Undecided<br>4. Agree<br>5. Strongly agree |
| Any changes in the company improve the working environment  | 1. Strongly disagree<br>2. Disagree<br>3. Undecided<br>4. Agree<br>5. Strongly agree |
| Our managers support us during every change in the company  | 1. Strongly disagree<br>2. Disagree<br>3. Undecided<br>4. Agree<br>5. Strongly agree |
| The Onboarding Program reduces stress at work   | 1. Strongly disagree<br>2. Disagree<br>3. Undecided<br>4. Agree<br>5. Strongly agree |
| I handle tasks myself, without asking co-workers for help   | 1. Strongly disagree<br>2. Disagree<br>3. Undecided<br>4. Agree<br>5. Strongly agree |
| During my probationary period, my superiors have supported me and helped me                         | 1. Strongly disagree<br>2. Disagree<br>3. Undecided<br>4. Agree<br>5. Strongly agree |
| My colleagues have helped me during my probationary period.   | 1. Strongly disagree<br>2. Disagree<br>3. Undecided                                  |

|  |  |
|--|--|
|  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. Agree</li> <li>5. Strongly agree</li> </ul>  |
| The tasks assigned to my position are achievable   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Strongly disagree</li> <li>2. Disagree</li> <li>3. Undecided</li> <li>4. Agree</li> <li>5. Strongly agree</li> </ul> |
| I have all the information and tools I need, to successfully complete the assigned tasks       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Strongly disagree</li> <li>2. Disagree</li> <li>3. Undecided</li> <li>4. Agree</li> <li>5. Strongly agree</li> </ul> |
| I find the appraisal policy to be stressful  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Strongly disagree</li> <li>2. Disagree</li> <li>3. Undecided</li> <li>4. Agree</li> <li>5. Strongly agree</li> </ul> |
| I do not have the necessary resources or knowledge to achieve the goals defined by supervisors | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Strongly disagree</li> <li>2. Disagree</li> <li>3. Undecided</li> <li>4. Agree</li> <li>5. Strongly agree</li> </ul> |
| I agree that training can boost employees' motivation and performance                          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Strongly disagree</li> <li>2. Disagree</li> <li>3. Undecided</li> <li>4. Agree</li> <li>5. Strongly agree</li> </ul> |
| I believe that training helps employees cope with their tasks more effectively                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Strongly disagree</li> <li>2. Disagree</li> <li>3. Undecided</li> <li>4. Agree</li> <li>5. Strongly agree</li> </ul> |
| Our CEO encourage training   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Strongly disagree</li> <li>2. Disagree</li> </ul>  |

|   |  |
|---|--|
|   | 3. Undecided<br>4. Agree<br>5. Strongly agree  |
| I know my value in the company is important | 1. Strongly disagree<br>2. Disagree<br>3. Undecided<br>4. Agree<br>5. Strongly agree |
| Our company is always striving to innovate  | 1. Strongly disagree<br>2. Disagree<br>3. Undecided<br>4. Agree<br>5. Strongly agree |

**Interview questions.**

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | What do you understand by workplace stress and how does it manifest itself?         |
| 2 | How do you think organisational change affects employees in your company?           |
| 3 | How do you think KPI affects employees?   |
| 4 | How do you think training affects employees in your company?                        |
| 5 | How do you think the onboarding programme affects the new employee at your company? |

## Appendix 2:

### Research Ethics Approval Form

Higher School of Economics M.Narikbayev KAZGUU University is concerned about ethical issues related to research. A student should review “Ethics in Research” section in Master’s Dissertation Guidelines and have a discussion with a supervisor regarding ethical consideration in research.

Research Ethics Approval form should be filled prior to the start of data collection. A supervisor should sign a form as a sign of confirmation. A supervisor might contact Disciplinary and Ethics committee in case if there are some doubts on research and expert’s opinion is required.

|                          |  |
|--------------------------|--|
| <b>Name of a Student</b> | Linda Mukasheva  |
| <b>Degree Programme</b>  | Program 7M04106 - «Business and management»                      |
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| <b>Supervisor’s Name</b> | Marzhan Nazarova   |

1. Does your research involve vulnerable groups? (Yes/No) \_\_\_No\_\_\_\_\_
2. Does your research involve sensitive topics? (Yes/No)\_\_\_No\_\_\_\_\_
3. Does your research may potentially harm (psychologically/physically/financially, etc)participants? (Yes/No) \_\_\_No\_\_\_\_\_
4. Describe outline and objectives of your research.

The study will take place in the “AMG” mining company in the Nur-Sultan city. The study was conducted to investigate the impact of certain HRM practices and policy in Kazakhstani companies on personnel stress management. **Next objectives** were explored:

- To examine certain practices and policies used in “AMG” company;
- to identify the impact of certain policies and practices used in “AMG” company on stress management;
- to diagnose the practices used to develop recommendations;
- to develop practical recommendations for the management of practices and policies influencing stress management at “AMG” company in Nur-Sultan, in the Republic of Kazakhstan.

5. Describe your research design and how human participants will be involved

The study used a set of research methods (description, analysis and synthesis by using secondary sources, qualitative and quantitative methods of research).  
By methods of description, analysis and synthesis, the author will compare and analyze practices and policies used in “AMG” Company in Nur-Sultan city.  
The quantitative method by the survey include 20 questions ad 40 participants were involved. The qualatative research method in the form of semi-structured interview was chosen to analyze certain practices and policies in detail by involving 6 respondents from different departments. The interview will consist of 5 questions.

6. Describe potential risks of your research to your human participants and how you are going to avoid these risks.

The main risk involved the honest responses of respondents in both interviews and questionnaires, and the confidentiality of the information.

7. Describe how anonymity of respondents will be ensured.

During the survey, each participant was initially informed of his or her anonymity, with no name or other specific signs. In addition, all questionnaires were placed in one common box. In this way, anonymity was maintained. During the interview, all names of the respondents were concealed.

8. Describe how informed consent will be provided.

There will be a document about consent that will be provided in printed format prior to the survey/interview.

9. Describe how you will ensure privacy of data collection.

The research will maintain strong confidentiality with respect to employees and results of survey and interview.

10. Describe how data will be stored throughout and in the end of the project.

The data will be stored in a personal computer with a password.

Student's Name

Student's

Signature

Date

Supervisor's Name

Supervisor's

Signature

**For Supervisor's:** Contact Disciplinary and Ethics Committee, if there are any ethical issues that seems controversial and unclear. Send this form and provide your explanation.