


## The Impact of Professional Stress on Managerial Performance Among Middle Managers

Camelia Cristina DRAGOMIR-PÂNZARU<sup>1,3</sup>, Aurel Mihail ȚÎȚU<sup>2,3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Transilvania University of Brasov, Colina Universității Nr 1, 500068, Brasov, Romania;

 ORCID No. 0000-0002-7537-9217; camelia.dragomir@unitbv.ro (corresponding author)

<sup>2</sup>Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, 10 Victoriei Street, 550024, Sibiu, Romania;  ORCID No. 0000-0002-0054-6535; mihail.titu@ulbsibiu.ro

<sup>3</sup>Academy of Romanian Scientists, 3 Ilfov Street, 050094 Bucharest, Romania

Received: April 21, 2026

Revised: May 17, 2026

Accepted: May 25, 2026

Published: June 30, 2026

**Abstract:** The analysis of professional stress and understanding how it affects the activity and performance of managers is a strategic necessity for the sustainable development of organizations. Therefore, they are increasingly interested in identifying the causes of professional stress and developing strategies to prevent or reduce it. The purpose of this paper is to analyze professional stress and its implications on managerial performance among middle managers. The paper addresses the sources of professional stress, its effects on the activity of middle managers and the strategies adopted for stress management, considering the level of managerial experience. This study adopts a quantitative, cross-sectional, and exploratory approach. The results indicate a medium-to-high level of professional stress for the managers participating in the study. The findings suggest that, although a certain level of pressure can support managerial performance in the short term, maintaining high demands for long periods can affect the health, motivation and efficiency of managers' activities, with negative implications on individual results and organizational performance. The paper provides a useful perspective on how professional stress in the work of middle managers can be understood and managed effectively so that individual and organizational performance remains at an optimal level in an organizational context characterized by dynamism, competitive pressure and a high level of uncertainty.

**Keywords:** professional stress; managerial performance; middle managers; stress management strategies; managerial experience.

### Introduction

In the current organizational context, professional stress has become a constant in the lives of managers, with significant implications for the efficiency of their work and organizational performance. The rapid pace of changes in the organizational environment and the rapid evolution of digital technologies require a permanent effort to adapt, intensify the pace of work and increase responsibilities for managers in all fields (Lupsa-Tătaru et al., 2025). This professional category is subject to increased professional demands; managers being forced to make complex decisions and ensure the sustainability of the organization in a challenging economic environment characterized by a high level of uncertainty.

Professional stress is presented in the academic literature as an individual's reaction to the imbalance between professional demands and personal adaptation resources. According to the World Health Organization (2024), this type of stress represents the response that people can have when faced with professional demands and pressures that do not correspond to their knowledge and skills and that test their ability to cope with them. The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH, 2024) describes

### How to cite

Dragomir-Pânzaru, C.C., & Țîțu, A. M. (2026). The Impact of Professional Stress on Managerial Performance Among Middle Managers. *Journal of Knowledge Dynamics*, Vol. 3, No.1, pp. 54-64.

<https://doi.org/10.56082/jkd.2026.1.54> ISSN ONLINE 3061-2640

occupational stress in a complementary way, as a set of harmful physical and emotional reactions that occur when job demands do not match the individual's capabilities, resources, or needs. This idea is also taken up in the study by Catapano et al (2023), which highlights the source of occupational stress in the imbalance between occupational pressures and individual resources and emphasizes how occupational stress affects the physical, emotional, and behavioral health of individuals, with negative effects on workplace performance.

The specifics of managerial activity make professional stress reflect not only on individual results, but also on the way teams function and on organizational performance. Rapid organizational changes, pressure from operational and strategic demands, high workload and complex decision-making responsibilities can affect the ability of managers to effectively manage situations of occupational overload. This may have important implications not only for the efficiency and quality of their professional activities, but also for decision-making processes, employee coordination, the achievement of organizational objectives, and ultimately for the overall performance of the organization. Therefore, understanding how professional stress influences managerial performance and identifying effective strategies for its management are relevant aspects for the sustainable development of organizations.

Although the literature has shown increasing interest in examining workplace stress and its effects on employee performance and organizational effectiveness, the analysis of professional stress among managers, particularly those occupying middle-management positions, and its effects on managerial performance are insufficiently addressed. Therefore, our paper aims to examine, in an integrated manner, the sources of professional stress, its implications on managerial performance among middle managers and the strategies adopted for stress management, considering the level of managerial experience.

To achieve the research goal, the following research objectives were established:

- O1: Identifying the main factors generating professional stress and analyzing its effects on managerial performance among middle managers.
- O2. Identifying the strategies used to manage professional stress.
- O3. Exploring the differences in the perception and management of professional stress depending on managerial experience.

The results obtained provide a useful perspective on how professional stress in the activity of middle managers can be understood and managed effectively so that individual and organizational performance remains at an optimal level in a dynamic and highly competitive organizational context.

The paper is further structured as follows. After this introduction, we review the literature and present the research methodology. The results are then presented and discussed. The final section is dedicated to the conclusions of the study, limitations and future research directions.

## **Literature review**

The analysis of professional stress and understanding how it affects the activity and performance of managers is a strategic necessity for the sustainable development of the organization. The literature describes stress as a complex phenomenon, in which professional pressures and individual resources are in a constant imbalance. In the long term, this imbalance affects both the physical and emotional health of the individual, as well as their professional performance and, implicitly, that of the organization (Catapano et al., 2023; Chireh et al., 2025). In other words, the fewer organizational, personal and social resources individuals have at their disposal, the more vulnerable they will be to the cumulative effects of stressors.

High workload, pressure to achieve objectives and insufficient resources are sources of professional stress for managers, frequently mentioned in the literature (Portoghese et al., 2020; Penconek et al., 2024), with a negative impact on job satisfaction and managerial performance. Also, low rewards for high-effort situations are associated with job dissatisfaction, high stress scores and intentions to leave the organization (Kokobun, 2024). In contrast, adequate resources, organizational support and decision-making autonomy increase job satisfaction and reduce the effects of stress (Svanström et al., 2025; Christiansen et al., 2024).

In the case of middle managers, research has identified a higher level of stress compared to leaders occupying higher hierarchical positions (Sherman et al., 2012; Pangert & Schüpbach, 2011). This situation is explained by the reduced sense of control over professional life (Sherman et al., 2012) and by the differences recorded in the distribution of stress factors and resources (Pangert and Schüpbach, 2011). In the opinion of researchers, the sources of stress become more pronounced at lower managerial levels, while the resources available to cope with them tend to be more limited (Bossmann et al., 2016). The position that middle managers have within the organization involves multiple responsibilities, intense work and high pressure generated by the need to simultaneously manage both the requests of senior managers and the responsibilities towards the coordinated team (Stilijanow, 2012). They are required to demonstrate a wide range of competencies, which involve effective management of resource, team coordination, communication skills, and leadership, within a highly competitive organizational context (Svanström et al., 2025). Team tensions, lack of role clarity and insufficient support from colleagues and superiors are significant stressors for middle managers, reported in the literature (Arakelian & Rudolfsson, 2021). Research by Hagerman et al. (2016) showed that managers who coordinate large teams face more problems in the case of insufficient resources, limited decision-making autonomy and lack of organizational support. Middle managers also have less freedom to effectively manage work-life balance compared to senior managers (Lundqvist et al., 2013), which can have a negative impact on the effectiveness of the activity and managerial performance. The results of the study conducted by Maharani and Dewi (2024) correlate occupational stress with work-life balance and job satisfaction. A poor work-life balance increases stress at work (Kumara & Fusana, 2018), affects personal well-being and has negative implications on work productivity and organizational performance (Shaffer et al., 2016). Added to these challenges is the limited experience of early-career managers in dealing with stressful situations, which may reduce their ability to identify and implement effective stress management mechanisms in critical circumstances (Foris et al., 2022). In this context, the high workload, the assumption of decision-making responsibilities and the pressure exerted by achieving performance objectives can trigger feelings of restlessness and anxiety, with potential effects on work-life balance and negative implications on managerial performance.

Studies on occupational stress management strategies for middle managers highlight as priorities workload management, role clarification and better control over work activity (Johari, 2020), organizational support and development of personal resources (Putra & Sari, 2025). In the meta-analysis conducted by Dannheim et al. (2025) on occupational stress management interventions, the authors emphasize the important role of senior managers in promoting well-being at work and effective management of occupational stress. Along with personal resources, organizational aspects, such as access to resources, organizational culture, work organization mechanisms and favorable working conditions, influence employee well-being and can contribute to improving organizational performance by increasing individual productivity, reducing absenteeism and health care costs (Hassard et al., 2018; Lundqvist et al., 2024). At the same time, the literature highlights the role of social and family resources in better managing stress at work and maintaining professional performance. (Johari, 2020).

Recent research reveals that the implications of professional stress on performance are not uniformly negative. In the study conducted by Conceição & Palma-Moreira (2025),

the authors identified a positive association of stress generated by high workload with perceived performance and burnout. On the other hand, the results of the study suggest a positive relationship between stress associated with career and reward and performance at work. However, when exposure to stress is prolonged and of high intensity, productivity and professional performance are negatively affected.

### Methodology

The aim of the study is to analyze professional stress among middle managers and its implications for managerial performance, taking into account the level of managerial experience.

The study adopts a quantitative, cross-sectional and exploratory research design. The sample included 68 respondents, middle managers from several organizations in the Central Region, Romania. A non-probabilistic, purposive and convenience sampling method was used, with participants being selected based on the criterion of occupying a middle-level managerial position and their availability to participate in the study.

The data were collected between March and April 2026 through a structured questionnaire, developed in accordance with the research objectives. The questionnaire was distributed electronically through a web platform. The data collected were processed using descriptive statistical methods, with frequencies and percentages being calculated to characterize the sample.

The distribution of participants by fields of activity is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1. Distribution of respondents by fields of activity**

Field of Activity	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Industry	16	23,5
Services	17	25,4
Information Technology (IT)	14	20,6
Medicine and Pharmacy	12	17,3
Financial and Banking	9	13,2
Total	68	100

Source: Author's own research

Table 2 presents the distribution of respondents according to their experience in middle management position.

**Table 2. Distribution of respondents by middle management experience**

Middle Management Experience	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Less than 2 years	8	11,8
2-5 years	18	26,5
5-8 years	26	38,2
More than 8 years	16	23,5
Total	68	100

Source: Author's own research

### Results and discussion

The results were analyzed according to the objectives pursued.

The assessment of the level of stress perceived by the respondents indicates a significant degree of professional pressure. Specifically, 39.2% of the subjects experienced a high level of stress, 9.4% reported a very high level, and 43.9% assessed their stress level as moderate. Only a small proportion of respondents (7,5%) perceived their stress level as low.

With regard to the frequency of stress experienced in the workplace, most of the respondents reported experiencing stress frequently (45.8%) or constantly (26.5%). These results indicate that professional stress is a constant presence in the activity of the managers participating in the study and is generally perceived at moderate to high levels. These findings are in line with previous research, which suggests that professional stress among middle managers is a widespread problem and, for many of them, manifests itself at moderate to high levels (Bossmann et al., 2016; Svanström et al., 2025).

To identify the factors contributing to professional stress, the respondents' perceptions of the main sources of stress encountered in managerial work were examined. The distribution of responses is presented in Table 3.

**Table 3. Main sources of professional stress reported by respondents**

<b>Source of professional stress</b>	<b>Frequency (n)</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Excessive Workload	49	72,1
Limited resources	35	51,5
Tight Deadlines	33	48,5
Role ambiguity	20	29,4
Relationships with Senior Management	18	26,5
Team conflicts	15	22,1

Source: own processing of survey data based on a questionnaire

The data obtained highlight the high workload as the main source of professional stress indicated by the managers participating in the study (72.1% of respondents), followed by resource limitations (51.5%) and deadlines (48.5%). At the same time, role ambiguity (29.4%), relationships with superiors (26.5%) and team conflicts (22.1%) were mentioned to a lesser extent. The results suggest that the professional stress of the managers participating in the study is determined mainly by direct demands from the workplace and resource constraints, while relational factors and organizational clarity have a moderate contribution. The results are confirmed by the findings of other studies in the literature, which associate professional stress with the stress factors mentioned (Ojha, 2025; Saud & Rice, 2024).

With regard to symptoms associated with professional stress, the results highlight chronic fatigue, irritability and difficulty concentrating as the most prevalent manifestations. The majority of respondents experiencing these symptoms either sometimes (41.2%) or often (34.5%). A very frequent occurrence of these symptoms was reported by 11.8% of respondents, while 9.3% indicated a low frequency. Only 3.2% declared that they had not experienced such manifestations. These findings are consistent with previous studies, which identify these manifestations as common symptoms associated with professional stress and burnout (Quick & Henderson, 2016).

Regarding the impact of work-related stress on work-life balance, the results highlight significant negative implications. The majority of respondents perceived a moderate negative impact (41%), followed by those who considered work-related stress to have a high negative impact on work-life balance (32.6%). At the same time, 9.6% of respondents indicated a very high impact, while 14.7% indicated a low impact. These results suggest that the effects of work-related stress extend beyond the workplace for most of the managers surveyed, affecting not only their health but also their ability to maintain an appropriate balance between work and personal life. This finding is confirmed by the results of recent studies in the literature, which associate high levels of professional stress with a reduced ability to maintain a healthy work-life balance (Thilagavathy & Geetha, 2021; Chireh et al., 2025).

To investigate the implications of professional stress on managerial performance, respondents were asked to assess their ability to make decisions under pressure and excessive workload. The results indicate that more than half of the respondents (58,3%) maintain a high level of decision-making capacity, while 31,9% assessed it as moderate. Only a small proportion of respondents (9,8%) reported a significant reduction in their decision-making capacity under conditions of professional pressure. These findings suggesting that effective mechanisms for adapting and managing situations of occupational overload have been identified.

To analyze the impact of professional stress on individual performance, respondents were invited to indicate how frequently stress situations affects their productivity. The results show that 54.8% of the study participants considered that stress affects their productivity only occasionally, suggesting that its influence, although present, is not constant. At the same time, 29.6% of managers reported that professional stress frequently reduces their productivity, which is negatively reflected on individual performance. In contrast, only 11.3% of respondents indicated that professional stress rarely reduces productivity, while the responses "very frequently" and "never" were recorded by only a small proportion of participants (4,3%). The results suggest a constant and moderate influence of professional stress on the efficiency of managers' activity, without significantly affecting managerial performance. This finding is associated with the results highlighted in recent research (Conceição & Palma-Moreira, 2025).

Regarding respondents' perceptions of the effects of professional stress on managerial performance, the results indicate a predominantly negative assessment. Specifically, the majority of respondents (61.5%) considered that professional stress has a negative impact on managerial performance. In contrast, 22.7% of the subjects believed that professional stress may have a positive effect on the efficiency of the work, with favorable implications for managerial performance. At the same time, 15.8% of the study participants considered that professional stress does not have a significant impact on managerial performance. Therefore, the results suggest that, although professional stress may be perceived as a mobilizing factor by some managers, in the long term, it is associated with a decrease in the efficiency of professional activity and managerial performance. These findings are in line with previous studies, which suggest that, over the long term, occupational stress may adversely affect productivity, work efficiency, and managerial performance (Gunasekera & Perera, 2023; Conceição & Palma-Moreira, 2025).

To identify the strategies used by research participants to reduce the effects of professional pressure on managerial performance, respondents were asked to indicate the methods they employ to manage professional stress. The distribution of responses is presented in Table 4.

The results indicate that the managers surveyed employ a combination of organizational, social and individual strategies to manage professional stress. Thus, task planning and prioritization were the most frequently reported strategies (60.3%), followed by task delegation (52.9%), team support (48.5%) and communication with senior managers (38.2%). At the same time, family support (30.9%) and participation in sports activities (26.5%) were mentioned as strategies for managing professional stress. Only a small proportion of respondents reported that they did not use any specific strategies to manage stress.

**Table 4. Professional stress management strategies reported by respondents**

<b>Professional Stress Management Strategies</b>	<b>Frequency (n)</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Task planning and prioritization	41	60,3
Task delegation	36	52,9
Team suport	33	48,5
Communication with senior management	26	38,2
Family suport	21	30,9
Physical activity	18	26,5
No specific stress management strategies	7	10,3

Source: own processing of survey data based on a questionnaire

The results highlight middle managers' preference for task organization mechanisms and organizational strategies for the effective management of professional stress and maintaining performance. The findings are in line with the results of other studies that emphasize the role of organizational context and support from the team and senior managers in reducing stress and supporting individual performance (Lundqvist et al., 2024; Putra & Sari, 2025). At the same time, the managers participating in the study mentioned that they use family and individual resources to reduce professional pressure and maintain an adequate level of involvement in professional activity, which confirms the results of studies in the literature (Dumas & Perry-Smith, 2018; Dannheim et al., 2023).

Finally, the relationship between the respondents' managerial experience and the main dimensions highlighted by the research results was investigated, namely: the main sources of professional stress, the perceived frequency of stress, the impact on work-life balance, the ability to make decisions under pressure, the impact of stress on managerial performance and the strategies used to manage stress.

The results suggest moderate differences in the responses of the managers participating in the research according to managerial experience. Thus, managers at the early stages of their managerial careers reported higher levels of stress and perceived a more pronounced negative impact on managerial performance, with excessive workload being identified as the main source of professional stress. Support from the team members and senior managers represents the organizational strategy most frequently used by managers with limited managerial experiens to reduce the effects of professional stress. As managerial experience increases, the ability to make decisions under stress appears to improve, with managers placing greater emphasis on organizational mechanism such as more efficient planning of responsibilities and delegation of tasks. The impact of professional stress on work-life balance remains substantial regardless of the level of managerial experience, with negative implications for job satisfaction and work efficiency.

The data underlying the findings presented above are summarized in Table 5, which illustrates the distribution of responses across the analyzed dimensions according to respondents' managerial experience.

**Table 5. Distribution of the main dimensions of professional stress and stress management strategies by managerial experience**

		Number of respondents	8	18	26	16
		Middle Management Experience (years)				
			< 2 ani	2-5 ani	5-8 ani	>8 ani
Main sources of professional stress	Excessive workload		73,1%	78,5%	71,3%	61,2%
	Tight deadlines		61,8%	60,3%	53,6%	42,9%
	Limited resources		56,4%	54,3%	50,8%	46,5%
High frequency of professional stress			61,4%	67,2%	52,9%	43,8%
High impact on work-life balance			63,8%	62,2%	53,8%	51,6%
High capacity for decision-making under pressure			48,6%	59,1%	72,9%	81,7%
Perceived negative impact of stress on managerial performance			62,%	59,7%	50,4%	43,1%
Primary strategies used to manage professional stress	Task planning and prioritization		49,8%	55,3%	66,2%	69,7%
	Task delegation		34,5%	46,2%	58,7%	69,6%
	Team support		52,6%	51,8%	49,6%	42,9%

Source: own processing of survey data based on a questionnaire

The findings are consistent with the results of studies in the literature, which emphasize the adverse effects of professional stress on employee well-being and work performance (Thilagavathy, & Geetha, 2021; Maharani, & Tamara, 2024).

## Conclusions

The accelerated pace of organizational change, competitive pressures, complex tasks and multiple responsibilities may increase the level of professional stress experienced by managers, negatively affecting their performance and, consequently, the performance at the organizational level. We aimed through this research to analyze the level of professional stress among middle managers operating in different fields of activity and to examine its implications on managerial performance, taking into account the level of managerial experience of the participants.

The results suggest a moderate to high level of professional stress consistently experienced by the managers participating in the study. The main stress-generating factors identified were high workload, tight deadlines for completing tasks and resource limitations. Decision-making capacity remains high under pressure, particularly among respondents with more than five years of managerial experience. However, the impact of stress on productivity and managerial performance is perceived as predominantly negative, especially by managers with less than five years of experience, who appear to be the group most exposed to professional stress. For these respondents, stress is further amplified by role ambiguity and limited decision-making autonomy, correlated with the decision-making responsibilities assumed and the pressure to achieve performance objectives. The stress management strategies most frequently mentioned in the responses of the study participants primarily involve mechanisms aimed at improving work organization, such as effective planning, task prioritization, role clarity, and greater

decision-making autonomy, as well as support from senior managers and team members. The results suggest that a certain level of professional pressure may have a mobilizing effect and contribute positively to managerial performance in the short term. However, the persistence and intensification of stress factors for long periods of time may negatively affect the health, motivation and efficiency of managers' activities, with negative consequences for both managerial and organizational performance.

From a theoretical perspective, the paper contributes to the existing body of knowledge by enhancing the understanding of the implications of professional stress for middle managers' performance. The study is of interest because it offers an integrated perspective on the main sources of professional stress, its effects on managerial performance and work efficiency among middle managers, as well as the strategies employed to manage stress across different levels of managerial experience.

From a practical point of view, the findings can be used at the level of organizations to develop strategies for managing professional stress that are sustainable in the medium and long term. Institutionalizing stress management as an organizational practice and moving from an individual to strategic approach to stress management could contribute to improved managerial and organizational performance. Measures such as reducing excessive workloads, fostering a supportive organizational culture, promoting transparent communication and providing structured support for novice managers may help mitigate the adverse effects of professional stress. For middle managers at the early stages of their managerial careers, managerial induction programs could be implemented to facilitate adaptation to managerial roles. Such programs should include roles and responsibility clarification, as well as regular feedback and support sessions involving both senior and middle management, with the aim of reducing role ambiguity and alleviate stress associated with performance expectations. In addition, middle managers should make greater use of personal and social resources to improve their well-being and reduce the adverse effects of work-related stress.

The paper has certain methodological limitations. Given the relatively small sample size and the use of a non-probabilistic sampling method, the results cannot be generalized to the entire population of middle managers. However, they provide valuable exploratory insights into the phenomenon under investigation.

Future studies may consider extending the analysis to a larger sample of managers from various fields of activity in order to explore differences in professional stress management strategies according to the specific characteristics of their work environments. Also, additional research could investigate how organizational culture contributes to reducing the effects of professional stress on managerial and organizational performance.

**AI Declaration:** The authors used an artificial intelligence (AI) tool solely to verify the accuracy of translations of certain text passages during the preparation of the manuscript. All intellectual contributions, scientific content, analyses, interpretations, and conclusions were developed exclusively by the authors.

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