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Stress in the American Workplace

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STRESS IN THE AMERICAN WORKPLACE

BY

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Thesis Advisor

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**Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a
Master of Arts degree in Corporate and Public Communication**

at

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Few can deny that stress levels in American society are now at unprecedented levels. The devastating effects of stress are most clearly and compellingly reflected in a place that commands widespread attention— Corporate America's bottom line. While sources of stress can stem from various crises in one's personal or family life, the workplace is undoubtedly one of the most frequent and challenging contributing factors. Globalization and free trade, increased market competition, changing economic conditions, mergers, acquisitions, downsizing, increased diversity in the workforce, higher expectations from organizational stakeholders, technological advancements and a host of other global and societal developments have dramatically raised the standard required for the survival and long term success of all organizations, small or large. These revolutionary developments have also significantly increased the productivity demands placed on their employees.

The implications for both the international labor force and America's workforce have been enormous. Never before in human history has the pace of change been so rapid and its effects so widespread. Globalization and free trade in particular have resulted in an unprecedented increase in competition between domestic firms and other world economies with significantly lower labor costs and faster production rates. This has meant increased pressure on American firms to reduce costs, raise productivity levels and meet the ever-increasing expectations of stakeholders. In the push for organizations

to “do more with less”, employees have found themselves involved in a “rat-race” which is extremely difficult to escape. Performance expectations have risen in the majority of careers and education and training requirements have increased. Those who wish to develop or maintain successful careers face increasing pressure for ongoing professional and technological training and often harbor secret fears of being left behind in the collective battle for long term career success.

In spite of apparent increases in company profits, financial security is becoming a more and more elusive goal for many. The cost of living has been steadily rising, personal debt levels –particularly credit card debt – have been soaring, and savings rates declining. Traditionally, a person could expect to remain in the same job for 20 or 30 years, confident of a regular income and the opportunity to retire comfortably after a lifetime of faithful service. Unfortunately, the progressively more competitive and ever-changing corporate world has rendered this expectation unrealistic and outdated. Many employees now expect to change jobs within five years, and are continually searching for a “better opportunity” or for that “big break”, hoping to become more financially secure and to protect themselves from the devastating effects of unexpected job cuts.

Mergers, acquisitions, and downsizing have become buzz words in the last decade, and have been carried out with unparalleled frequency. Downsizing in particular has become such a common trend, affecting so many lives, that there is practically no stigma attached to someone who has lost his or her job in such a manner. In far too many cases, flawed planning and execution of these processes have had devastating short- and long-term effects on employee wellbeing and morale. The stress caused by the uncertainty of an unstable and unpredictable work environment has been overwhelming.

Even when working in an ideal or desirable environment, many employees struggle daily to balance family and professional responsibilities. The number of American families where both the husband and wife work stood at 67 percent by March 1988 (Coates et al, 1990), and working couples with children increased by 61 percent to 13.4 million people from 1972 to 1989 (Vanderkolk and Young, 1991). This trend has made it much more challenging for many parents to find and retain quality day care help, or to make arrangements to care for children when they fall sick. Many women also find themselves taking on the majority of household chores in addition to working full-time, leaving precious few opportunities for leisure time and activities which can help them to manage stress.

Single parent families have risen dramatically in number, increasing the number of people who must work to support their families but do not have a partner with whom they can share child-rearing responsibilities. An overall increase in life expectancy has resulted in a greater number of people facing the challenge of caring for aging parents while maintaining full-time careers. All these family-oriented pressures affect the stress and productivity levels of employees who have trouble managing them adequately.

Immigration trends, increased mobility between U.S. states and changing societal and cultural norms have all combined to create a much more diverse and challenging workforce. Ethnic minorities have become a much more prevalent component in the demographic makeup of most organizations. Americans from diverse geographic locations with their own distinct sub-cultures are much more likely than ever before to relocate for professional reasons. More and more older employees are opting to delay retirement, resulting in an growing generational gap among employees. This diversity is

often not addressed or managed appropriately, resulting in much lower levels of predictability and increased opportunities for conflict in the workplace.

Technological advancements, while they have resulted in desirable convenience and much greater speed in carrying out many organizational tasks, have also contributed to the unfortunate increase in employee stress. Much more documentation and communication is now expected of all employees, and everyone is now much more accessible by much wider audiences and larger groups of stakeholders. The constant need to respond to voice mail messages, faxes and e-mail messages has undoubtedly increased the "to-do" lists of many employees. The regular introduction of new programs, upgrades and improvements to existing software has made regular training a necessary part of professional survival. The proliferation of computer viruses in spite of anti-virus software has also become a source of frustration when files are damaged and software performance affected, causing delays and slower productivity.

All of these trends and developments have had a devastating effect on stress levels in labor forces. The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health found that 25 percent of all Americans view their jobs as the most stressful part of their lives (Paige, 2003). According to an International Labor Organization (ILO) report, the incidence of mental health problems in a host of developed and developing countries has steadily been mounting, with as many as one in ten employees suffering from depression, anxiety, stress or burnout (International Labor Organization, 2000). In the U.S., clinical depression has become one of the most common illnesses, affecting one in ten working age adults each year and resulting in a loss of approximately 200 million working days annually.

Anger levels in the workplace have been steadily rising along with the increase in stress, so that security is of greater importance. An annual survey conducted by a leading security service company invited 100 security directors from Fortune 500 companies to rate their top ten concerns. Workplace violence moved from being an inconsequential issue that was never listed, to sixth place on the list in 1992 (Mantell, 1994).

Interpersonal relationships at work are becoming progressively more strained. Greater performance pressures and more challenging deadlines, the competitive and transitory nature of many professional associations, and the growing diversity of staff members' backgrounds must all be managed along with the heightened challenges that are being experienced in many employees' private lives.

Businesses are becoming more and more aware that the drive for profitability and cost-effectiveness is being hampered by the rising costs associated with stress levels among employees. A recent survey of over 300 companies across the U.S. disclosed that 12 percent of unscheduled employee absences in 2002 were due to stress, compared with 6 percent in 1995 (Bushnell, 2002). Productivity levels are being heavily impacted by absenteeism and employee turnover costs; workplace stress now costs businesses over \$150 billion U.S. every year. Psychological and psychosomatic problems contribute to more than 60 percent of long-term employee disability cases, and corporate legal liability for stress-related mental and physical problems developed by employees in the workplace has been steadily increasing (Matteson and Ivancevich, 1987).

In light of all these disturbing trends, it is clear that organizations should proactively stem this dangerous tide by making an integrated stress management program an important part of their business strategy. Greater numbers of companies have

acknowledged the financial implications of workplace stress on overall profitability, and there have been attempts to help employees develop better stress management skills. However, many remain woefully ill-equipped to manage the stress crisis effectively, and too many managers still regard employees' personal challenges as merely costly hassles that hamper their departments' or even their organizations' progress. Ironically, while an organization's very survival depends upon its ability to manage its resources effectively, this ability applies especially to its most important asset – employees. Those organizations that prepare to meet the challenge of workplace stress aggressively and comprehensively will have a distinct competitive advantage over those that do not.

Research Question/ Purpose

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the primary contributing factors to stress in the workplace, to evaluate their impact on employee's psychological and physical wellbeing and productivity, and to develop a guidebook outlining the most important components of an integrated stress management guidebook for a progressive organization. The suggestions provided will be instrumental in helping organizations to meet the difficult challenge of hiring, developing and retaining the best possible employees, maximizing productivity in an aggressive and competitive business environment and cementing their positions in the face of challenging economic conditions.

Subsidiary Questions

In order to explore workplace stress as thoroughly as possible, the following aspects of stress and stress management will also be addressed:

1. What constitutes stress?
2. What are the various types of stress?
3. What are some of the individual differences in the way people deal with stress?
4. What changes have Americans undergone in the last twenty years that have contributed to current stress levels?
5. What are some of the physical and behavioral manifestations of stress?
6. What key areas should a stress management program encompass and why?
7. What organizations have tried to address some aspects of the stress epidemic, and how?
8. What are some new trends that will need increased attention in the coming years?

CHAPTER 2

THE PSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIOLOGY OF STRESS

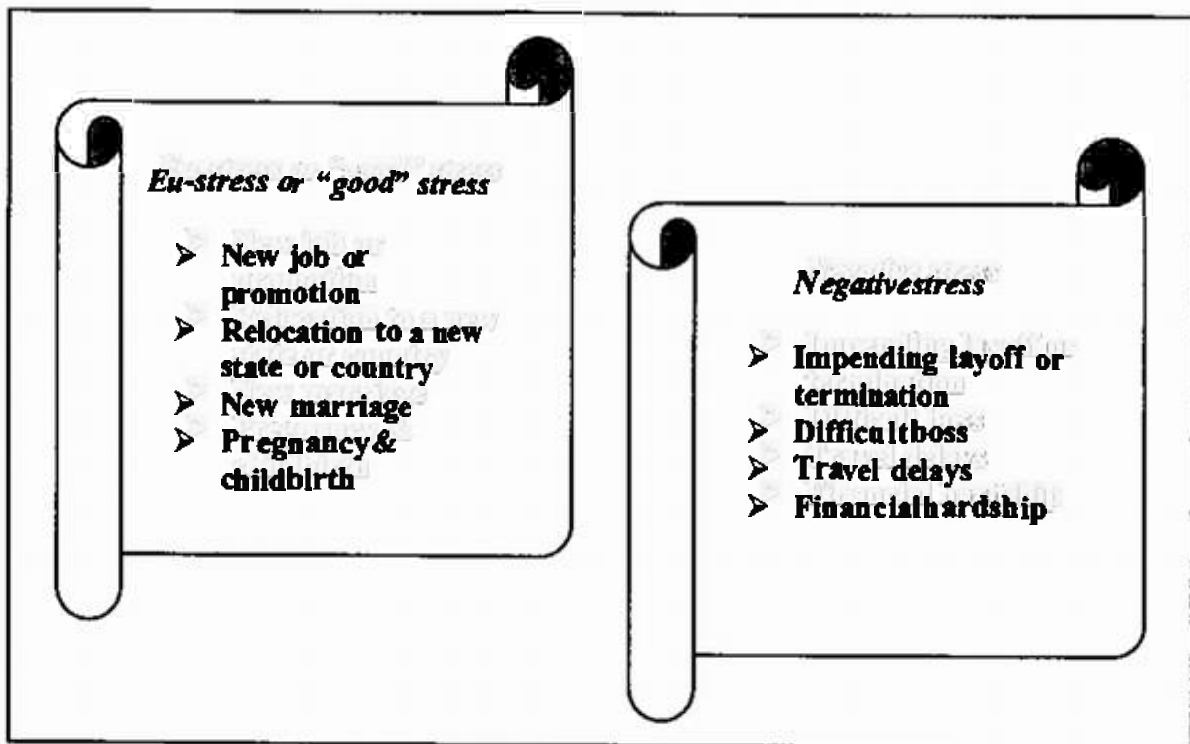
The word *stress* has a many different explanations, definitions and connotations depending on who is asked to explain it. In summary, however, according to stress experts Michael T. Matteson and John M. Ivancevich, all the broad categories and explanations of stress can be narrowed down to being either a stimulus or an agent that causes a sudden positive or negative reaction, or as a *response* to a change in one's environment or circumstances. For the purposes of this project, their definition of stress will be used – an adaptive response, moderated by individual differences, that is a consequence of any action, situation or event that places special or “out of the ordinary” demands upon a person (Matteson and Ivancevich, 1987, p. 10).

All stress is not harmful, and both positive and negative types of stress are in fact an important part of our overall life experience. They assist us in our ability to anticipate and adapt to changing circumstances and events. Positive stress, also known as *eustress*, such as an exciting move to a new country or city, or getting married, will likely result in a greater desire to prepare adequately for the new demands that will come as a result of these changes. For example, researching demographic information and reading news about the new city, or taking marriage preparation classes, are likely outcomes of positive stress and can also help to relieve much of the anxiety associated with the anticipated changes. Negative stress, on the other hand, is necessary for our very survival if we are to anticipate and avoid danger or recognize the need to make a proactive change in a

particular situation over time. We know that missing a flight can cause major distress, so we make the effort to arrive well before the scheduled departure time. If one's car or home is entered unlawfully and vandalized after being left unlocked, the stress and anxiety that follow will likely result in greater pains being taken to secure them properly so that it is much less likely to happen again. In a similar manner, positive or negative stress in the workplace that is properly managed can in fact be a major motivational catalyst for hard work and improved productivity levels.

Figure 2.1

Examples of positive and negative stress



It is important to note that the same event can cause positive stress (great excitement and anticipation) for one person, negative stress (fear and dread) for another,

and a neutral response from yet another person. For example, news that job descriptions will be expanded to include a larger number of clients in each person's portfolio can be a source of great anticipation for an ambitious, resourceful person who feels unchallenged in her position. But this same news can be a source of fear and dread for an individual who feels overwhelmed and unsure of his ability to properly manage the clients he already has. The announcement can be viewed nonchalantly by someone who is non-committal to their job or employer, is simply happy to be working, and is not particularly concerned with job performance. For this reason, changes in circumstances or events can be referred to as *potential* stressors, since they can have such varied effects on various people.

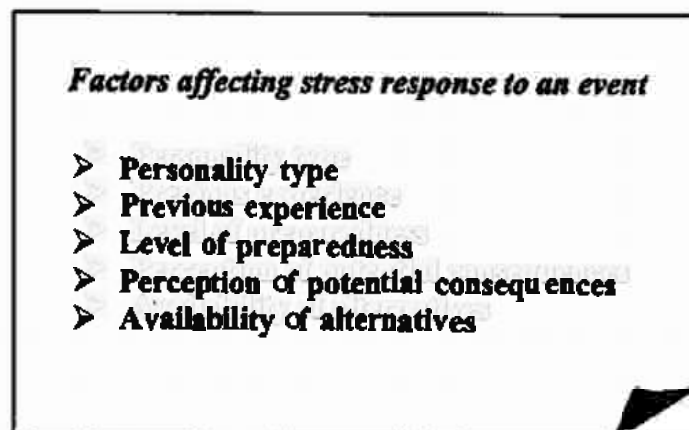
Announcements or changes in workplace circumstances can also produce varying degrees of the same stress reaction in different individuals, depending on each person's "wiring", preferences and circumstances. For example, news of impending layoffs can be a source of stress for all employees, especially in a contracted job market where another job may not be easy to find. However, the stress caused by the announcement may be less for a person who was already tiring of her current workplace, and putting aside money for a short-term nest egg while considering an alternative career. It might be significantly more for a person who was satisfied in her role, felt certain of her job security and had no intentions of leaving the organization or changing careers. The announcement will mean greater demands upon that person and a significantly higher negative stress response, since she was much less prepared for its implications.

A great deal of stress that individuals experience is what has been called "anticipatory stress" – stress associated with worrying about what *might* happen

(Matteson and Ivancevich, 1987, p.11). The fear of losing one's job and being unable to meet financial obligations, learning that one may need to find an alternative to the excellent child care arrangements that are already in place, or learning that a new, much more autocratic and demanding manager may become one's new boss can all be sources of significant anticipatory stress for employees. The more likely it seems that the unwanted event may become a reality, the more intense the negative stress response will become.

The length of time to which one is exposed to a particular situation can also be an important determining factor in the degree of stress which is experienced. The longer the special demands are placed on an individual, the more stressful the situation becomes. For example, if an employee is asked to train a new intern for two weeks in addition to taking care of regular responsibilities, he may view this new task as very manageable and the stress that he experiences as a result of the extra time commitment may be minimal. However, if he is asked to begin training a successive number of interns, each for two weeks over a number of months, his stress levels may increase significantly and seriously affect work performance in his regular role.

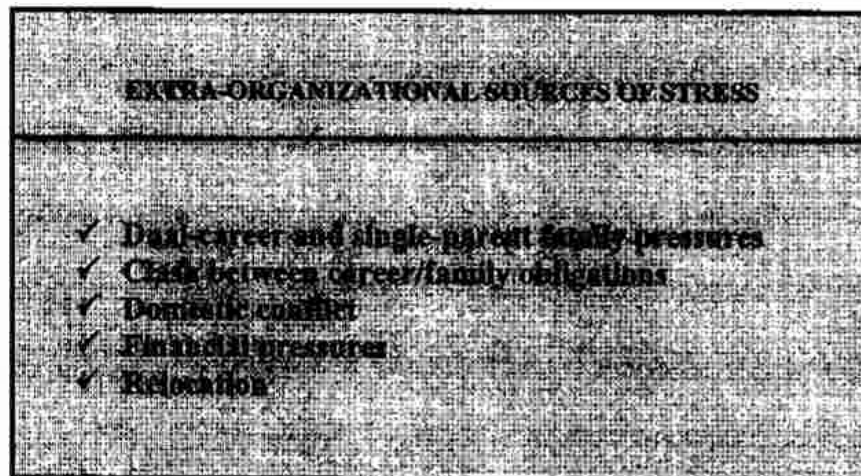
Figure 2.2



SOURCES OF WORKPLACE STRESS

For the purpose of this study, two major categories of stressors affecting employees will be addressed; those that arise outside of the office and stem from one's personal life, and those that arise within the organization itself. The following diagram summarizes the sources of extra-organizational stress that will be addressed in this study.

Figure 2.3



Dual-Career and Single-Parent Family Pressures

A number of societal trends that have developed in American society are contributing significantly to the stress levels that employees take to the workplace. One of the changes that has had the most striking impact is the increase in the numbers of dual-career families. Women have been entering the workforce at steadily higher rates than males—43.8 percent of the total workforce was female in 1984, up from 33 percent in 1960 and 38 percent in 1970 (Abraham and Flippo, 1991). Dual-career families have jumped from 55 percent in the late 1980s to approximately 75 percent in 2000, and 75

percent of all working women are in their child-bearing years (Jamieson and O'Mara, 1991). Single parenthood, and in particular single motherhood, has also become a much more common occurrence. Consequently, there are a large number of employees with children, especially pre-school children, who are experiencing a great deal of frustration in their desire to balance their personal and professional responsibilities.

Quality, affordable, easily accessible child care services are a challenge to find, and many day care centers do not have the most desirable adult to child ratio. One 1995 study found that seven out of ten child care centers provide substandard care, and that one in every eight poor enough to actually threaten the health and safety of the children under the workers' care (Friedman, 2000). Many parents worry about their children constantly during the time they must spend at work and away from them, often making regular phone calls to caregivers to check that everything is going smoothly.

A large number of parents bring their children to work, especially when schools close unexpectedly because of emergencies or holidays, because they cannot afford emergency child care arrangements. Parents whose employers are less receptive to the idea of children being brought to work remain absent from work altogether. A Boston University study on how 1,500 employees balance work and family life found that 71 percent of women and an unexpected 73 percent of men admitted to taking time off from work to take care of child-related needs (Vanderkolk and Young, 1991). Not surprisingly, businesses lose \$3 billion annually as a result of child-care related absences, according to the Child Care Action Campaign (Vanderkolk and Young, 1991). Finding adequate supervision is also a challenge for parents with school age children. Each week close to 5 million children are left unsupervised after school, contributing to higher rates

of drug use and juvenile crime (Friedman, 2000). These sociological developments have translated into high levels of anxiety and even guilt in many parents, with many women in particular struggling with the feeling of falling short in *both* their parental and professional roles.

Clash Between Career and Family Obligations

Tension can develop at home or among family members if the employee finds it difficult to develop a desirable balance between career demands and time spent with the family. A vicious stress cycle can emerge if the employee finds that the time investment required for her career becomes so great that it affects her ability to spend time with her partner and/or the family, perform routine parenting responsibilities, or attend important events. Aggravating the situation is the fact that many managers are not able to relate to the child care and family concerns of their subordinates, with the result that nearly one in three women and more than one in five men feel uncomfortable about discussing their child care needs with their bosses (Vanderkolk and Young, 1991). As a result, many feel forced to lie about the reasons for taking time off work and may simply remain absent to avoid having to discuss the details.

Parents often have to disappoint their children when they are unable to attend important extra-curricular events or functions because of work obligations and a lack of flexibility in their work schedules. Spouses and children alike may express disappointment and develop resentment over time. The conflict or "hard feelings" that may arise will compound any guilt that the employee may already be feeling, all of which could impact work performance, even if only occasionally.

One professional single mother described how she had to attend a high-level board meeting that would not have ended in time for her to pick up her two children from school. She had no alternative child care arrangements that she could make, and during the meeting, her children weighed heavily on her mind as the time passed. By the time it was over and she hurried to the school, her girls were the last two of all their classmates to be picked up, and they were in tears. The guilt she felt over the incident had a lasting impact on her, and she continues to feel torn between her family and career responsibilities, but feels the need to press on with her career.

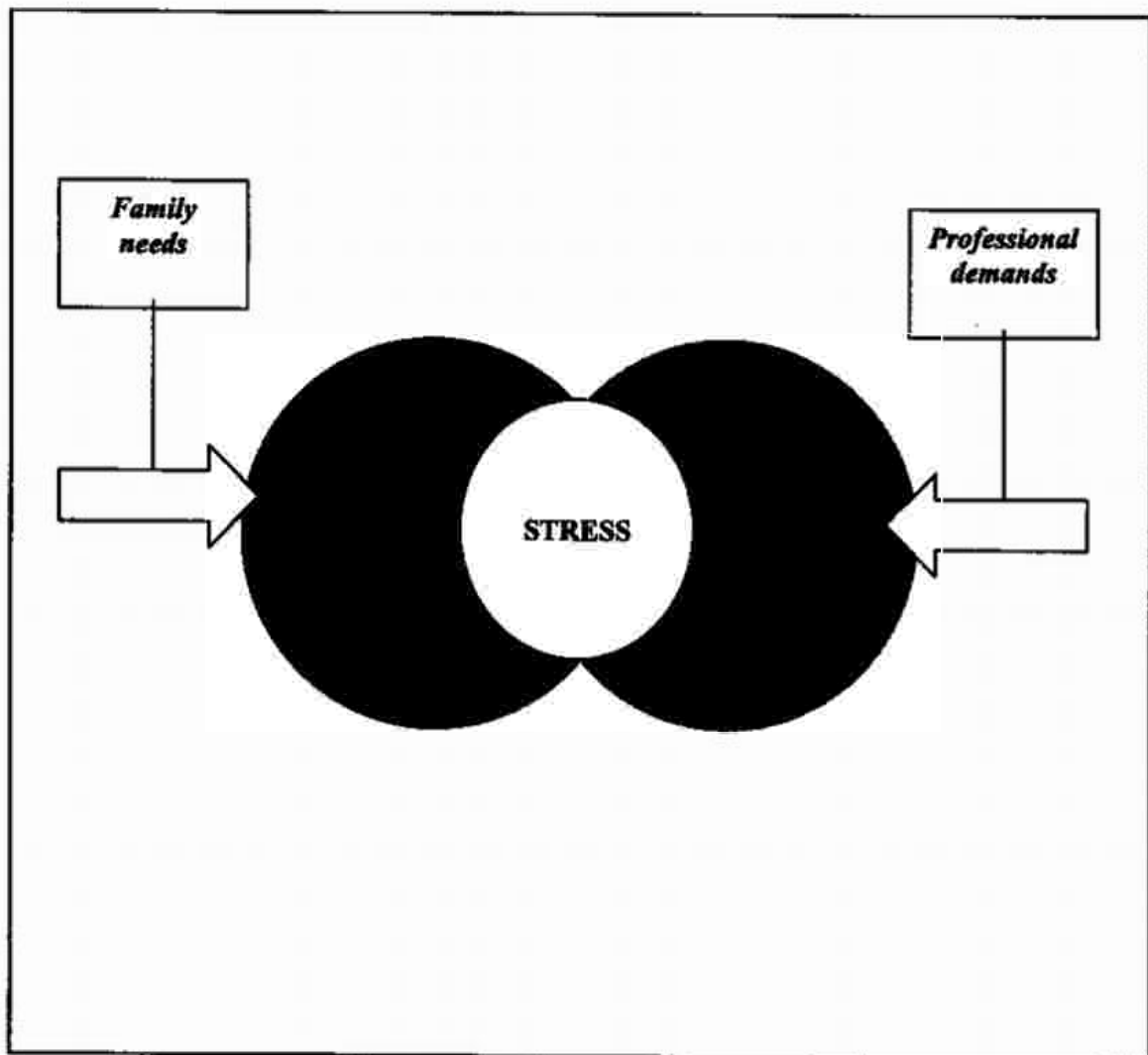
Women of childbearing age who are considering starting a family worry about the effect that the announcement of a pregnancy may have on their careers. They often feel that they may not be respected professionally after having a baby, as their ability to work beyond regular business hours and to be consistent in work attendance will become significantly more challenging. They feel a considerable degree of anxiety about the appropriate timing of a baby, and worry about how the announcement may be taken by their employers.

Once pregnant, many feel troubled that the maternity leave granted may not be enough for bonding with their baby, even after they have combined the usual six-week allowance with vacation time and sick leave. This concern is well founded; child-development experts have warned that the maternal bonding period that the baby needs is still extremely fragile after eight weeks (Vanderkolk and Young, 1991), yet many women are forced to return to work after as little as three weeks out of financial need. Breastfeeding is strongly encouraged for babies well beyond their first year, yet few employers have implemented programs to make this practical for new working mothers.

Of course, once they do return to the office, their unease over the wellbeing of their children constantly supersedes other work-related concerns, especially if the baby is still only weeks or a few months old.

Figure 2.4

Constant friction between family and job obligations heightens stress



Domestic Conflict

Conflict or tension in the home is also extremely likely to affect stress levels and one's ability to concentrate on the job. Marital conflict, a temporary separation, an impending divorce or a child custody battle are all sources of tremendous stress which can have a major impact on an employee's productivity levels while at work. Discipline challenges with one or more adolescents in the home can also be an ongoing source of frustration for parents. For some, the workplace is actually a way of escaping the reality of the turmoil in one's personal or domestic life. A feeling of failure or frustration with personal or family relationships and can be a powerful impetus for professional success, and provides many people with a reason to work longer, harder hours at the office. For many others, however, these stressors drain energy and reduce enthusiasm for one's job, and in fact, the job is often seen as an aggravating source of stress that one simply has to resign oneself to since the paycheck is so badly needed.

Financial Pressures

Financial pressures are another major source of stress for a large percentage of the labor force. Few have managed to escape without feeling the effects of the rising cost of living and a diverse range of financial challenges. Personal debt levels have reached unprecedented levels in the U.S., with interest payments increasing from \$7 billion in 1960 to \$161.5 billion in 1997 (Caughey, 1999). College education costs have been steadily rising, and upon graduation, many find themselves with student loans in the tens of thousands and struggle for years afterward to make the monthly payments.

As mentioned before, child care is a financial commitment that many parents are struggling to meet. Expenses can range from \$4,000 to \$10,000 per year, per child (Friedman, 2000). The cost of home ownership has risen so much that subletting basements or garages to strangers for rental income is a growing trend for couples who are finding it difficult to keep up with mortgage payments, meet family obligations, pay off debts and secure their financial future all at the same time. Saving for a rainy day has become more and more difficult, and overall savings rates in the U.S. are at an all-time low. MetLife recently released survey results which showed that of 728 employees, more than half manage their finances by living paycheck to paycheck (Seitel, 2003). Most disturbing of all, personal bankruptcies jumped to 1,625,813 from 1,508,578 in the twelve months ending September 30, 2003, many of them driven by heavy consumer debt (Business with CNBC, 2003).

In order to relieve the pressure, and in some cases, to remain afloat, many employees take on part-time jobs to supplement their regular income. While this may relieve much of the economic strain, it drains energy levels over time and can result in poor sleeping habits, fatigue and irritability. The author once found herself in such a situation, working at a second, part-time job to help pay off debt more aggressively while maintaining an adequate disposable income. As a part-time waitress, she often came in to work extremely tired on Thursday or Friday at 9 a.m. after having worked from 6 p.m. to midnight at the restaurant the night before, often getting home after 1 a.m. Needless to say, much of the work day was spent looking ahead to 5 p.m. when she could head home and get a good night's sleep. On those particular days, she had considerably diminished enthusiasm for and satisfaction in her daily routine. Productivity is undoubtedly affected

if an employee is working so much that there is little time for adequate rest or leisure activities that could help to alleviate stress levels.

Relocation

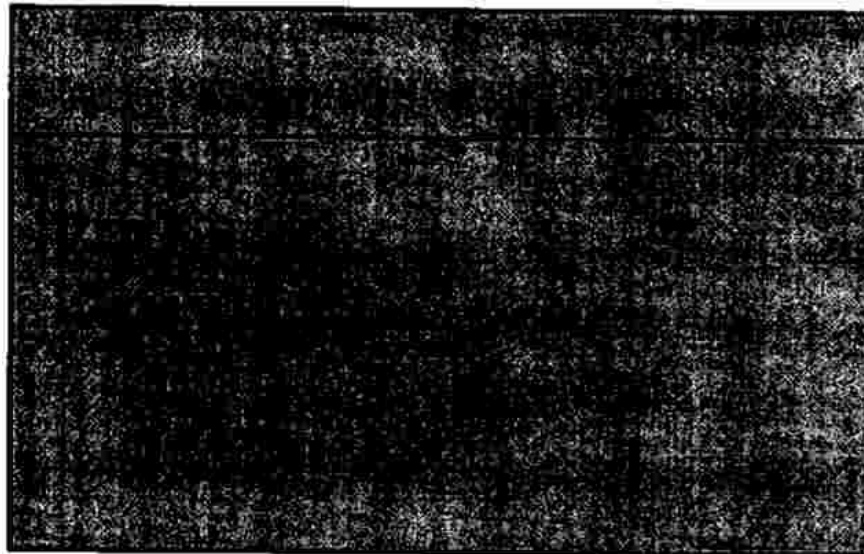
Relocation is another source of extra-organizational stress for employees. Mobility in America has increased so much so that one in every five citizens changes address each year (Matteson and Ivancevich, 1987). Most homeowners move after about seven years, and it is now quite commonplace for employees to change jobs every three years. When a newly relocated employee has to make most or all of the moving arrangements with little support from the organization, stress levels can increase significantly as the employee calculates in his mind all the activities and arrangements that need to be put into place, all while being required to put in a full week's work on the job. In many cases, the employee may choose to use working hours to take care of personal affairs, whether by spending a significant amount of time on the telephone or calling in sick altogether.

If a career move by a married employee involves relocation to a new state, the resulting stress can be even higher as the other partner, most often the female, has to readjust to the new environment and deal with feelings of loneliness and a loss of control over her circumstances. The relocated employee may be so focused on adjusting to his new role that he is unable to devote sufficient time to the increased needs of his partner, who may now be even more dependent upon him for emotional support in the new, unfamiliar environment. If the spouse has also had to find a new job, she is more likely to be resentful of challenges that arise at her workplace and experience even more

heightened stress levels there, since the career move might not have been a promotion for her, as it was for her partner.

When children – adolescents in particular – are involved, the problem is amplified as they deal with the challenges of fitting into a new school environment and making new friends. Any domestic stress or conflicts that arise as a result of all these new challenges are likely to affect concentration and productivity levels in the employee while at work if not managed adequately.

Figure 2.5



Heavy Workloads

Stressors that arise within the organizational environment itself are numerous. One of the most common sources of workplace stress is inadequate staffing. Much of this has resulted from massive layoffs and cutbacks that organizations across the U.S. have used as an aggressive means of controlling costs and improving their competitive positions. The mandate to “do more with less” has meant that employees are now being

asked to take on greater levels of responsibility without any additional compensation or autonomy. Ten years ago, the typical American worked for 41.8 hours per week, and by 1997, the average had risen to 44.4 hours (Bushnell, 2002). Many traditional service-oriented institutions, such as banks, now conduct business on weekends in response to customer demand, and full-time employees have had to make themselves available for shift hours that include Saturday mornings.

Career advancement is often tied closely with one's willingness to log longer hours and to consistently go the "extra mile" for the company, and many do so out of a desire to be considered for promotions or pay raises. Incidentally, employees who consistently work within expected hours often end up feeling that they are perceived as "indifferent" to the organization, and evaluated negatively by supervisors against their "more committed" peers as a result. Performance expectations from management have also increased because of mounting pressure to meet profitability forecasts in spite of faltering market conditions, and has translated into longer office hours for staff.

Pagers, beepers, cell-phones, lap-top computers, e-mail and internet access mean that many employees are still very much connected to their jobs even after they leave the office, sometimes round-the-clock, all week long. Many frustrated employees who try to gain employment elsewhere quickly find that the tight job market leaves them no choice but to remain in their positions, in spite of the stress they experience. Those who do find alternative jobs often find that the situation does not necessarily improve, because long working hours have become a built-in part of many organizational cultures.

Mergers and Acquisitions

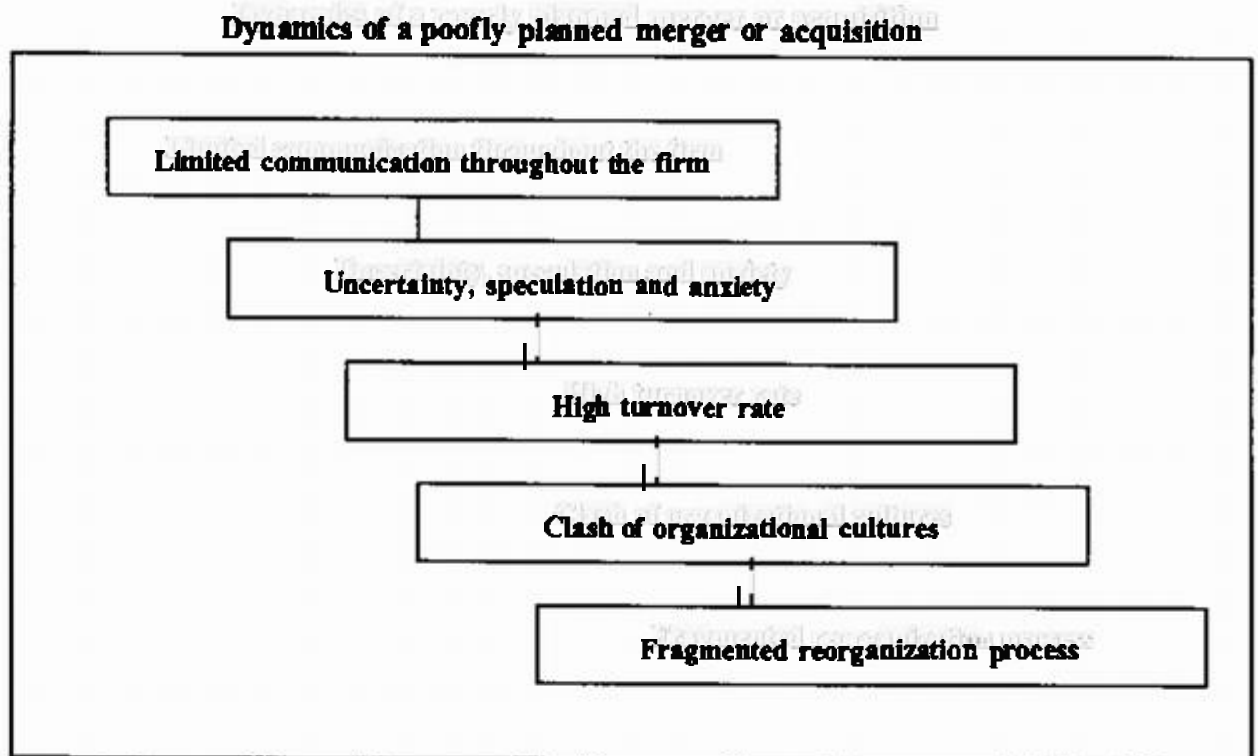
Mergers and acquisitions are major sources of workplace stress that have gained more attention in recent years. Globalization and increased competition for domestic market share has led many companies to seek new ways of strengthening their position and diversifying their product offerings to increase profits. Mergers have become an important way for organizations within the same industry to increase their dominance and market presence, and in some cases, to capitalize on technological advancements. The result is often a duplication of jobs and services, and job losses tend to be a natural aspect of the restructuring process that takes place in the months and years after the merger is approved. Regrettably, many merger deals are so focused on financial benefits that human resources are not given the attention and importance that they deserve (Shearer, 2001). The resulting employee dissatisfaction, stress and turnover rates often end up compromising or diminishing the expected return on the merger investment.

Inadequate communication from top management levels to employees throughout each organization at each stage of the fusion process is one of the most common mistakes made during mergers. Flawed communication often results in a heightened sense of uncertainty for all involved, and the fear of heavy job losses often overshadows work activities. Even mere speculation about a potential merger or acquisition can be a major source of stress and uncertainty. Many employees immediately start looking for alternative employment, preferring to take this initiative rather than wait to be given pink slips.

With some acquired firms, so many key people leave so quickly that aggressive damage control becomes a necessity, as happened with Credit Suisse First Boston's

acquisition of Donaldson, Lufkin & Jenrette (DLJ) in August 2000. More than 25 valuable bankers in an important, high-yield division of DLJ, or 20 percent of its staff, defected to a rival company, forcing Credit Suisse to take emergency action to woo remaining employees and to recapture some of the defectors if possible (Shearer, 2001). All of this unrest no doubt heightened stress and anxiety for those who did in fact remain at DLJ.

Figure 2.6



In cases where a merger actually does translate into job losses, those left behind experience a deep sense of loss and a heightened awareness of their own lack of job security. As seen in the First Boston example, executives and managers are especially vulnerable to layoffs after a merger or acquisition and thus experience the highest levels

of stress and uncertainty about their professional future. As the merger goes forward, work roles of retained employees may have to be adjusted and new workflow processes implemented, depending on the nature of the two organizations and the vision behind the merger. These new procedures must be learned and mastered as quickly as possible and the pressure to be successful is tremendous.

Although two organizations may be a part of the same industry, their cultures may have distinctly opposing characteristics which cannot all co-exist once a merger occurs. In fact, while some elements of each organizational culture may remain, only one of the two cultures is likely to remain the dominant one over time. Employees must adapt to the freshly emerging corporate culture, and the process does not always progress smoothly or quickly. Hostile takeovers can be particularly traumatic for all involved, especially for the employees of the smaller or subsidiary company, who will feel more vulnerable. If not handled carefully, major differences in organizational cultures and business strategies can cause an adversarial atmosphere to develop between new management and employees at all levels, and tensions can reach such high levels that productivity and effectiveness is seriously compromised.

Undefined Performance Expectations

Unclear or ambiguous job descriptions can be a major cause of workplace stress. This can be of particular importance for a new recruit who finds herself unable to adapt comfortably over time to the requirements of her position. After interviews are completed, selected candidates are frequently chosen based on matching employee and organizational objectives, such as the candidate's previous education and work

experience. However, subjective preferences and underlying skills – such as a desire for structure or a need for autonomy– are often not discussed in detail (Jarnieson and O'Mara, 1991). As the employee becomes more familiar with her new role, she may find that the demands of the job are not quite an ideal match for her skills or tastes, and her frustration and stress levels may progressively increase. Her confidence in her ability to meet performance expectations may decrease, causing anxiety about whether she will make it past the probationary period, and damaging her self-esteem. Even if she has already had similar working experience, she still needs to develop an understanding of workflow patterns that are unique to her new employer.

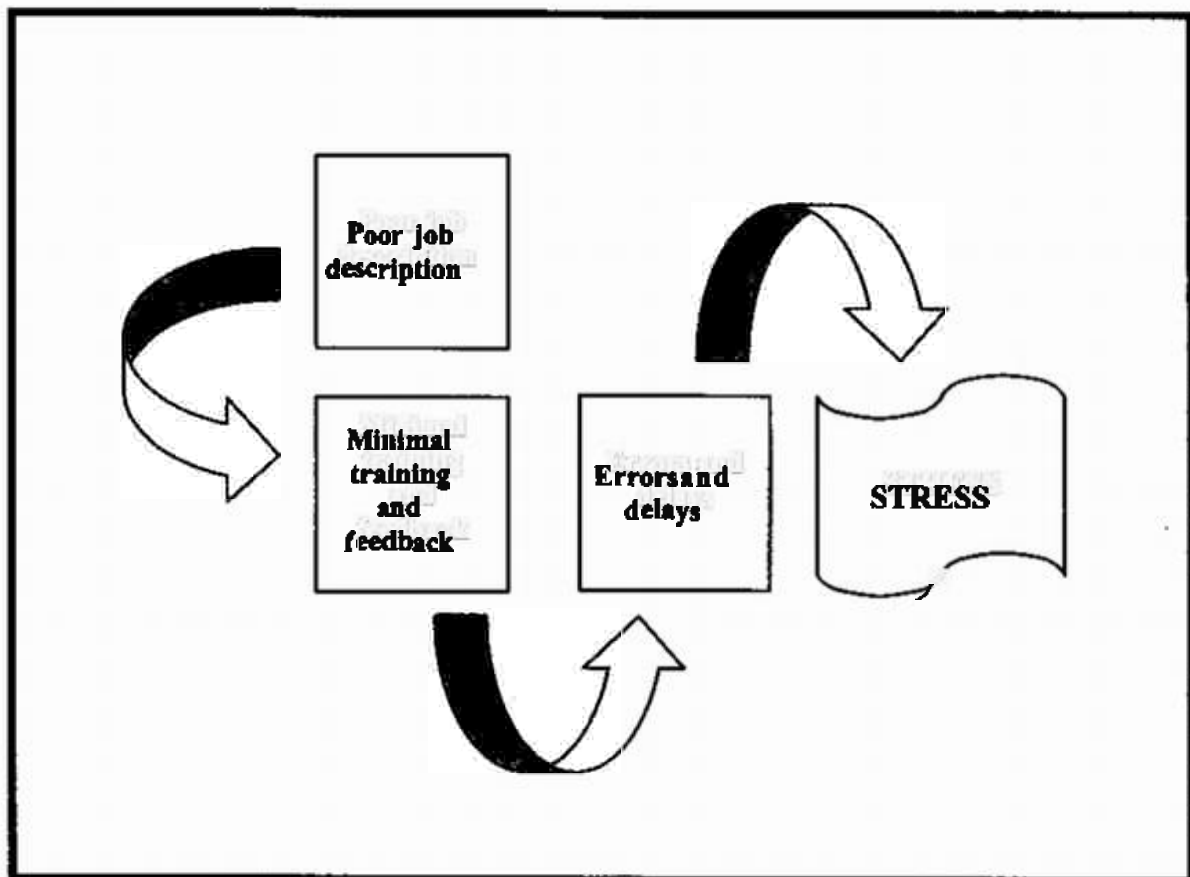
Unfortunately, formal training programs in most corporations tend to cater to middle and upper management, with much less importance placed on lower level employees (Greer, 1995). Many new employees find that they are only given an overview of their new tasks, with the expectation that they will “fill in the blanks” or use “common sense” to resolve workflow or service issues. However, when a new employee’s job description is outdated or inaccurate, and training is only minimal, she is not likely to have a clear understanding of what is expected. Learning requires specific information about how one’s behavior is affecting the surrounding environment, and feedback is necessary for knowing how to adjust work performance accordingly (Daniels, 1994, pp. 18).

Without sufficient guidance or feedback, errors and delays will occur regularly, impacting productivity and harming client perceptions of the organization and of her competence in particular. She may need to make a number of decisions without sufficient information, increasing her stress levels as she constantly worries about the potential for

undesirable outcomes. A structure-oriented person will find all these developments to be extremely frustrating and difficult to adapt to, and may eventually give up the position altogether instead of waiting for an improvement or a change.

Figure 2.7

Development of stress in a new employee



Weak or Flawed Leadership

Almost every working-age person knows the frustration of working under a difficult team leader or manager. An effective manager knows how to balance organizational objectives and employee needs, how to manage employees firmly but

respectfully, and how to groom employees for greater levels of responsibility or leadership over time. Unfortunately, managers may possess superior industry knowledge and product management skills, but may not have been effectively trained to manage the staff reporting to them. An informal survey revealed that managers spend as much as 85 percent of their time either "telling people what to do, deciding what to tell them to do, or deciding what to do because employees didn't do what they told them to do" (Daniels, 1994). An employee's sense of wellbeing on the job is closely tied to her confidence in her own ability to get the job done. If her work is constantly questioned or checked by her manager, her confidence in her abilities may be eroded, causing heightened anxiety levels and reducing the chances that she will take the initiative in developing new ideas and approaches to problems.

A more self-assured employee will resent the constant second-guessing and may even challenge her manager each time a decision or action is questioned, causing tension and heightened stress for all involved. For yet another employee, micromanagement may result in subtle rebellion where he purposely avoids following certain instructions, often at the expense of his co-workers, who must then pick up the slack.

When a corporation fosters a culture that allows employees to feel a sense of autonomy and value, they are much more likely to feel committed to the achievement of organizational objectives (Willmott, 1994). Their sense of loyalty and security is considerably higher. In contrast, employees whose ideas are consistently disregarded and whose contributions are taken for granted are more likely to feel a sense of disconnection from their workplace. The gap between their own sense of their value as employees and

how they feel they are viewed by management will eventually decrease job satisfaction and increase stress, and ultimately contribute to higher turnover rates.

Favoritism and thinly disguised office politics are another regrettable consequence of poor leadership in many organizations. The failure of managers to maintain an impartial approach to assigning tasks, giving feedback, preparing performance evaluations and providing awards or other forms of positive reinforcement causes tension and a contentious atmosphere among co-workers. Such an environment negatively impacts employee motivation, productivity, loyalty, and most importantly, their stress levels.

Figure 2.8

Indications of poor leadership

| | |
|--|--|
| | |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Micromanagement of staff• Disregard for employees' opinions and ideas• Failure to validate consistent hard work• Favoritism• Unchecked office politics |

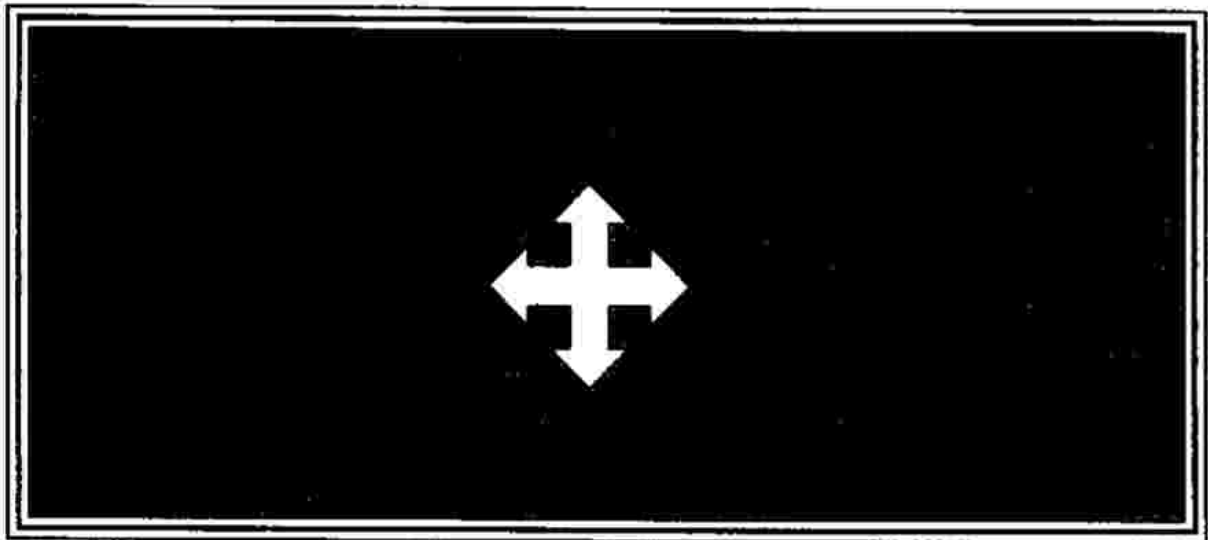
Defective Organizational Communication

An organization's communication style, which is closely tied to its decision-making style, can contribute significantly to the stress levels of its employees. Employee participation in decision-making contributes to a reduction in role conflict and the

resulting tension that it creates (Matteson and Ivancevich, 1987). Autocratic, inflexible decision-making and top-down communication styles leave employees feeling demoralized and unable to feel a sense of control over their professional lives. When major changes are implemented or new expectations and demands are placed upon staff without first gaining their input (for example department restructuring or adjusted job descriptions), employees are more likely to feel resentful and to become psychologically disconnected from their work roles. This disconnection will augment stress over time, particularly for employees who feel that they have no alternative but to remain in their positions in spite of the forced changes.

Figure 2.9

Symptoms of defective organizational communication



On the other hand, when decisions do in fact need to be made, but there is indecisiveness on management's part and communication lapses or gaps, anxiety for the employees is the unfortunate outcome. For example, shifts in industry trends and social

or economic developments which could potentially affect a company's productivity need to be handled carefully. An organization whose management fails to provide formal reassurance or share strategic plans with their watching and waiting employees is more likely to foster an atmosphere of insecurity and uncertainty.

Having employees participate in decision-making and strategic planning processes not only reduces the chances that they are caught off-guard once major changes or decisions are announced, but it also improves the likelihood that management will communicate important information and feedback to employees in a timely fashion. It will also improve the chances that managerial decisions have successful outcomes, since a more accurate and complete picture of challenges and potential barriers would be developed before hand.

Faulty communication of information between departments within the same organization can cause considerable damage to its effectiveness and create unwarranted tension for employees. Relationships between divisions that should be cooperative can be adversarial instead, because they are not as sensitive to each others' needs, demands and challenges as they should be. Productivity may suffer if one department has only a limited understanding of how another department fits into the overall organizational picture, and if job flow procedures between them are not properly harmonized.

A failure to maintain transparent and timely announcements about internal organizational opportunities and needs, such as job openings and newly created career opportunities, can give rise to a politically charged environment of favoritism by management and divisive behavior among staff. If information is not disseminated professionally and fairly, the recruitment process will be rightly perceived as biased and

will be a source of discouragement and frustration for those employees who are seeking professional advancement.

Stagnant Career Development

The successful development of one's professional life over time has become an integral part of emotional wellbeing, self esteem and overall life satisfaction for a large percentage of the working population. With each position that individuals hold, they gain a new understanding of themselves, their abilities, strengths and weaknesses, and ultimately, adapt their aspirations accordingly (Beer et al., 1984). Ideally, employees should have a clear understanding early on of what they want they accomplish professionally and at what pace, and find an organization in a related industry with which they can form a mutually beneficial contract. However, for many, the process is not that straightforward.

Some employees may find themselves in an inappropriate job as a result of an ineffective interview or hiring process, during which their skills were not appropriately evaluated for the job, or vice versa. Others who had taken the risk of seeking and finding a job in a new industry may discover that the change fails to meet their expectations. Both of these situations can cause a great deal of strain on all involved, especially if alternative positions or new recruits cannot be found in a timely manner.

Perhaps the most detrimental of all is when an employee outgrows a professional role over time that was indeed a good fit at the initial stages. A person's perception of his overall professional potential will have a tremendous impact on how he views a scarcity of limited career advancement opportunities in his workplace. If he views himself as

already having reached his professional peak, and he is already in a job that he feels suits his education and ability, an organization with a low degree of mobility will not be problematic. This will be especially true if security and predictability are of chief importance.

On the other hand, an employee who feels that he has been learning and developing his skills at a tremendous pace and wishes to advance accordingly will find the lack of opportunities for promotion frustrating. As time passes and he has few outlets through which he can apply his acquired knowledge, whether through more challenging projects or in new organizational roles, his stress level will undoubtedly rise. It will be immensely exacerbated if advancement opportunities present themselves, but as a result of faulty performance evaluation systems, organizational inefficiencies, bureaucracy or outright favoritism and office politics, he is overlooked.

Many employees may be, for the most part, satisfied with their jobs, but would like some additional training or support in pursuing post-secondary or post-graduate education as preparation for future advancement openings. A lack of relevant in-house training opportunities or assistance from the organization for independent study can prove to be a source of significant dissatisfaction over time. Worse, it may contribute to increasing levels of boredom and apathy toward the organization itself, and a growing fear of becoming obsolete. It could frustrate those employees who do eventually feel the need to go forward on their own, but who may secretly fear that their knowledge is outdated in the current, aggressive job market and, as a result, remain captive to their doubts and to their existing positions.

All of these situations represent a significant opportunity cost to an organization that does not place a high value on maximizing the potential of their employees. The anxiety that arises needlessly affects productivity and profitability.

Workplace Discrimination

In spite of the noteworthy shift towards political correctness in the workplace, discriminating behavior and covert attitudes in various forms still unfortunately exist and have a considerably damaging effect on those to whom it is directed. Racism, sexism, pregnancy discrimination, sexual harassment, and insensitivity to employees with various types of disabilities are some of the chief sources of workplace discrimination that can heavily impact stress levels. These must be addressed if harmony and a true sense of belonging and security is to be maintained among all employees, motivating them to put forward their best effort and protecting them from unwarranted anxiety.

Figure 2.10

| | | |
|--|--|--|
| | <p style="text-align: center;">Types of Workplace Discrimination</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Racism• Sexism• Pregnancy discrimination• Sexual harassment• Disregard for those with disabilities | |
|--|--|--|

Racism

Covert racism can create a hostile working environment and become a major contributing source of stress for visible minorities. Although racism has historically been an African American issue in the U.S., new immigrants from a wide of range of ethnic backgrounds have been joining the ranks of America's labor market, making discrimination a broader issue. As more and more visible minorities become a part of the corporate world, related assimilation challenges will arise, especially as competition for jobs and advancement opportunities increases.

In addition to African Americans, employees with Hispanic, Indian, Middle Eastern and Asian roots, for example, may find themselves in working situations where they feel that they are perceived or treated differently by one or more co-workers or by their boss. They may feel that they have to suppress certain aspects of their culture or style in order to be accepted, respected or taken seriously. Corporate downsizing and the trend towards middle-management elimination usually affects blacks and other minorities disproportionately (Coates et al., 1990). The more traditional the industry, where there maybe very few people of color, the higher the risk that the employee may feel a sense of exclusion and concern over job security when organizational or economic instability arises.

Because racial discrimination is often difficult to prove and is usually vehemently denied when confronted, the employees in question often internalize their feelings of rejection or frustration. They may recognize that in spite of excellent job performance and feedback, they lag behind others in receiving career advancement opportunities, and in some cases, feel that they cannot progress at all. This will undoubtedly eventually

affect an employee's morale and stress levels, particularly if he has invested a significant amount of effort in his job over time in the hopes of progressing within that particular organization.

Sexism

Women continue to experience an uphill battle for respect and meaningful promotion opportunities in the workplace. Although women and men are now equally represented overall, women continue to be significantly underrepresented in managerial and executive level positions. A 1991 survey based on 94 randomly selected Fortune 1000-sized companies revealed that women made up 37 percent of all employees, 17 percent of all managers, and just 6.5 percent of all executive-level managers (Tannen, 1994).

There has been much discussion about the reasons for this phenomenon. Women are much less likely to be aggressive in organizational networking with higher-ups, are more hesitant about self-promotion and publicizing accomplishments to key corporate figures, and are more apt to use a consensus-oriented communication and decision-making style in order to avoid being seen as bossy or arrogant (Tannen, 1994). In contrast, men are, on average, much more purposeful in forming and maintaining networking contacts with key organizational figures, have no problem advertising their own accomplishments and are more likely to use a direct communication style, since a "take-charge" attitude is actually perceived as a positive attribute for males.

Perhaps it is a combination of behavioral differences between men and women and resistance to change in the historically male-dominated and male-oriented workplace.

Regardless of the reasons, the result is that women are much less likely to be perceived as ideal candidates for leadership roles that require boldness, decisiveness and significant levels of autonomy and authority. Those who are determined to advance to coveted positions face a significant, ongoing battle. For the minority who do manage to break through the well-known "glass ceiling", receiving the same acceptance, respect and recognition for their work that is freely granted to their male counterparts remains a constant challenge.

All women in the general workforce – not just managers – are still struggling for pay equality, and this can be another obstacle to job satisfaction. According to one study, as of 2000, the average female worker earned 76 percent of what men were paid (McFeatters, 2002). One woman, a systems database administrator, described the blatant pay discrepancy she endured as the lone female on her professional team. At one point when year-end bonuses were distributed, she felt shock and disbelief when she was handed a check for \$500, when other co-workers had received bonuses for as much as \$9,000.

As a single mother, she was often unable to work for the 90 or so hours per week that her male counterparts often put in, and felt that she was penalized for not being able to do the same, in spite of her dedication to her job. She also felt that there was an overwhelming perception that the men needed to receive more because they were the chief breadwinners for their families, a responsibility which she, incidentally, also held. Stress levels can easily take their toll and even undermine one's motivation to continue the professional struggle if not carefully managed in the face of perceived injustices in the workplace.

Pregnancy Discrimination

The Pregnancy Discrimination Act passed in 1978 was intended to safeguard the rights of the growing number of women of childbearing age who were joining the workforce. However, discrimination against women who become pregnant is still an unfortunate reality, in spite of legal attempts to prevent employment abuses in this area. Research has found that the most common form of discrimination against pregnant women occurs when employers fail to reinstate women after they return from medical leave for childbirth (Greer, 1995). The Family Medical Leave Act of 1993 helps to reduce the number of cases where this occurs, but for many women, anxiety about what starting a family may mean for their careers continues to be high. Many who "take the plunge" are extremely concerned about whether their jobs will be available once they are ready to return to work. Others worry that once they do return, their value may have diminished in their employer's eyes. They may feel that they are no longer viewed as reliable, industrious and hardworking. All of these emotions can cause considerable stress in an employee who does not feel that her employer will be supportive of her decision to start a family.

Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment is a problem that can create a very hostile working environment for its victims, especially when there are no specific guidelines or policies of if they are not strictly enforced and upheld. Victims may be either male or female employees, but at least 85% of formal complaints filed with the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission with complaints were by females (The U.S. Equal Employment

Opportunity Commission, 2004). Because sexual harassment is considered to be an extremely prickly topic, many cases are never reported or formally documented; victims often choose to suffer silently or to remove themselves from the situation altogether.

There are two categories of sexual harassment in the workplace – *quid pro quo* harassment, and *hostile environment* harassment (Abraham and Flippo, 1991). With *quid pro quo* harassment, an employee is made to feel that the acceptance or refusal of a sexual advance will directly impact the chances of being hired, fired, promoted or penalized. Hostile environment harassment can include both verbal and non-verbal sexually oriented behavior, such as telling lewd jokes, repeatedly asking someone on a date, unwanted, inappropriate staring or touching, and displaying suggestive pictures. When harassment occurs, the victim may likely feel a sense of dread about going to work and encountering or working with the harasser, and productivity will undoubtedly suffer as stress levels become heightened. The situation is much worse if the victim feels that there is no place to turn for a resolution or that complaining will prove damaging to his or her employment security.

Disregard for Disabilities

Finally, employees with disabilities are bound to experience the stress of discrimination if their organization has not equipped itself with the appropriate policies, procedures or accommodations to meet their needs. A disability is any physical, mental or medical impairment that substantially limits or affects a person's ability to carry out regular life functions, including earning a living. Organizations often undervalue the productivity potential of persons with disabilities, while overestimating the potential

costs associated with hiring them. The result of this mindset is that two-thirds of all working-age disabled persons are not working, even though the large majority of them express a desire to work (Abraham and Flippo, 1991).

Those who do find a place in the general workforce often face significant barriers to acceptance and advancement, particularly those who are perceptibly physically or mentally disabled. Many organizations have made great strides in making their premises wheelchair accessible, for example, thus catering for employees who may have a physical disability that confines them to a wheelchair. However, an employee who suddenly finds herself wheelchair-bound – but who works for a company at a location that does not cater to her need – may find the new situation nearly impossible to deal with and will experience considerable stress.

The American Disabilities Act (ADA) bans all forms of discrimination against physically and mentally handicapped workers in the hiring and promotion process. Unfortunately, the failure on most organizations' part to provide awareness education opportunities for managers and staff have meant lingering negative attitudes towards people with physical abnormalities, speech impediments, and towards those who need treatments that may require flexible working hours. This makes it very difficult for them feel accepted, respected for their contributions, and able to progress satisfactorily, in spite of good job performance. The perceived injustice of this type of situation will no doubt increase stress and impact a disabled employee's desire to continue pursuing excellence over time, and in due course, the organization loses out.

PHYSICAL MANIFESTATIONS OF STRESS

When a person experiences elevated stress levels over a prolonged period of time, and nothing is done to alleviate the problem or to offset its impact constructively through exercise, rest or other outlets, serious health problems are likely to develop. Sustained, untreated stress levels become readily apparent in four main types of disorders – physiological, behavioral, cognitive and emotional (Charlesworth and Nathan, 1982). Each of these four categories have had a tremendous impact on organizational costs related to premature employee death, stress-related absenteeism, employee turnover and replacement recruitment.

Physiological disorders such as muscle tension, tension headaches, migraines, elevated blood pressure, a rapid heart beat and ulcers are some of the most commonly experienced ailments directly associated with stress. Headaches and migraines are two of the most debilitating disorders that can render an employee completely useless, even after using painkillers to try to numb the pain. Hypertension, known as “the silent killer”, has no obvious symptoms, but its effects can have a devastating effect on major organs such as the heart, kidneys and liver if not monitored and controlled over time. Ulcers are extremely painful and can also cause chronic absenteeism and lost productivity.

Behavioral disorders such as smoking, overeating and alcoholism often develop in employees as coping mechanisms for constant worry and anxiety. Many employees who smoke have a recurring need to take “smoke breaks” in order to relieve psychological pressure, a habit which is made more difficult to entertain when the work environment is a non-smoking one. The cumulative time that is spent away from work demands because

of smoking addictions costs organizations a significant amount of time in lost productivity, and the rising costs associated with the treatment of smoking-related diseases in employees is of serious concern. Overeating is an increasingly common coping strategy that is gaining more attention as an official disorder. Its impact on American society and related costs are rising astronomically. The federal Department of Health and Human Services reports that the cost of overweight and obese Americans stood at \$117 billion in 2000, and that 300,000 die every year as a result of related complications (Zernike, 2003).

Alcoholism and the abuse of other drugs can be of serious concern in employees who use them to numb the physical or psychological effects of stress. Statistical data on drug or alcohol abuse in employees is difficult to attain, largely because they tend to be kept highly confidential (Mantell, 1994). Many organizations do not wish to compromise their image by exposing negative behavioral patterns in any of their employees. However, it is a problem which some companies are addressing in a proactive manner by encouraging employees to get treatment, counseling, or enter 12-step programs, as opposed to waiting for a major unfortunate incident to occur. If not handled effectively, substance abuse can significantly exacerbate stress for everyone involved.

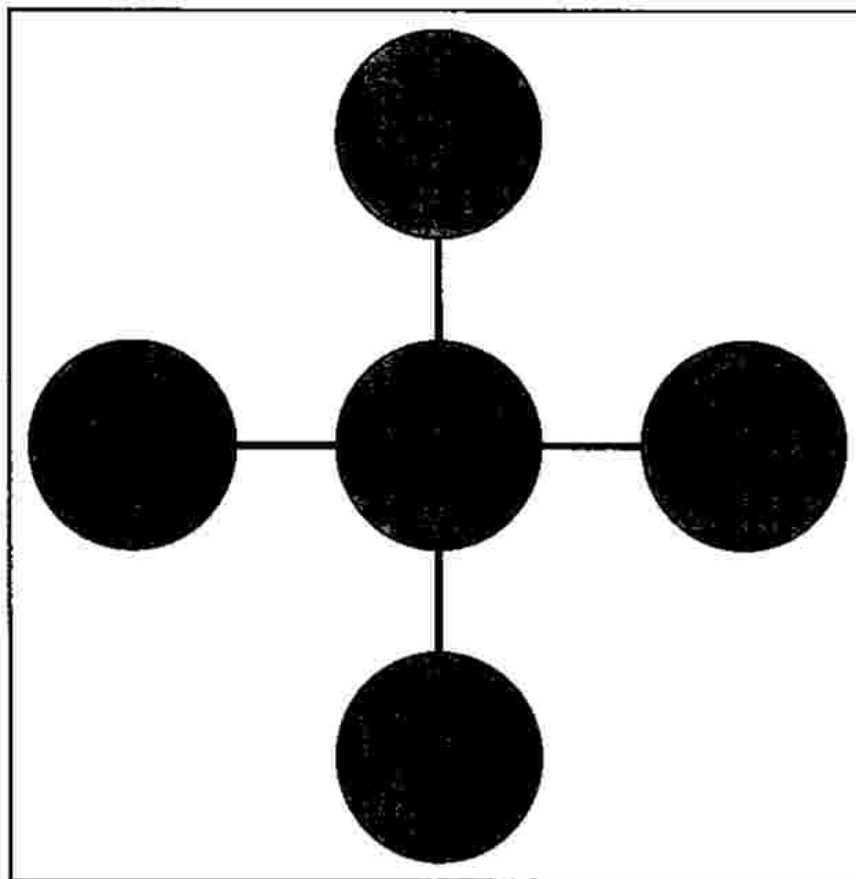
Cognitive disorders such as memory loss, concentration challenges and sleeplessness all have an incapacitating effect and compound the immense stress that triggers them. An employee suffering from any of these ailments may begin forgetting how to perform routine procedures and become distracted or frustrated much more easily in everyday work situations. The incidence of errors, service delivery compromises and

confidentiality breaches may increase significantly, resulting in an intensified cycle of disillusionment, helplessness, and feelings of incompetence.

Emotional disorders such as anxiety, depression, personality changes and mental illness can develop as stress remains untreated over time and the employee faces what may seem to be formidable challenges with no identifiable solutions.

Figure 2.11

Disorders arising from sustained high levels of stress



Anxiety can manifest itself in various ways, including the fear of leaving one's home, an exaggerated fear of being fired, or the fear of losing one's ability to continue "business as

usual" in the face of all the challenges being faced. Depression has become a particularly serious concern in the American workforce, with one in every twenty employees experiencing symptoms of depression at any given time (National Institute of Mental Health, 1996). Depression results in more days spent in bed (and thus away from work) than many other stress-related ailments. Fortunately, the majority of depressed persons can be treated quickly and easily, as can be observed from the dramatic rise in the prescription and sale of antidepressants such as *Prozac*.

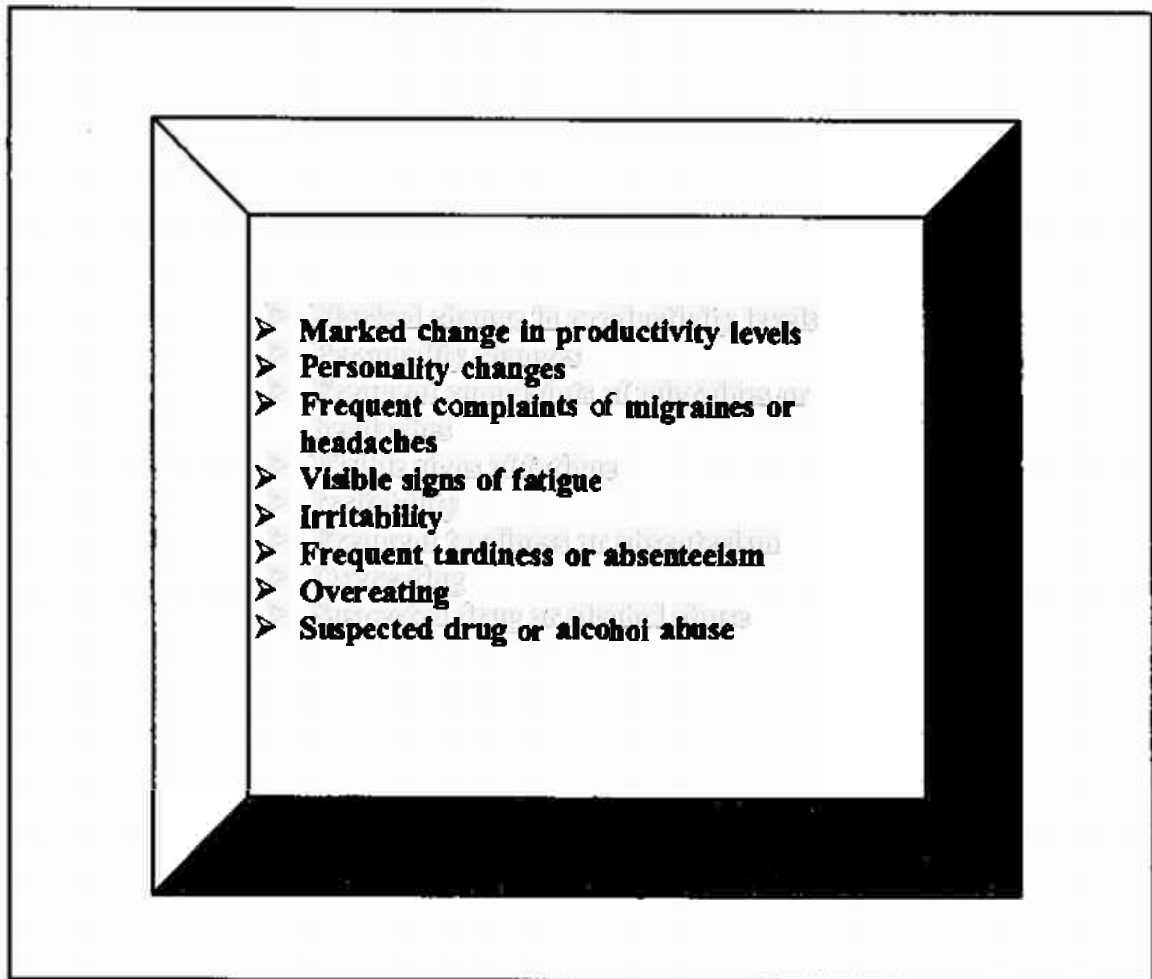
Personality changes may take place over time in an employee who does not have appropriate coping strategies or outlets for dealing with stress. Irritability and short-temperedness with co-workers and clients can become a serious problem for an employee battling anxiety about personal problems. The same is true for someone affected by sleeplessness and fatigue as a result of working long hours at more than one job. Co-workers are in turn affected as the employee's behavior contributes to an unpredictable, edgy and unpleasant working environment. In the most severe cases, the development of a mental illness can be the unfortunate and most devastating result of prolonged, intense and unmanaged stress. It can potentially result in physically dangerous situations for an affected person's co-workers if stress is eventually manifested in violent behavior.

Each of these physiological, behavioral, cognitive and emotional disorders should be taken very seriously once initial symptoms begin to appear in an employee. An organization whose managers are trained to identify these symptoms and to help employees to explain or determine their possible causes can save inestimable costs by intervening before problems escalate. By investing in the appropriate remedial and support programs for employees who need them, an organization will not only

demonstrate empathy for its employees and build a positive organizational culture, but it will safeguard against significant productivity losses and the damage to morale that can occur in other employees who may be affected by a distressed co-worker.

Figure 2.12

Symptoms of employee distress



ORGANIZATIONAL STRESS MANAGEMENT SUCCESS STORIES

In many organizations, individual bosses and supervisors often try to be accommodating to their subordinates' needs, but there is still some degree of uneasiness and guilt in some employees' minds about the liberties they are allowed to take. There is often a fear that with a change of boss or position, the same degree of understanding may no longer be available. Fortunately, other more proactive organizations have long recognized the growing concern surrounding societal changes and trends that have been contributing to workplace stress, and have made noteworthy, purposeful attempts to set themselves apart from the status quo. They showed their employees that they had a significant interest and a genuine commitment to their overall wellbeing and to their professional security and progress.

Johnson & Johnson

Johnson & Johnson was a pioneer in recognizing employees' struggles and developing accommodating policies. When feedback from regularly circulated surveys in the late 1980s revealed growing distress among employees about child care and the difficulties in managing work and family life, and a perception that the company was insensitive to their personal needs, they responded decisively (Morgan & Tucker, 1991). By the early 1990s, Johnson & Johnson lengthened its leave of absence limit to one year, and also allowed for time off when required for elder and child care challenges. They set up mandatory training programs for supervisors and managers at all levels to educate them about work and family issues.

They opened up on-site day care centers at various locations, complete with trained teachers and outdoor playgrounds, with some of the funding coming from pre-tax salary deductions. Separate rooms were set aside for children with manageable illnesses or non-contagious diseases whose parents were unable to stay home with them because of work pressures. One employee described how after her paid maternity leave ended, she was allowed to work from home for three months, with Johnson & Johnson setting up a personal computer in her home and connecting it with the company's mainframe. After the three months were up, she worked from home for three days, and reported to the office for the other two days, all for another three months, after which her child was able to enroll in the newly-opened day care center at their head office. She expressed a great deal of gratitude for the way in which the corporation helped her to balance her personal and professional responsibilities and keep her mind at ease.

PSE&G

Public Service Electric and Gas (PSE&G) received recognition from the New Jersey Psychological Association (NJPA) for helping its employees to make a smooth transition to a more competitive atmosphere when the utilities industry was deregulated (Chamberlin, 1999). PSE&G held communication groups allowing employees to express their opinions and concerns, and made professional development training available to those employees whose job functions were adapting because of the conversion process. They had also established flexible work hours as well as child care and leave time options for employees who had challenges balancing work and family concerns.

Rex Hospital

Many corporations are setting up official employee assistance programs (EAPs) that are specifically designed to help their employees manage stress or personal crises through counseling and training programs. Rex Hospital in Raleigh, North Carolina set up an off-site center called RexAware, where staff members and even their families can go for help when interpersonal or family crises develop and stress levels threaten their emotional wellbeing (Paige, 2003). Up to three visits are allowed, following which professional referrals are provided. Managers are also offered training opportunities to help them deal with conflict in their departments and to help them recognize and deal with various distress signs among staff, including substance abuse.

SAS Institute Inc

SAS Institute Inc., a software development company in Cary, North Carolina, has 1,400 employees. Fifty-six percent are females and forty-nine percent are managers, considerably higher than the industry average. Professional equality is no doubt a factor that is appreciated by the women there who are more likely to feel a greater sense of fairness and are more motivated to give their best. The institute also has an on-site day care center for over 300 children, from age six weeks to five years, funded by a subsidy program (Morgan & Tucker, 1991).

The company also provides paid disability for childbirth, up to one year of paid parental leave, alternative working hours, an on-site health care center, and a recreation and fitness center. There is even a subsidized cafeteria with economical meals that can

be ordered for take-out, and 100-acre grounds with a 6-acre lake for fishing, swimming and boating, where employees can take their minds off professional demands and relax.

SAS Institute wanted to ensure that they attracted and retained top talent, that bright, educated and valuable female employees were not penalized for wanting to start a family, and that employees with young children would not feel overwhelmed with child care or child pick-up pressures. Their efforts have been successful, as employees have developed a deep and unique sense of commitment to their jobs and to the organization as a whole. Their employee retention rate stands at an impressive 97 percent (Cantore, 1999).

TRENDS TO WATCH

The RAND Corporation conducted a study for the U.S. Department of Labor that forecasts trends expected to impact the American workforce over the next two decades. As workplace stress gains more attention, organizations should be prepared to adapt their policies and business strategies in anticipation of these new trends, or managing them will prove to be difficult. Even those companies that have already made great strides in implementing employee-friendly policies should take note of how the corporate arena is expected to change, so that they do not eventually lose the ground they have gained in controlling stress among employees.

For the purpose of this study, attention will be drawn to three developing trends. Firstly, the U.S. workforce will continue to grow, but at a considerably slower pace. The

rate has been steadily declining from 2.6 percent annually in the 1970s to 1.1 percent in the 1990s, and is expected to be as low as 0.3 percent by 2020 (RAND Corporation, 2004). There will be increased challenges in attracting skilled workers, particularly at the entry level. This will result in a greater tendency to hire employees that have traditionally been underemployed or overlooked, such as the disabled, persons who are emotionally impaired, talented introverts, ex-offenders, slower learners, displaced workers or retirees (Coates et al, 1990). Having a greater percentage of typically shunned employees in the workforce will no doubt bring about a greater need for businesses to make certain that they are integrated successfully, and flexibility and sensitivity will have to be used in managing them. Ignoring their special needs may hamper hidden potential, incur high costs and hinder overall productivity and organizational growth.

The second trend that is expected to have a major impact on the U.S. workforce is the acceleration of technological change, such as an increase in the use of microprocessors for instant speech recognition and translating foreign languages (RAND Corporation, 2004). Advances in information and other types of technology in the next 10 to 15 years will require the aggressive and ongoing training of employees so that they can keep abreast of them. Companies will have to take a much more proactive role in setting up technology training programs during working hours, and in helping employees to manage the stress that will undoubtedly come with the increased productivity expectations and, for some employees, intimidation by the new technology.

Finally, the spread of economic globalization will force a much greater percentage of companies to become more flexible and agile in their business operations in order to compete effectively with emerging markets abroad. In particular, they will have to be

prepared to outsource a greater number of non-core business services, and to dismantle hierarchical structures which make decision-making and delegation of responsibilities more complex. This may translate into greater numbers of people working in decentralized, specialized firms, less protocol in working relationships, a greater percentage of employees working from off-site locations, and a lessening of the availability of permanent work (RAND Corporation, 2004).

These and other emerging trends make it clear that companies desiring to remain successful will need to establish an appropriate balance between managing emerging competitive realities and protecting the professional and emotional needs of its employees. A failure to do so will not only mean higher stress levels, decreased commitment from employees and lost productivity, but it may ultimately mean extinction.

CHAPTER 3

SURVEY ANALYSIS – PUBLIC OPINION ON WORKPLACE STRESS

Purpose

In order to gauge the general public's perception of the most prevalent causes of stress and the ways in which it could be managed, a survey was distributed to 50 respondents (see Appendix A). The respondents are all employed, whether full-time or part-time, and come from a variety of white-collar working environments and industries. The respondents' input was used by the author to solidify the research findings in literature on stress in the workplace. Their responses and comments were also used to help shape the design and content of the organizational stress management guidebook.

Limitations

The closed questions on the survey made participation quick and easy for the respondents and straightforward to tabulate and summarize. However, they also restricted the author's ability to explore and analyze each participant's individual circumstances, experiences and resulting rationale behind each response. Another limitation was the survey length. Many additional questions could have been asked in order to pinpoint other sources of workplace stress, but for the sake of brevity, the survey was limited to 10 questions. However, personalized comments made on some of the surveys helped to add significance to the responses and contributed to the standpoints reflected in the stress management guidebook.

Survey Description

The survey was designed using the Likert Scale, which requires the respondent to choose one of five options as a response to a particular question. The potential responses range from “Strongly Agree” to “Strongly Disagree” for each of the 10 statements in the survey. The rating scales are defined as follows:

SA – Strongly Agree – The respondent agrees emphatically most of the time with the statement.

A – Agree – The respondent generally agrees with the statement.

N – Neutral – The respondent does not know, does not care, or otherwise does not have a solid position for or against the statement.

D – Disagree – The respondent disagrees with the statement.

SD – Strongly Disagree – The respondent does not agree with and actually has an emotional reaction to the statement.

Method of Analysis of Survey Results

Each of the 50 respondents answered all 10 statements on the survey. The author then tallied the respondents' answers and calculated the percentage totals of each response. A 5-point scale was also used to calculate the average positive or negative sentiment of all the respondents to each statement, based on the Likert rating scale. The 5-point scale was used as follows:

5 (Strongly Agree) 4 (Agree) 3 (Neutral) 2 (Disagree) 1 (Strongly Disagree)

Likert ratings between 2.6 and 5 indicate moderate to unanimous overall agreement with a particular statement (see Appendix B for Likert rating calculations). Quantitative and

qualitative evaluations were made based upon the overall level of agreement or disagreement with the statements about the public's perceptions of the causes of workplace stress, how it affects them, and how it should be managed.

Figure 3a

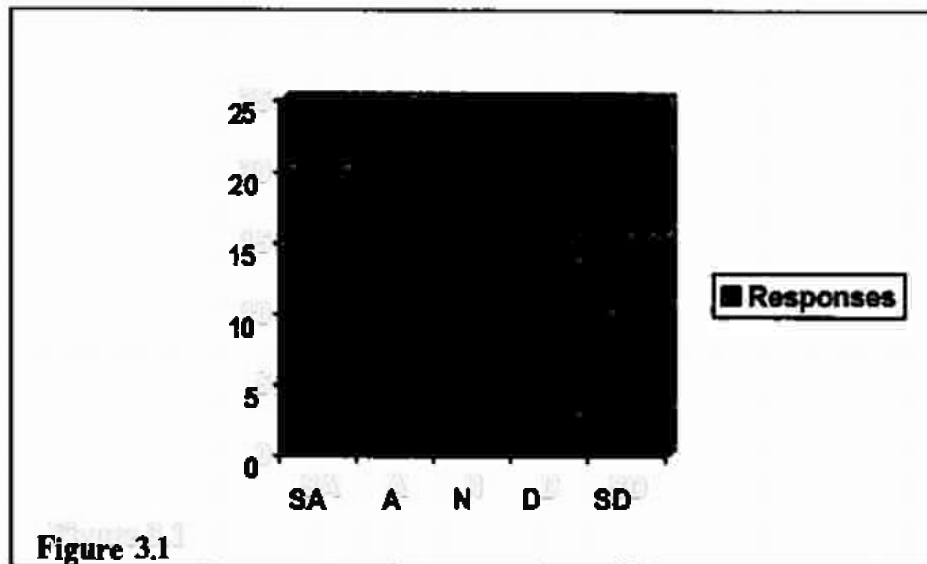
Tabulated Survey Responses (50 participants)

SA (Strongly Agree) A (Agree) N (Neutral) D (Disagree) SD (Strongly Disagree)

| Summarized Survey Questions | % SA | % A | % N | % D | % SD |
|---|------|-----|-----|-----|------|
| Feel overwhelmed because of the number of responsibilities on the job | 8 | 40 | 20 | 28 | 4 |
| Stress levels at work often affect health and family life | 22 | 42 | 12 | 24 | 0 |
| Organization's management style and culture contribute to employee stress | 46 | 42 | 10 | 2 | 0 |
| Inadequate communication channels at work are a leading cause of stress | 48 | 50 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| An unclear job description and inadequate training affect productivity and employee stress | 48 | 50 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| Layout and design of office and workspace could impact concentration and productivity | 20 | 50 | 20 | 10 | 0 |
| Increased use of technology has made jobs easier and more productive | 16 | 60 | 12 | 10 | 2 |
| Regularly think about quitting current job because of overwhelming stress | 4 | 14 | 24 | 46 | 12 |
| Employer is generally supportive in helping to control stress levels | 2 | 28 | 42 | 18 | 10 |
| Investment in wellness / recreation programs for employees decreases stress and absenteeism | 18 | 62 | 6 | 10 | 4 |

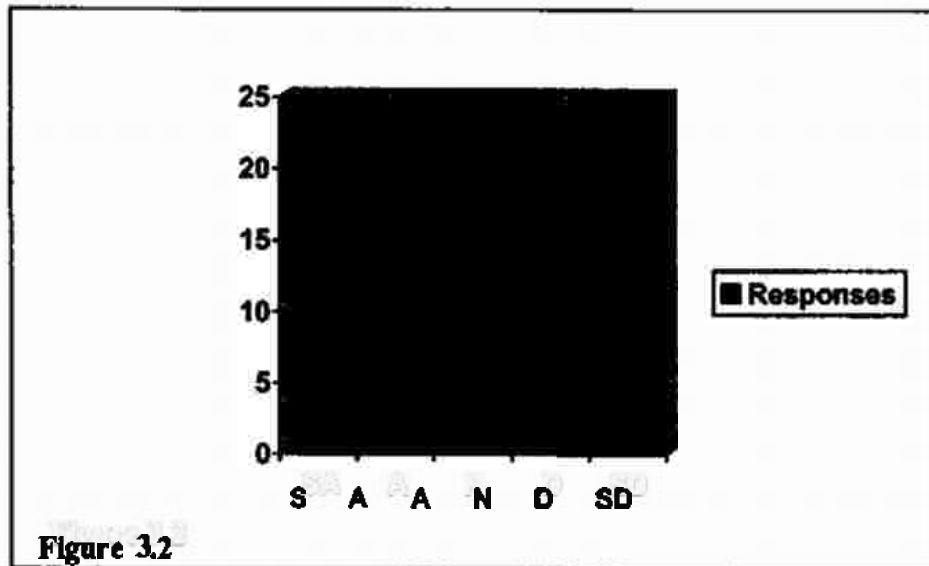
Analysis of Survey Responses

Statement 1: In general, I feel overwhelmed at my job because of the number of responsibilities that have been assigned to me.



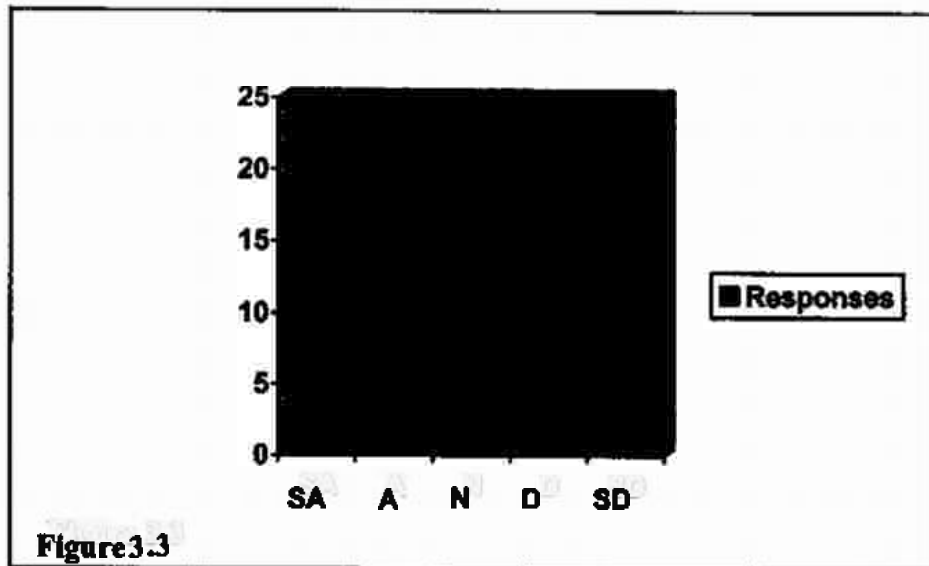
On the whole, 48 percent of respondents agreed that they felt overwhelmed at their jobs because of the level of responsibilities assigned to them (4 strongly agreed and 20 simply agreed). This statement measured 3.2 on the Likert rubric overall. Although this is a significant number, the author was expecting to see a higher percentage of respondents agree to this statement. This result could perhaps be attributed to the wording of the question. It is possible that some of the respondents feel overwhelmed at work, but not necessarily because of the number of responsibilities they have. It could be as a result of other factors, such as workflow design or difficult interpersonal relationships with co-workers.

Statement 2: I feel that my stress levels at work often affect my health and personal/family life.



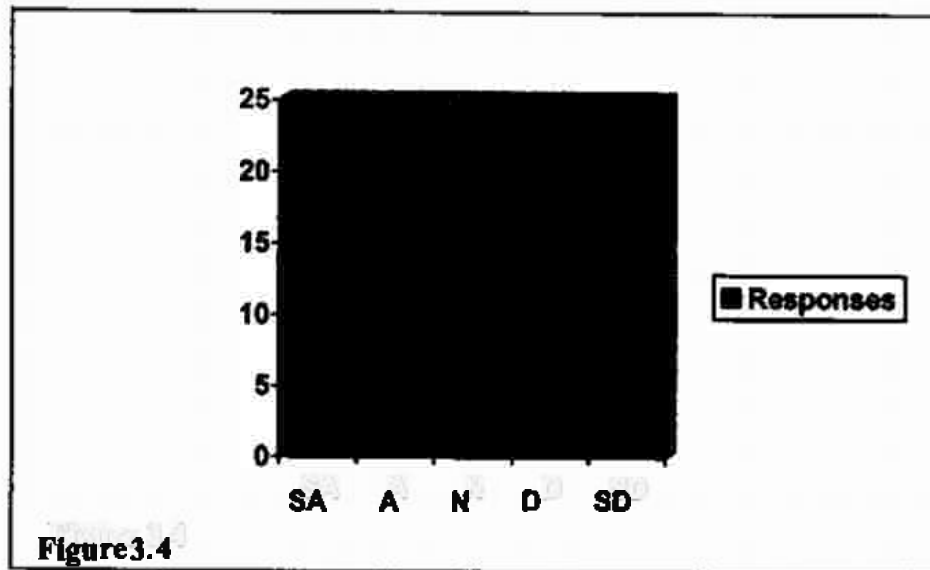
Overall, 64 percent of respondents agreed that their stress levels at work affect their health and personal / family life (11 strongly agreed and 21 simply agreed). This statement measured 3.6 on the Likert rubric. The comparatively higher level of agreement to this statement supports the author's belief that the previous (first) statement received a relatively lower level of agreement because of its wording, which specifically tied stress at work to the number of responsibilities assigned as opposed to a number of other possible factors.

Statement 3: In general, an organization's management style and organizational culture contribute to the stress levels of its employees.



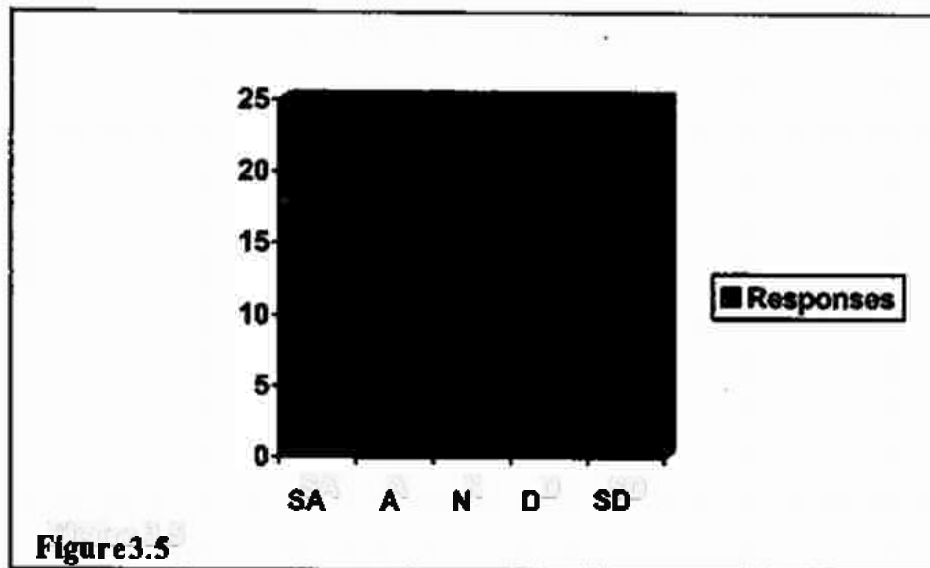
A heavy majority of 88 percent of respondents agreed that an organization's management style and organizational culture contribute to the stress levels of its employees (23 strongly agreed and 21 simply agreed). This statement measured 4.32 on the Likert rubric. The overwhelming level of agreement with this statement indicates that this is a leading factor that should be addressed in any organization's approach to managing the stress levels of its employees.

Statement 4: Inadequate communication channels between departments and among staff can be a leading cause of stress at my job.



Overwhelmingly, 98 percent of respondents agreed that inadequate communication between departments and among staff can be a leading cause of stress at their jobs (24 strongly agreed and 25 simply agreed). This statement measured 4.46 on the Likert rubric, and was one of the two most strongly supported statements of all. The resounding agreement by the respondents to this question indicates that this is also a crucial area to which an organization should pay close attention if it wishes to manage stress among its employees successfully.

Statement 5: An unclear job description and inadequate training can affect an employee's productivity and stress levels.



The vast majority, 98 percent of respondents, agreed that an unclear job description and inadequate training can affect an employee's productivity and stress levels (24 strongly agreed and 25 simply agreed). This statement also measured 4.46 on the Likert rubric, one of the two strongest ratings on the survey. Undeniably, employees place a high value on having access to adequate job descriptions and suitable job training if they are to control stress at work.

Statement 6: The layout and design of your office / workspace could have an impact on your concentration and productivity.

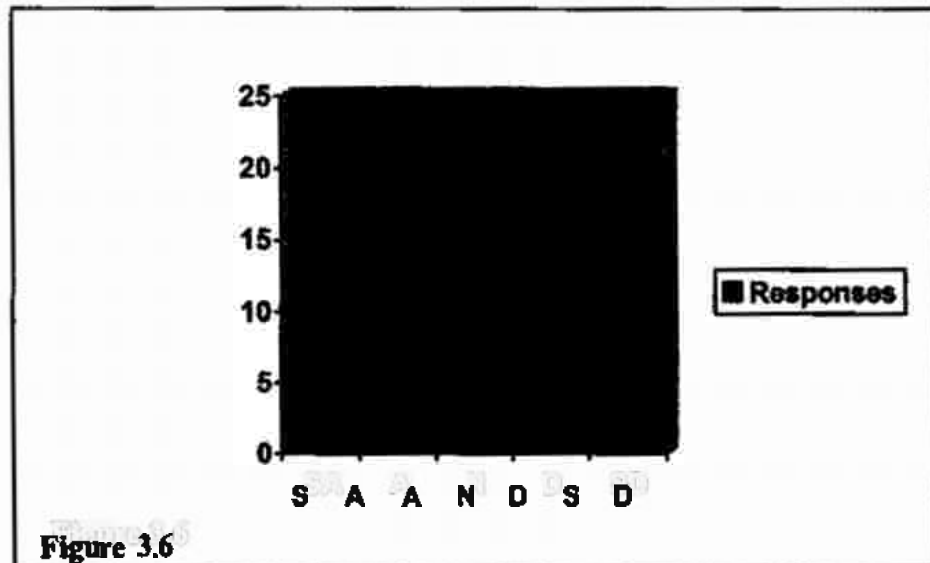
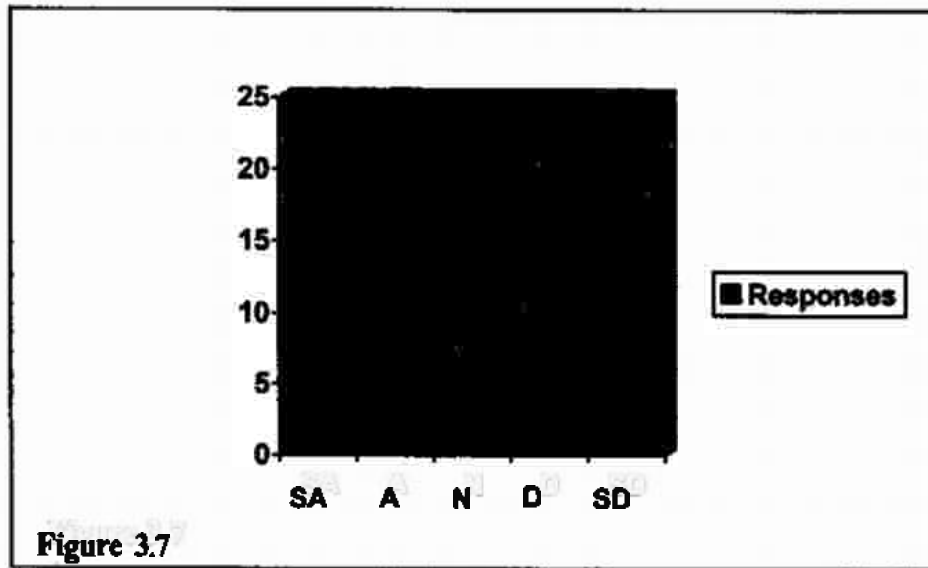


Figure 3.6

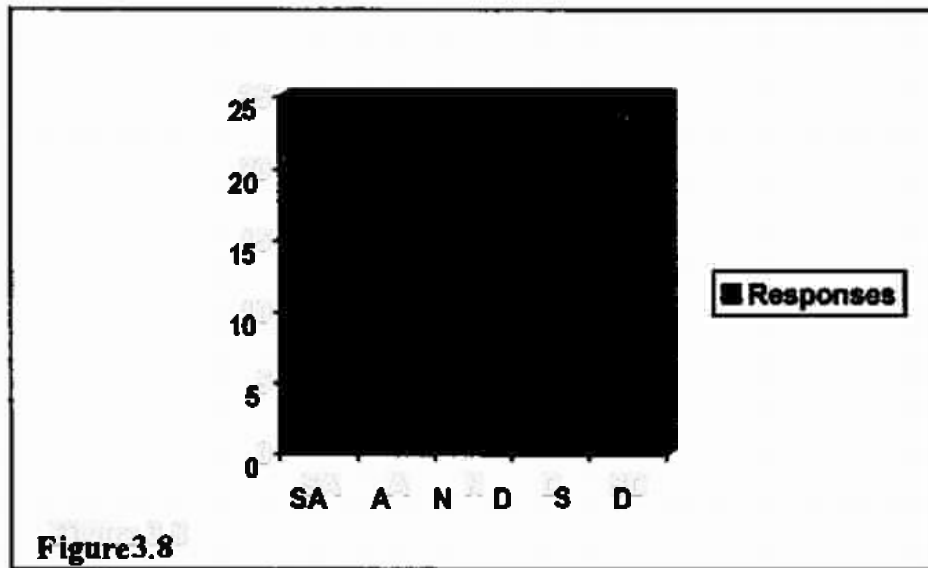
On the whole, 70 percent of respondents agreed that the layout and design of their office or workspace could have an impact on their concentration and productivity (10 strongly agreed and 25 simply agreed). This statement measured 3.8 on the Likert rubric overall, a strong level of agreement. The fact that only 20 percent strongly agreed with this statement indicates that this is an area that is important, but not as significantly as an organization's management style and organizational culture, communication between departments and among staff, and job descriptions and job training (statements 3, 4 and 5).

Statement 7: Overall, the accelerated development and use of technology has made employees' jobs easier and more productive.



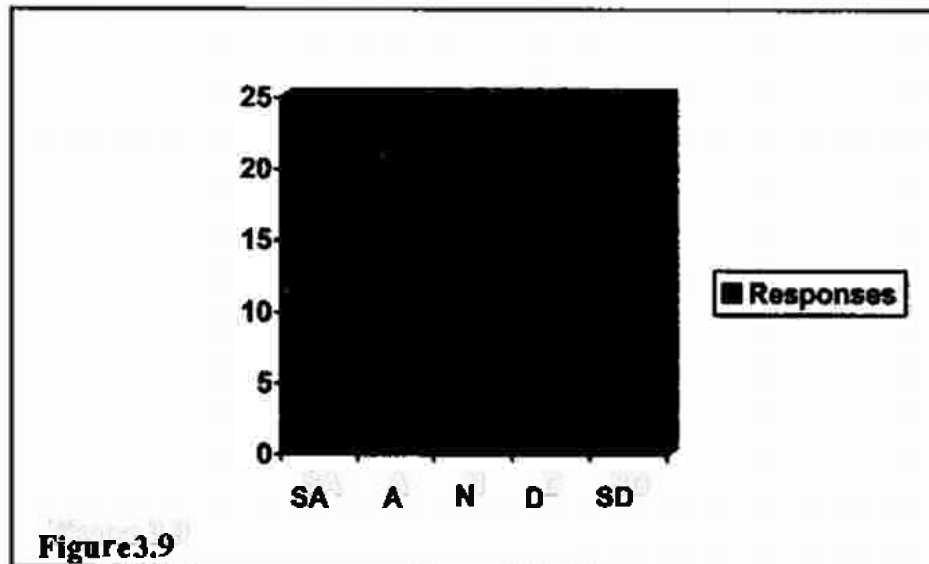
Overall, 76 percent of respondents agreed that the accelerated development and use of technology has made employees' jobs easier and more productive (8 strongly agreed and 30 simply agreed). This statement measured 3.78 on the Likert scale overall, indicating a high level of support. Many respondents made the observation in the "comments" section of the survey that technology has proven to be both a positive and negative influence on work stress. While technology helps to make certain responsibilities easier to carry out, at the same time, it has resulted in much higher expectations for total output from each employee, thus increasing stress. Lap-top computers, e-mail, cell phones and pagers in particular have made employees who use them accessible and accountable round-the-clock.

Statement 8: I regularly think about quitting my present job because of the degree of stress I experience.



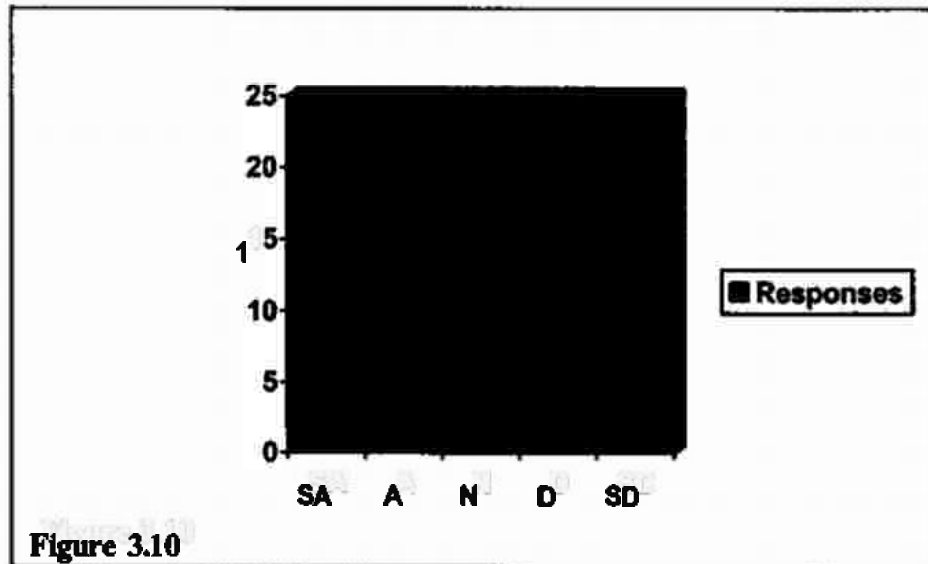
On the whole, merely 18 percent of respondents agreed that they regularly thought about quitting their jobs because of the degree of stress that they experience (2 strongly agreed and 7 simply agreed). 58 percent of respondents disagreed with this statement (23 simply disagreed and 6 strongly disagreed). The response rating to this particular survey question measured a low 2.52 on the Likert rubric overall. When one considers that 64 percent of respondents stated that their stress levels at work affect their personal and family life, the author expected a higher number of respondents to express a desire to quit their present job as a result. However, there could be several reasons for the high level of disagreement, which include the perception that most workplaces are stressful, so that leaving the current organization will not necessarily solve the problem. The current drought in the job market could also be another contributing factor to employees' unwillingness to give up their current positions in spite of high stress levels.

Statement 9: My employer is generally supportive in helping me to control my stress levels.



Only 30 percent of respondents agreed that their employers were generally supportive in helping them to control their stress levels (1 strongly agreed and 14 simply agreed). 28 percent of respondents disagreed with this statement (9 disagreed and 5 strongly disagreed). An unusually high number of respondents, 42 percent (or a total of 21), were neutral to this statement, which measured 2.9 on the Likert rubric overall. This could perhaps be because respondents were not entirely sure of what constitutes “support” by their employers. Alternatively, many of the respondents may not have revealed their discontent directly to their employers, and as a result are not sure of how to evaluate their employers’ position or overall response in relation to their stress levels.

Statement 10: An organization's investment in wellness / recreation programs for its employees is likely to improve stress levels and decrease absenteeism.



Overwhelmingly, 80 percent of respondents agreed that an organization's investment in wellness / recreation programs for its employees is likely to improve stress levels and decrease absenteeism (9 strongly agreed and 31 simply agreed). This statement measured a strong 3.8 on the Likert rubric overall. Notably, only 18 percent strongly agreed with the statement, while 62 percent agreed. This is reflective of comments made by some of the respondents that wellness programs can help employees to manage stress levels, but only to a limited extent. Many expressed the opinion that these programs will not be effective if the organizational environment itself is causing stress because of poor work design, contentious interpersonal relationships, intra-organizational communication challenges, or any of the other crucial factors that contribute to workplace stress.

Figure 3b

Summary of Likert Ratings (50 participants)

| Summarized Survey Questions | Rating |
|---|---------------|
| Feel overwhelmed because of the number of responsibilities on the job | 3.2 |
| Stress levels at work often affect health and family life | 3.6 |
| Organization's management style and culture contribute to employee stress | 4.32 |
| Inadequate communication channels at work are a leading cause of stress | 4.46 |
| An unclear job description / inadequate training affect productivity and stress | 4.46 |
| Layout and design of office and workspace could impact concentration and productivity | 3.8 |
| Increased use of technology has made jobs easier and more productive | 3.78 |
| Regularly think about quitting current job because of overwhelming stress | 2.52 |
| Employer is generally supportive in helping to control stress levels | 2.94 |
| Investment in wellness / recreation programs for employees decreases stress and absenteeism | 3.8 |

Survey Conclusions

The survey generated genuine interest from the respondents, many of whom expressed a great desire to see the results and to read the final report and the stress guidebook. Overall, the sentiment that came across most strongly from most of the respondents is the fact that an organization's management style, organizational culture, communication patterns and its approach to job training are key factors that contribute to the development of high levels of stress in the workplace. While investment in wellness and recreation programs for employees was considered beneficial by most respondents, it is only viewed as such if these key factors are addressed appropriately by the organization. As a result, the organizational stress management guidebook will incorporate approaches to managing these aspects employee stress, in addition to some of the other areas that the research literature has uncovered and explored.

CHAPTER 4

ORGANIZATIONAL STRESS MANAGEMENT HANDBOOK

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INTRODUCTION

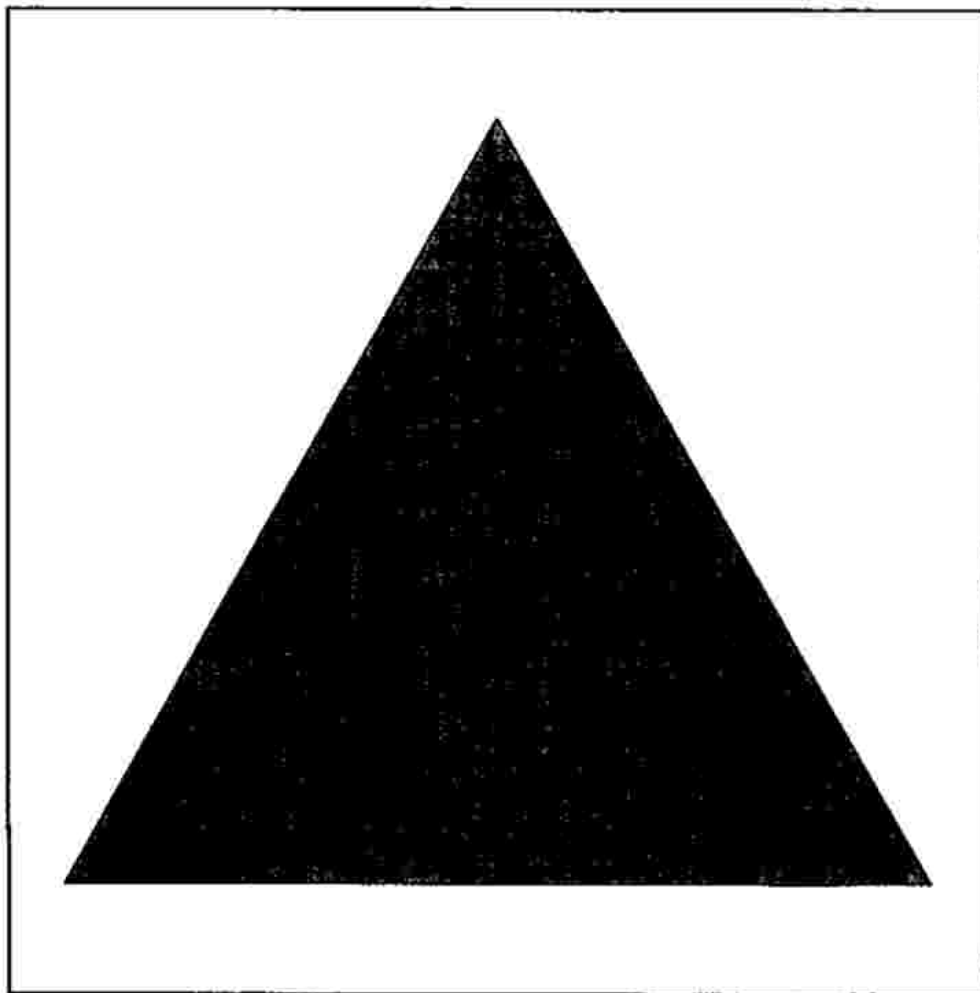
This guidebook is intended to address some of the chief factors that are contributing to the stress epidemic rippling across the American workforce. It can serve as an important preliminary resource tool for businesses that desire to give a higher priority to the health and comfort of its employees. The leading issues that typically preoccupy the minds of employees have been identified and potential solutions for these challenges presented. While it is not possible for an organization to single-handedly and completely eliminate the various pressures and stressors that are an inherent part of life, it can do its part to help make them more manageable and even reduce their overall impact. By taking a proactive role in the battle against workplace stress, an organization will not only reduce spiraling stress-related health care costs, but will maximize its own overall productivity, competitiveness and longevity.

Research shows that employees' stress levels at work are often directly related to four key dynamics, in the following order of importance – the management style of those in authority over them, the degree to which they are supported and developed while on the payroll, the nature of the organizational culture in which they work, and the types of benefits made available to them. As a result, these dynamics are the framework around which this guidebook has been developed. Practical guidelines have been provided to help managers improve their effectiveness in their roles and to help them provide maximum support and growth opportunities for employees. Ideas on concrete ways to

help improve the atmosphere in which employees must spend a significant amount of time have also been presented. Finally, helpful and relevant programs and benefits that can help them to manage stressors that are both within and beyond their control are explored.

Figure a

Foundations of effective stress management in a progressive organization



UNIT 1:

IMPLEMENTING EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT TRAINING PROGRAMS

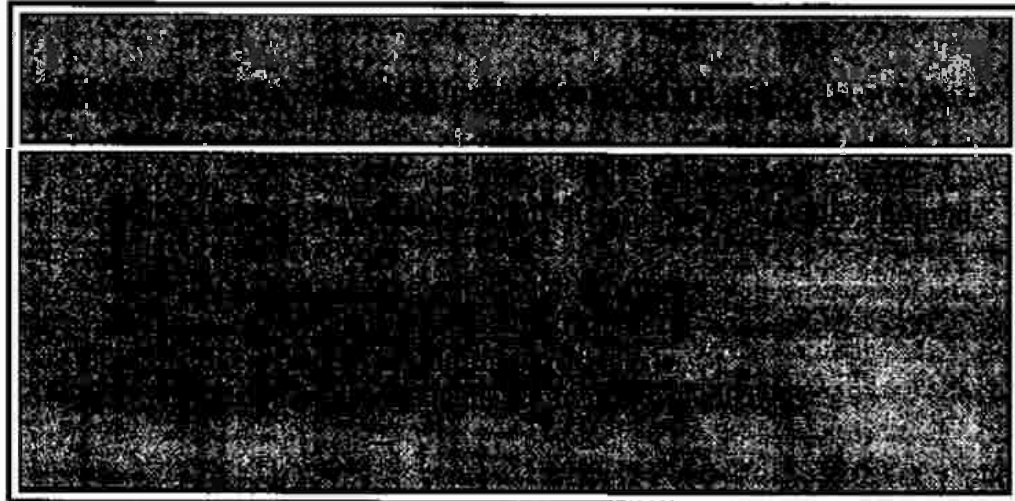
An overwhelming contributing factor to stressful working environments is poor leadership by supervisors or managers. Any organization that wishes to be proactive in helping its employees to manage stress must be committed to developing and maintaining effective training programs for its managers, so that they can maximize their own potential along with those that they oversee. Ineffective managers contribute to significantly increased anxiety levels for their subordinates, poison the organizational culture and damage morale, all of which hampers productivity.

By implementing progressive and tailored training programs, managers can be taught effective strategies to maximize the success of their departments. Employees' confidence in the credibility of their superiors is more likely to improve along with morale and the quality of work performance. All managers should be exposed to training programs that enable them to tailor their approach to managing the diverse skills and personality traits of the people they direct. A "one-size-fits-all" approach to all employees may undoubtedly work for some but alienate others and affect a manager's ability to motivate each employee to give his or her best.

Five key areas of a successful management training program will be explored. All of the areas are important but commonly bungled aspects of managing group dynamics. Managers equipped with these skills will not only increase their ability to

minimize the stress that their subordinates experience as a result of their decisions and managerial style, but they will also be better able to manage their own stress levels as they learn strategies for avoiding many of the pitfalls of supervision.

Figure 1.1



Identification and Management of Superstars, Steadies and Non-players

In every organization, employees can fall into one of three categories, superstars, steadies, or non-players (Lombardi, 2001). A “superstar” is an employee who has great enthusiasm for his or her job and the organization as a whole, generates positive ideas and proactively seeks opportunities for improvement. A “steady” is an employee who is hardworking and dependable, and helps the department to run effectively from day to day. A “non-player” is an employee who does the minimum amount of work necessary to remain employed, is apathetic to the success of the department and the organization as a whole, and is often a draining influence on other employees. All managers should be

equipped with the ability to identify each type of employee, and to tailor his/her approach accordingly so that stress levels are minimized for all involved.

Stress for superstars in an organization can increase dramatically if they are not given avenues or outlets to express their ideas, if their articulated ideas are repeatedly ignored or downplayed, if they become bored because of a limited number of responsibilities, or if they feel that their skills are not being developed or utilized effectively by the organization. Effective managers should know how to prevent or alleviate the stress that can result from any or all of the above circumstances, so that their best employees do not end up becoming so disillusioned that they leave for other organizations and their talents and contributions are lost altogether.

Superstars need to be encouraged to formally present their ideas and any new innovative strategies they may develop on their own initiative. They should be given opportunities to develop their education and skills through training and development programs or certification programs. They should be presented opportunities on the job that would allow them to feel continually challenged; for example, by creating cross-training opportunities for them in other parts of the organization and by allowing them to have a greater level of autonomy in managing their own responsibilities. One of the most effective ways to frustrate superstars and increase their stress levels dramatically is to micromanage them, limit their opportunities for growth and continuously stifle their ideas and opinions.

Failing to nurture superstars effectively can also increase stress levels for managers they become more apathetic and decreases their contribution to their department over time. The value that the superstar adds to a department and to a

manger's overall success is often recognized most dramatically once the individual hands in a resignation letter, and in the weeks and months that follow. An astute manager will take great pains to ensure that this does not happen.

Steadies in an organization are often at the greatest risk for developing heightened stress levels in the workplace if not managed effectively. Steady employees are often taken for granted because of their willingness to comply with people in authority and their consistent dependability. In many organizations, they are often asked to do more than their fair share of work, especially when there are other employees in the department who are not measuring up to performance expectations, whether due to poor training or apathy. Many become frustrated when their responsibilities are increased without regard to their opinion, but may not express these feelings openly.

A good manager should remain vigilant about the work patterns of all their employees and ensure that responsibilities are assigned fairly. Steadies also need to have a clear indication, through effective job descriptions and job training, of what is expected of them and in what timeframes. They need to be encouraged to continue their diligent work and recognized formally for their solid contributions. They should be rewarded for successes or "wins" that the department experiences, and never taken for granted, as tends to be the norm. There should be a fairly regular staff meetings that provide opportunities for employees to discuss new trends or patterns in workflow, any interpersonal challenges that may have arisen among members of the team, and needed changes to protocol or work processes. Their ideas should be validated and implemented as often as possible.

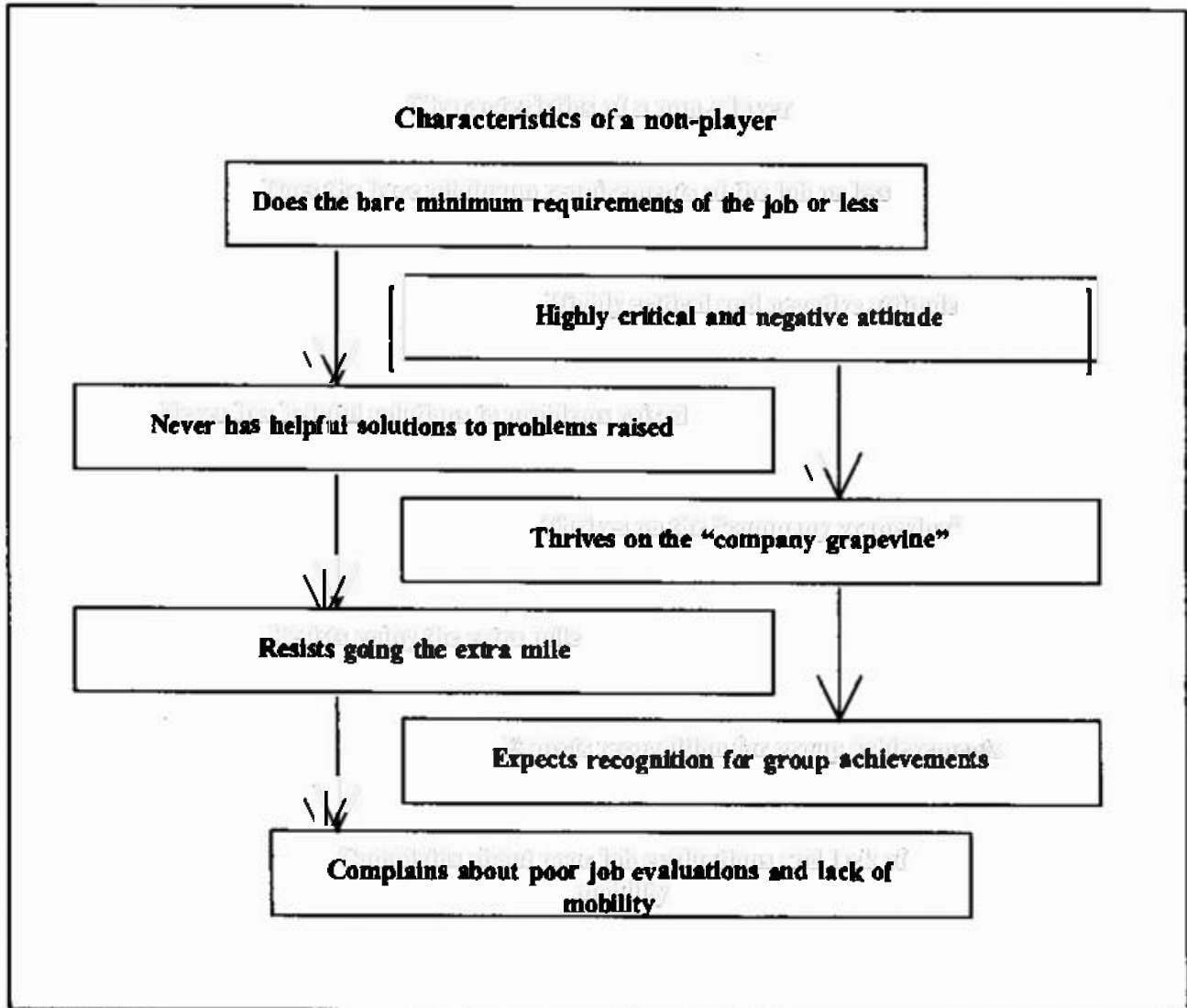
Steadies will also benefit tremendously from working closely with superstars in the group. While superstars should be actively encouraged to work on independent projects if they so desire, they should also be given the chance to work directly with steadies on other projects for the mutual benefit of the two groups. Superstars will be made to feel valued for what they can teach others, and steadies will benefit from the opportunity to learn from the style and approach of superstars. The overall creative energy and zeal for productivity in the department will be enhanced.

Non-players should be of particular concern to all astute managers, because their attitudes and behavior can impact an entire department and related stakeholders, increasing stress levels for all involved when performance expectations are consistently disregarded. Unfortunately, many are hesitant to take action with non performing employees because of the extremely controversial nature of today's workplace. The traditional practice of firing people on the spot for even minor mistakes has long become outdated, and many non-performers take deliberate advantage of the increased sense of security that America's litigious workplace culture now provides. In fact, it is much more difficult to remove a poorly performing employee than ever before in the country's economic history (Chambers, 1998). However, an organization can equip its managers with the necessary skills to take charge of employees whose behavior can have tremendous negative implications for overall productivity and cost-effectiveness.

Non-players enjoy complaining about all that the organization does not do for them, criticize almost every new venture and proclaim all changes to be a failure before they are even put into place. They typically shirk opportunities to go the extra mile for clients or co-workers, and often even fail to meet expected levels of service to clients.

All of these characteristics only serve to increase the stress levels of managers and co-workers alike. Non-player behavior should not be overlooked as is often the case by managers who are intimidated by the idea of reprimanding or correcting wayward employees. Managers should be taught how to be proactive in addressing non-players' apathy towards work by making them more accountable for how their behavior affects productivity and morale in the department.

Figure 1.2



When new ideas or initiatives are criticized openly, non-players should be asked directly and publicly to design and present an alternative approach by a specific date (Lombardi, 2001) – politely, of course. Managers should be prepared with encouraging words and effective rebuttals that will offset negative comments made by non-players about impending changes or trends. Otherwise, steadies may be influenced by concerns and fears about the future that are often exaggerated by employees who lack vision or a desire to deal with change. Stress levels can be much more easily managed if negativity is kept under control.

Effective Interviewing and Hiring Strategies

By learning how to manage recruitment processes effectively, managers can save themselves and their subordinates much of the stress that results from contentious interpersonal relationships and work habits on the job. One of a manager's top goals should be to build and motivate top-notch staff. Learning how to properly identify business needs, preparing and presenting proper search criteria for the human resource departments, conducting effective interviews and carefully evaluating candidates are all part of a successful approach to building a successful business unit for the long haul.

Many new employees experience heightened levels of stress when they discover that the job they were hired to do does not match their expectations, when they feel under- or over-qualified, or when the organizational culture is different from what they had anticipated. By developing and articulating expectations and requirements at the very beginning of the hiring process, management can avoid incurring the tremendous costs that result when a new recruit flounders in a position or has to be replaced when he

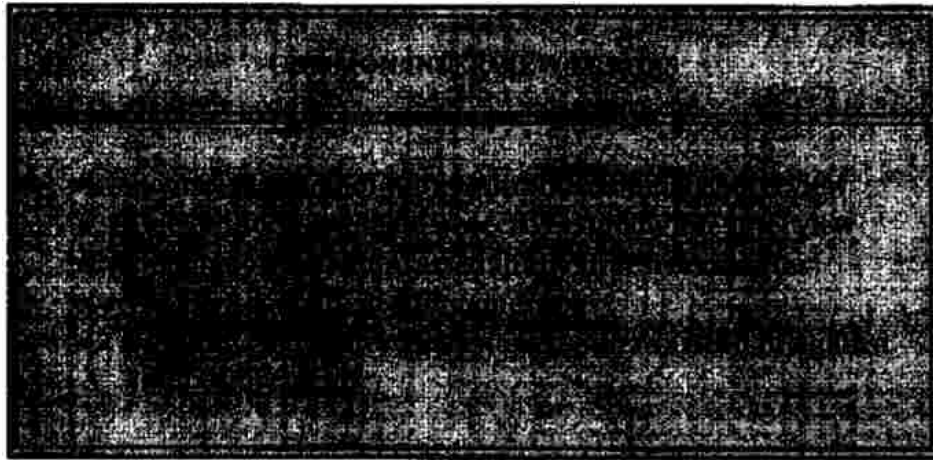
resigns unexpectedly. Whether the recruitment process is done through the human resources department or by directly by management, a formal blueprint should be developed that outlines clear job requirements, past successes and failures associated with the position, feedback from staff and co-workers about what they would desire in someone who is chosen for the position, candidates' expected education and experience, and desirable attitudes and habits (Lombardi, 2001).

Résumés should be carefully screened, although it should be kept in mind that they are merely summaries of a person's experience and background and can only provide a somewhat limited perspective on the candidate's suitability for an advertised position. Although it is not always possible to find individuals who fit every stated expectation perfectly, the profiles of candidates chosen for interviews should match the developed blueprint as closely as possible to increase the chances of choosing the best persons for the interview process, and ultimately, for the job.

The purpose of the interview itself is to determine how closely the candidate's training, experience and personality meet the desired standards and characteristics that have been outlined in the blueprint before a position has been advertised. To that end, the candidate should be allowed to do the majority of the talking once introductions are out of the way and the question and answer period begins. Questions should be as open-ended as possible, with no interruptions or leading statements on which the candidate can build a potentially exaggerated picture of his or her accomplishments and abilities. For example, instead of describing a potential crisis situation and asking the candidate how she would handle it, the interviewer should ask what types of crises she has already experienced and how she managed them. As she answers, the interviewer should listen

closely for indicators of her philosophies, attitudes and readiness to face organizational challenges. Her answers will also be an important gauge for determining whether she will be able to manage potential stressors on the job adequately.

Figure 1.3



The interview is a crucial juncture for identifying and “weeding out” non-players from the candidate pool. By recognizing non-players at the interview stage, managers can save precious company time and money. They can also save existing employees the needless stress of non-performers who hamper the productivity and effectiveness of other team members. Key qualities to look for are flexibility, adaptability, autonomy, a willingness to be a team player, a willingness to learn, respect for authority, and finally, managerial potential. While every candidate may not strongly demonstrate all of these qualities, a candidate who appears to be deficient in too many of these areas should be considered high-risk for the overall wellbeing of the organization.

Interviewers should ensure that candidates are encouraged before the end of the interview to ask as many questions as possible about the organizational culture and its

unique characteristics. This will avoid misunderstandings in the candidate's mind about the environment that she will be coming into, and save the organization the steep costs that are incurred when a new hire turns out to be a poor fit and the recruitment process needs to be repeated.

Interviewers should do their best to reserve concrete judgments about each candidate for the end of the interview. Many fall prey to the "five-minute actor factor". (Lombardi, 2001). This refers to the tendency to be too easily impressed by a candidate within the first five minutes of an interview. The candidate may have excellent interviewing skills, and can provide favorable answers to the manager's questions, but may not actually have the performance potential necessary for success in the position.

Another error that is often made in the interview process is to allow the evaluation of one candidate to be influenced by previous candidates (Parkinson, 1999). This error may not necessarily result in a poor choice, but it can also result in candidates being compared with each other instead of being evaluated according to their suitability for the job. A method of guarding against this error could be to ensure that each candidate's profile is studied carefully before the date of the interview, so that questions can be tailored according to experience stated on the résumé. This way, the interviewer reduces the chance that uniform questions are asked and the responses given by different candidates unfairly compared. All final analyses on the best candidate for the job should be postponed until all the candidates chosen have been interviewed.

Proper orientation, development and performance evaluation procedures should be put into place after new recruits are chosen (Lombardi, 2001). Once hired, employees should be thoroughly trained and not allowed to experience "sink-or-swim" situations.

They should be provided with a job description that is clear, crisp and easily understood by someone who has had no previous experience in a similar position. They should also be given adequate support, encouragement and the assurance that a knowledgeable person will always be around to answer questions and to provide guidance when it is needed.

Teams that are built with long term success in mind, as opposed to the short-term objective of "getting by" or "surviving", will help to keep stress levels for all employees at a manageable level. Carefully chosen members who are appropriately integrated into the organizational system can increase the chances that the team will remain cohesive and committed to desired organizational and departmental objectives.

Effective Change Management Strategies

Effective change management strategies should be ingrained in all managers so that they become effective at conceiving, developing and executing all changes in their departments, minimizing the stress that can result when the process is not handled effectively. Poor planning and execution of all types of change, whether minor major, can cause unnecessary instability in the workplace, devastate organizational pride and undermine morale. All major changes should include the input of employees, based on surveys, department discussions and day-to-day suggestions or feedback. At a minimum, no change should be imposed suddenly and without the opportunity for employees to express their concerns or suggestions for how the strategy's success can be maximized. If employees feel like they are a valued part of each stage of the change process, they are less likely to experience the stress that can develop when one feels disconnected from

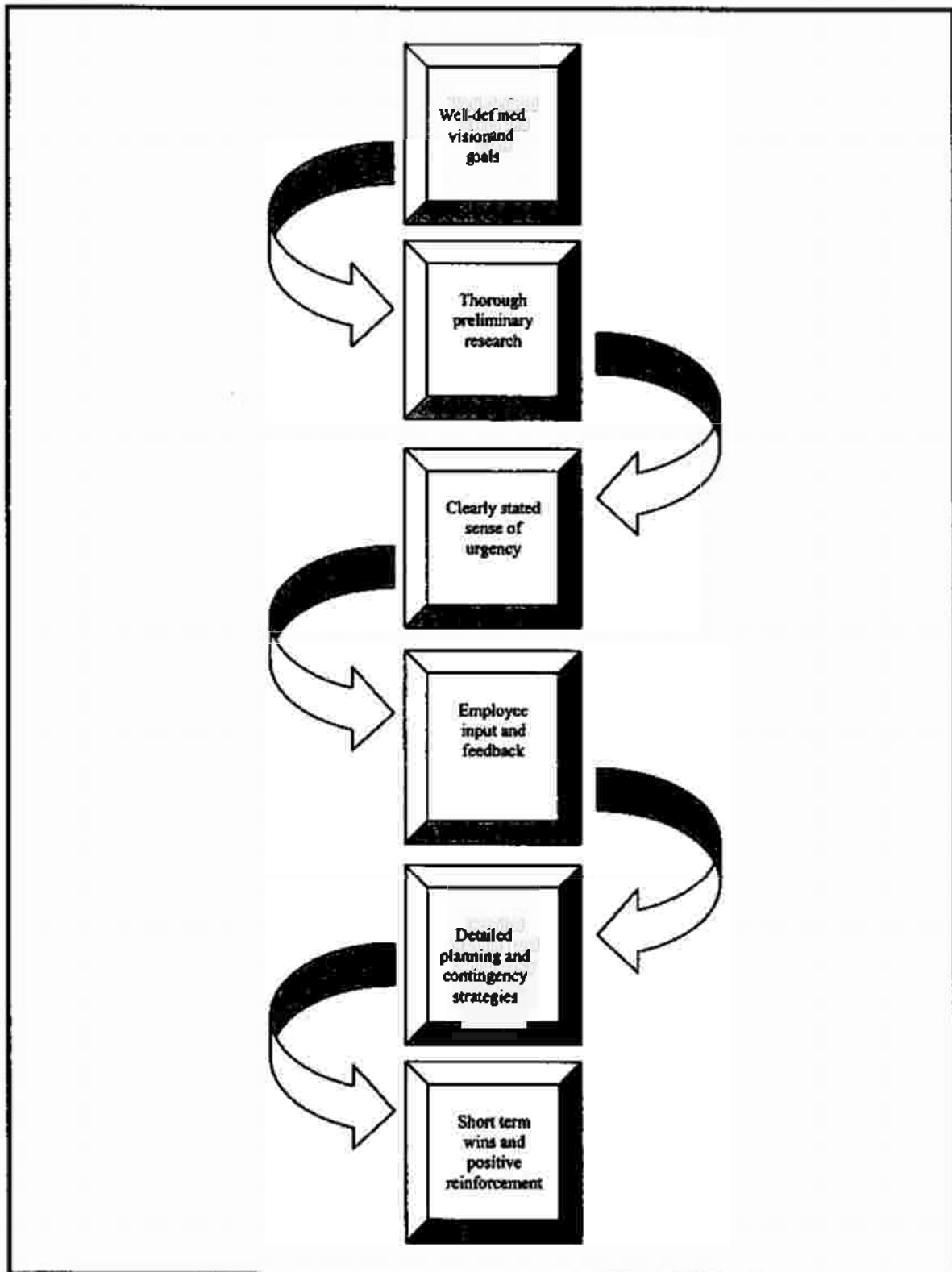
activities and changes taking place, or to feel like they have been caught off-guard, or suddenly controlled and manipulated into compliance with major organizational decisions.

At CBI, a major financial institution, a major move to a new location was being planned for employees of a particular division. The move represented the launch of a new business model for the division which was intended to take its service delivery capabilities to a new level of efficiency. Less than two business days before the move, employees were asked to choose one shift from a choice of three, and to respond by the next business day with an answer as to which shift they most preferred. Most employees, especially those with children and second jobs felt overwhelmed with this decision. Not only were they not prepared for a change to the shift system, but many had to rush to consult with babysitters and school contacts and other employers in order to determine what their options were.

Some employees within departments had to work out among each other who was best able to take specific shifts, since management was requiring staggered time periods for reporting for work. Even after details were ironed out, morale was needlessly affected in the process because many were left wondering what other unexpected changes were around the corner. Management at the new business center had created a negative impression for employees on how change and relationships with employees were going to be handled. The distrust that arose between staff and management became a palpable barrier to the development of a cohesive relationship, and marred employees' perception of a the new business model as one with a bright and rewarding future.

Figure 1.4

Elements of a successful change process



According to change management expert John P. Kotter, major organizational change initiatives are typically unsuccessful because of a failure by change agents to communicate the need for the transformation adequately, which often results in a failure to gain the momentum needed to drive the process to a successful completion. There is also often a failure to develop an effective mental picture that serves as a potent, desirable goal for the organization to make every effort to reach. With any major change that needs to be implemented, managers should ensure that the reasons for the transformation are clearly explained to all relevant stakeholders, and that everyone involved in the change process has a fitting sense of urgency about the need for its success (Kotter, 1996). Extensive preliminary research should be conducted and potential crises and opportunities thoroughly explored, so that well designed solutions and appropriate responses can be formulated ahead of time. A clear vision of what is to be achieved should be developed and communicated, and key, well respected individuals should be chosen to lead the way in getting the rest of the organization to work together to make the change a reality (Kotter, 1996).

As the changes are implemented and challenges arise, employees should feel welcome to communicate their perspectives and to be a part of the problem-solving process. Accordingly, they will be much less likely to feel alienated from developments taking place around them, or to feel that they may be eventually left out of the loop altogether if they cannot "get with the program" quickly enough. Carefully timed short-term wins should be built into the change process so that tangible results and improvements can be recognized and celebrated, driving the much-needed momentum that is necessary to keep motivation levels high and the change process moving to its

successful conclusion (Kotter, 1996). The stress of the change process is very likely to be alleviated if hard work and patient endurance is given proper recognition and if those involved have ample opportunity to share their perspectives on the various ways in which the process is affecting them.

Effective Problem-Resolution Strategies

Problem-solving and conflict resolution skills must be mastered if a manager is to be successful in his or her role. Three main areas where problems often develop are in relationships among employees in a particular department, relationships between departments and escalated complaints from clients. A manager who is not equipped with the appropriate approaches to each of these types of problems can quickly make a bad situation progressively worse, especially when the approach is to pretend that they don't exist at all, and hope that they will eventually go away.

Any tension between employees with personality differences must be addressed quickly to protect efficiency, maintain unity, and avoid the eventual resignation of valuable employees. Symptoms of troubles between employees include irritable behavior or anger, avoidance, openly assigning blame for problems, chronic criticism, or a negative change in overall performance levels (Lombardi, 2001). Once any of these symptoms have been identified, a manager should try to identify the source of the problem, first by observing activities and patterns among employees, then by discussing potential problems with the relevant parties. Every effort should be made to focus on the facts of the situation, and not on opinions.

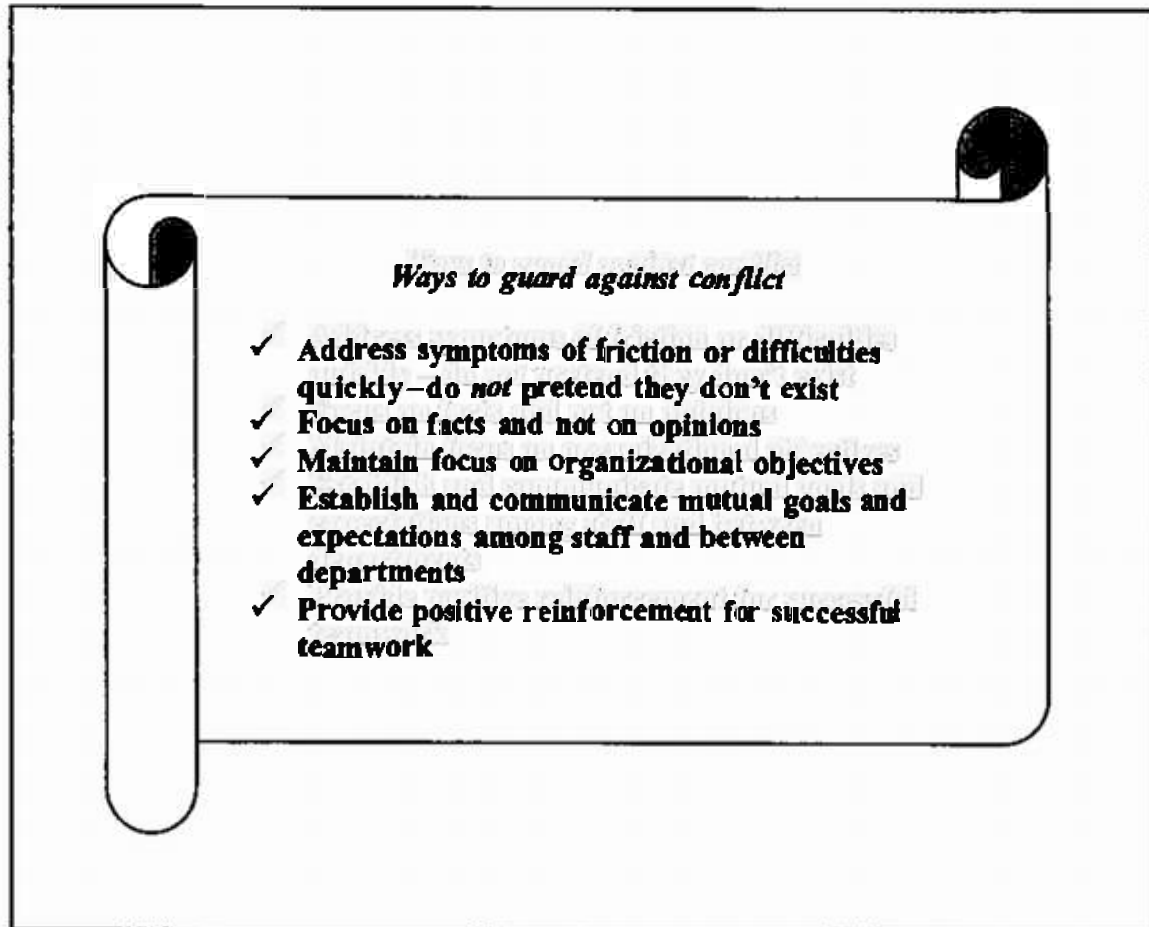
Employees should be approached individually at first, to determine whether the problem is business oriented or personal. While the comfort and emotional wellbeing of all employees while at work should be a concern in trying to resolve problems, the primary goal is to ensure that client satisfaction and performance objectives do not suffer as a result of the existing tension. This should be kept at the forefront of all discussions, as opposed to falling into the trap of taking sides or displaying favoritism in any form. As far as possible, solutions should be generated by consensus, but with the firm understanding that continued, open conflict and tension has to be eliminated if the department is to be successful. All observations, conversations, warnings and decisions should be carefully documented and dated. If necessary, specific disciplinary action should eventually be taken if warnings to control confrontational or divisive behavior are disregarded. In extreme cases, the termination of certain individuals may be the only viable solution.

Relationships between departments in an organization can often become contentious when there are competing goals and expectations, and incompatible standards and needs. These conflicts must be smoothly and diplomatically handled if stress levels are to be kept at a minimum for all involved. Employees can experience considerable stress when there is a regular breakdown in communication and inefficient workflow between departments. A perceptive manager should be able to identify this challenge based on the types of problems that his or her subordinates encounter on a regular basis.

An effective approach would be to try to work with other department heads to amend workflow patterns or requirements wherever this is possible. Another approach is to work with other managers to create cross-training opportunities for staff members of

connected departments. This will allow them to build up relationships and increase camaraderie within the organization, increase their understanding of overall operations, and help them to develop potential solutions to inter-departmental challenges.

Figure 1.5



Escalated complaints from clients must be handled diplomatically in order to protect stakeholder interests while ensuring that employee morale is not damaged in the process. Managers should ensure that their staff members feel comfortable approaching them with a challenging issue or when unusual mistakes or circumstances crop up and they need direction. When a client has a complaint that requires special attention,

managers should ensure that the client has a chance to express her concerns as quickly and as thoroughly as possible, and that everything is done to reassure her that her business is valued and that the situation will be resolved as soon as possible.

Managers should never belittle their staff members in their conversations with clients, privately or publicly. If an employee's error was the direct cause of the client's difficulty, he or she should be sensitively corrected, while ensuring that otherwise good quality efforts are verbally noted and valued. If client complaints seem to be higher than normal for a particular employee, the manager should determine whether or not additional training is needed.

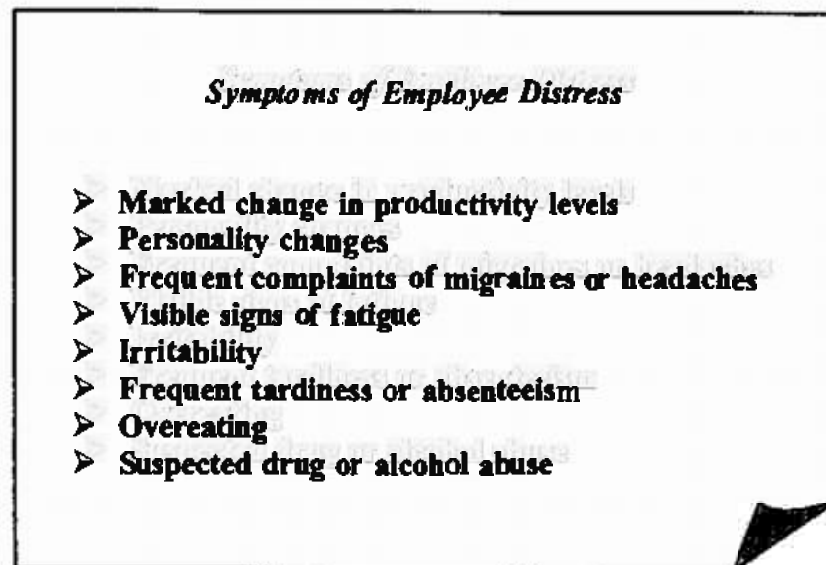
Recognition and Management of Employee Distress

Managers should be taught how to recognize the signs of abnormal stress in their subordinates, so that they can tackle the issue and minimize its effects on everyone involved. Employees who have experienced severe stress for a prolonged period of time may not be forthright with their supervisors about what they are going through, but may begin to develop physical, behavioral, psychological or cognitive disorders that are indicative of significant problems. Managers who are sensitive to these distress signals will be much better able to provide timely intervention and support that can mean the difference between a merely tricky situation and an outright catastrophe.

Employees who complain of persistent migraines, headaches, stomach aches or other severe muscle pains, even after using painkillers, could potentially be suffering from the effects of prolonged, unmanaged stress. Managers should remain alert to these types of complaints, and, if necessary, try to discuss the possible causes to see if there is

anything that can be done to support or assist the individuals through the physical challenges. This can include a change or adjustment to the work routine, workflow patterns or responsibilities, or even time off to seek medical attention in case there is a more serious underlying problem.

Figure 1.6



Behavioral disorders such as smoking, overeating and in rare cases, on-the-job drinking or drug use can develop in employees as coping mechanisms for constant worry and anxiety. Anxious or atypically nervous behavior in employees, sudden, progressive weight gain, or negative changes in personality are all warning signs to managers that they may be experiencing a crisis that requires attention and support.

Employees suffering from cognitive disorders such as sleeplessness, memory loss or an inability to concentrate for long periods may begin forgetting how to perform routine procedures and become distracted or frustrated much more easily in everyday work situations. The incidence of errors, service delivery compromises and confidentiality breaches may increase significantly, resulting in an intensified cycle of disillusionment, helplessness and a feeling of a loss of control.

Emotional disorders such as anxiety, depression, personality changes, mania or mental illness can develop as stress remains untreated over time and an employee faces what may seem to be formidable challenges with no identifiable solutions. The employee may display an open lack of willingness to co-operate in team projects or with superiors, demonstrate a clear lack of interest in organizational activities, or call in sick with increasing frequency. In the case of an employee suffering from mania, there may be displays of inappropriate elation, increased energy and activity, increased chatter and talk of extravagant plans (National Institute of Mental Health, 1996).

Every organization should have formal policies and procedures in place for how a manager is to approach an employee who displays unusual behavior for a period of more than two weeks, as it may be a signal of an underlying problem that must be taken seriously. By investing in the appropriate remedial and support programs for employees who need them, an organization will not only demonstrate empathy for its staff and build a positive organizational culture, but it will safeguard against significant productivity losses and the damage to morale that can occur in other team members who may be affected by a distressed co-worker.

In Summary...

While there will always be the problem of the "bad boss", an organization will do well to go as far as it possibly can to help support and mold their managers and help them to be as successful as possible in their roles. The effectiveness of those who hold senior positions in an organization is an extremely important determining factor in the degree of stress that their subordinates experience. The ability to read, understand, support and motivate people and to solve interpersonal and individual problems effectively is without a doubt the most significant aspect of a manager's role. Regardless of industry knowledge and experience and practical know-how, all managers should have a thorough understanding of the dynamics of managing people, or else they may fail dismally in their ability generate or maintain progressive or lasting organizational success.

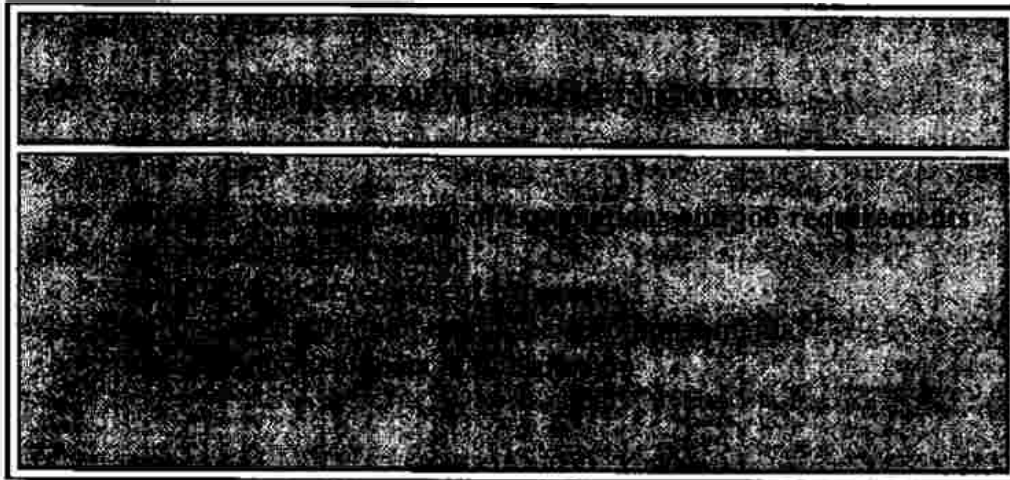
UNIT 2:

POSITIVELY DEVELOPING EMPLOYEES

A key component of successful organizational stress management is making sure that employees feel satisfied, valued and supported by their organization, and ensuring that their interests are an important factor in the development of its short-, medium- and long-term objectives. By giving sufficient attention to employees and their overall personal and professional development, an organization will be sure to realize numerous short- and long-term benefits. The type of employee it attracts, the way in which the general culture develops over time, and productivity and profitability are all enhanced when care is taken in the management of human resources. It will guard itself against the serious but widespread error of attempting to meet challenging stakeholder objectives at the expense of employee comfort and job satisfaction.

There are several practical ways in which job satisfaction can be maximized for personnel. Implementing these initiatives may seem like a complicated and expensive mission for a firm with limited resources and a traditionally rigid managerial approach, but, in fact, the costs of not progressing with these plans may prove to be extremely damaging to a firm's competitive position and to overall profitability and stability over the long haul.

Figure 2.1



Effective Communication of Expectations and Job Requirements

One of the first areas in which management can work to alleviate stress and enhance employee satisfaction and development is in the effective communication of organizational expectations and job requirements. As positions evolve and responsibilities change, many businesses fail to ensure that job descriptions are updated accordingly. While gradual adjustments to job functions may be handled well by an existing employee over time, the failure to properly document and explain the required tasks and job expectations as they change will increase the chances that a new employee will have a difficult time in the training process. It also increases the chances that confusion will arise about what is expected of a new candidate once the position becomes available, which may translate into a faulty advertising and recruitment process.

Managers should ensure that they keep the lines of communication open with their subordinates, to ensure that they are kept abreast of changes in workflow patterns and any adjustments that may need to be made to job descriptions or training requirements. Employees should feel comfortable enough with their immediate

supervisors to report increases in workloads or the emergence of specific obstacles that make their responsibilities more challenging. Hasty judgments about employees' abilities should not be made when they express frustration about workflow challenges, and staff should be allowed to present suggestions for addressing them. When solutions are presented, they should be incorporated as often as possible.

While performance appraisals are often a source of contention between managers and staff, they do provide a very useful mode for exchanging performance feedback. To be most effective, thorough training should be provided for evaluators, sufficient time should be established for conducting reviews and one-on-one counseling, and rewards should be granted that correctly reflect the level of performance demonstrated (Greer, 1995). An employee who is given a clear indication of how his or her performance measures up to managerial expectations is much more likely to be able to adjust work patterns and improve overall success in the assigned role. Individual performance results should be kept strictly confidential. However, group results can be posted and discussed as a means of fostering cohesiveness and giving the department or organization a more concrete idea of how well objectives are being met.

Autonomous and Flexible Work Design

The inherent design of an employee's position plays a major role in the degree of stress that is experienced on the job. Significant strain can arise in positions where an employee is given a large amount of responsibility but limited decision-making authority (Ganster, 1995). An organization's demands upon its staff to complete responsibilities should, as far as possible, be balanced with respect for the skills and decision-making

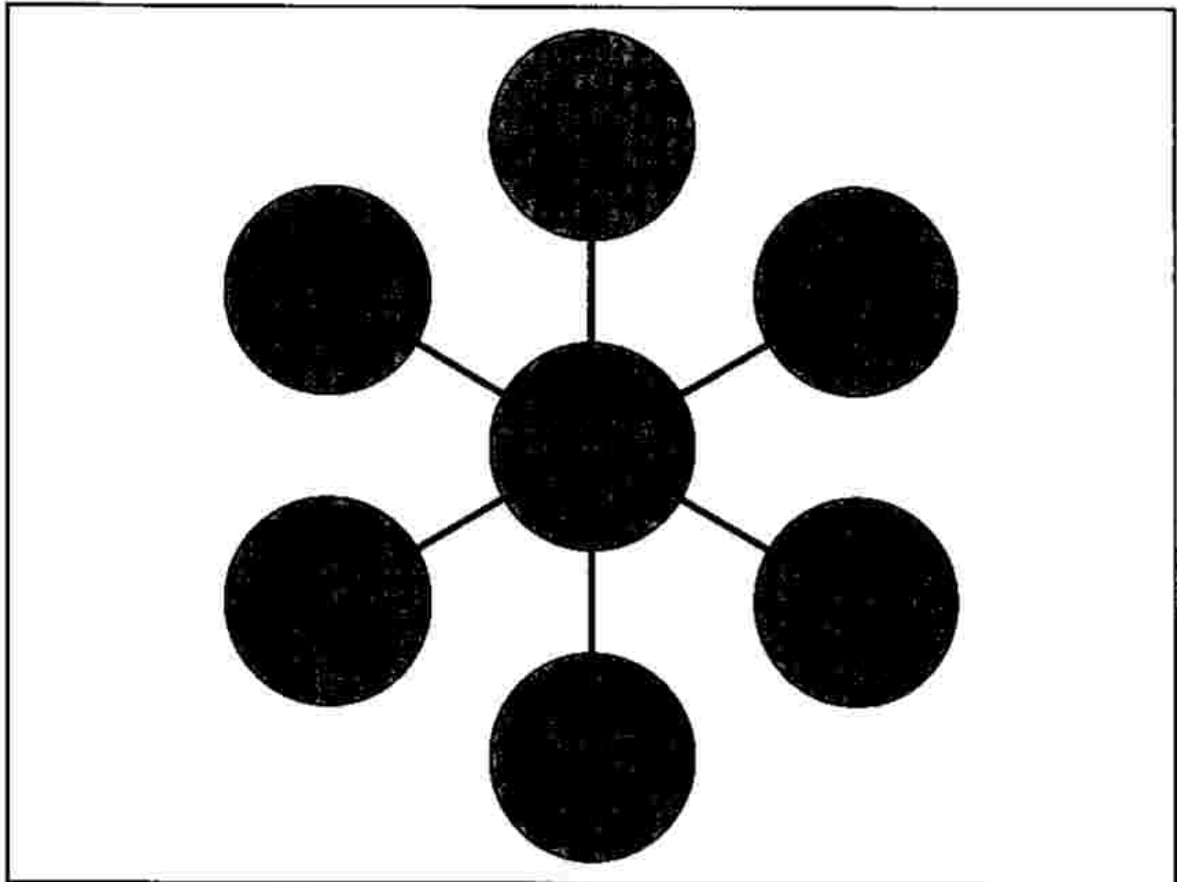
abilities of the employees. An employee's health and emotional wellbeing is much more likely to be preserved if she is allowed the flexibility to develop and implement practicable solutions to ongoing challenges without constantly having to check with a supervisor. She should also be able to carry out her regular duties without having a superior continually second-guess everything that is done or watch her every move.

Employees who lack the confidence and independence to resolve client grievances or other job-related dilemmas should be provided with further training and mentoring. This will not only help to prevent needless anxiety during various types of crises, but will increase the overall competence and effectiveness of the departments to which they belong, and the organization as a whole. An organization that fosters the development of independence and self-confidence in employees, within company guidelines, of course, will help to facilitate innovation and creativity and position itself at a competitive advantage. It will ensure that its employees are prepared to meet unforeseen challenges, and that it can draw from its own talent pool when new positions and opportunities for growth and organizational development are created.

Stress levels can also skyrocket if jobs are designed with such restricted functions that there is not enough variety to help keep the employee sufficiently challenged. As far as possible, an organization should design its jobs so that there are a sufficient variety of duties to guard against monotony and boredom. On the other hand, as job functions evolve and the organization's expectations of its employees grow, an appropriate balance should always be maintained between the need to meet stakeholders' expectations, and the need to keep employees' roles challenging but manageable.

Figure 22

Benefits of an autonomous and flexible work design



Adding too many tasks to an employee's daily "to do" list may compromise the quality of service provided over time, and cause undue frustration, absenteeism and sluggish organizational growth as stakeholders become disgruntled with poor service and performance. Close attention should be paid on an ongoing basis to changes in workflow patterns, client concerns and overall productivity, so that adjustments to job descriptions, job requirements, or even staffing levels can be made in a timely fashion, before there are adverse consequences.

Training and Development Programs

The pace of change in today's society is so fast, that ongoing training and development opportunities for employees must always be a key concern for any employer that desires to maximize job satisfaction. By investing in opportunities for continual learning, an organization improves the productivity potential of its staff and reduces the chance that employees feel like they are being "squeezed" for all they have for the sake of the company's bottom line. Customer service training, software literacy programs, effective teamwork skills, public speaking and business presentation instruction are some of the kinds of programs which organizations can make available to their employees. The training will not only serve to help them learn, grow and add value to their professional contribution, but will also help them to feel that they are receiving an added benefit from the company that will help them in any future career changes they might decide to make.

Educational sponsorship programs in the form of grants, partial scholarships and full scholarships can prove to be an excellent way to encourage employees to enhance their overall value, improve the organization's knowledge base and build employee loyalty. Employees will be much less likely to feel trapped in specific roles if they have opportunities to pursue educational programs that increase their advancement prospects. They are also more likely to stay with an organization that demonstrates a genuine interest in their overall professional development, which will lead to a generally stable atmosphere. To ensure that the organization does in fact receive the benefit of an improved knowledge base, employees who are provided with assistance in their

education should be expected to remain with the organization for a mutually established period of time after the completion of their studies.

Figure 2.3



A major cause of stress for some employees is the monotony of being in a specific role with specific duties for an extended period of time. In order to enhance overall organizational knowledge, improve relations between department staff and evade boredom, employees should be allowed the opportunity to cross train in related job functions. Many employees may find that they can understand and empathize more easily with the challenges that other departments experience once they have had a chance to “fill their shoes”. Rotating employees between departments for temporary cross training experience can add variety to an otherwise predictable daily routine for several months or even years, depending on the size of the organization and the number of departments. Cross-training can also provide employees with the possibility of a permanent change if they discover a role for which they feel better suited.

Opportunities for promotion are important for keeping employees satisfied within their organization and preventing high turnover rates. Some organizations, depending on their nature, may not be able to create sufficient variability in the types of openings that develop to help employees advance. Nevertheless, management should try to hire from within the firm as often as possible when positions do become available. Employees are more likely to feel undervalued and mistreated if higher-level openings are consistently filled by externally recruited candidates.

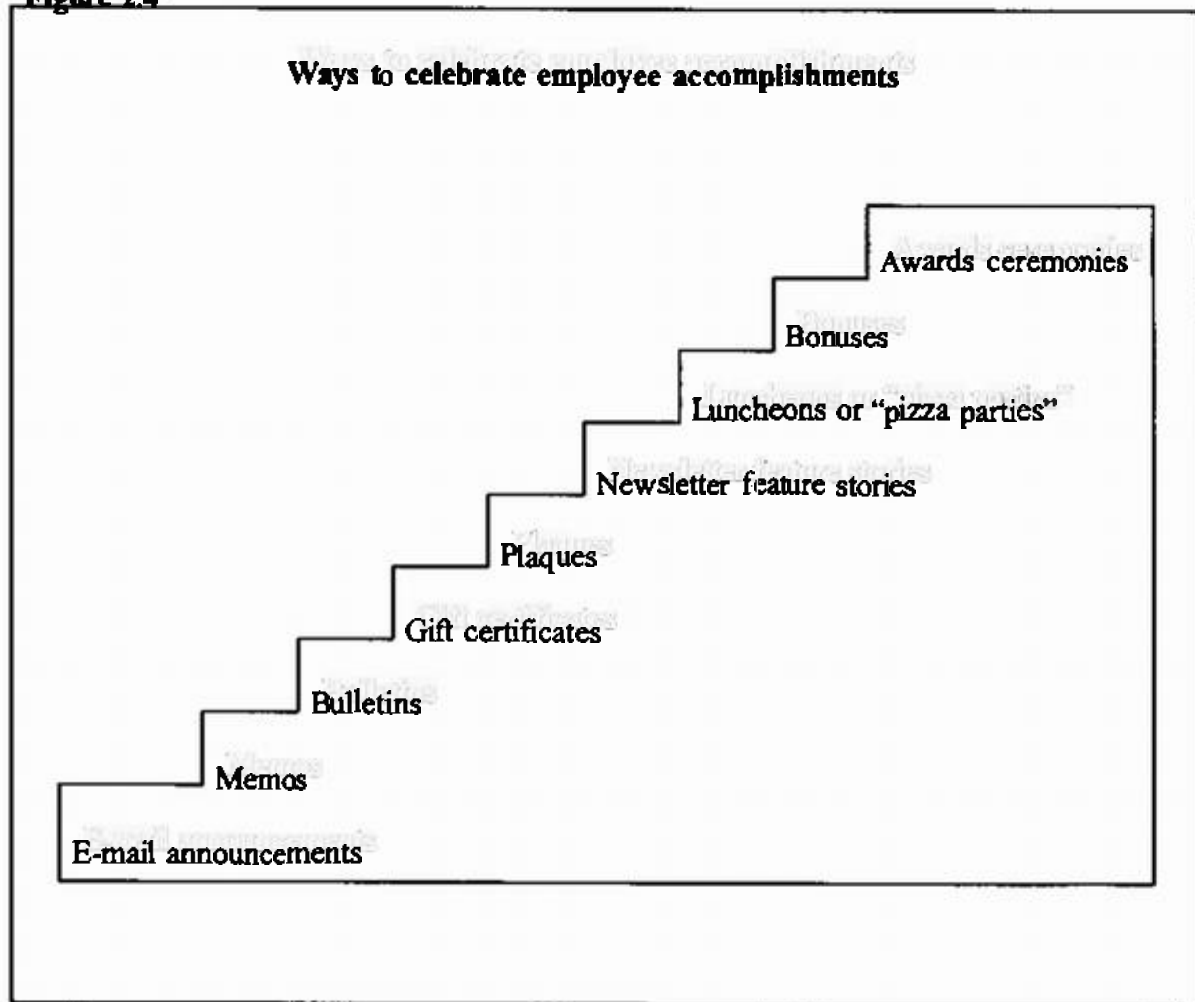
Formal Recognition of Employee Accomplishments

Awards ceremonies, bonuses, gift certificates, formal and informal announcements and newsletter features are all valuable ways of officially recognizing employee contributions and accomplishments. They serve as positive reinforcement to hardworking, industrious employees, motivate other employees to strive for improved performance, and encourage perseverance in those who may feel that the going sometimes gets too tough. They also encourage a greater sense of loyalty among staff, who are then more likely to feel that they have a vested interest in the ongoing success of the company.

Large organizations generally have company newsletters and intranet sites through which information is regularly transmitted, but small and medium sized organizations should also consider developing them as an outlet for boosting morale. Whenever a quarterly sales or growth milestone is reached, or when a major crisis is resolved to a client's satisfaction, proper recognition should be given to those involved by developing a feature story for the newsletter or intranet site. Major wins should be

properly noted by top management with an official congratulatory letter or memo that is distributed throughout the organization.

Figure 2.4



As far as possible, management should make sure that at some point, all employees are noted in some way for their contribution. This will show that consistency is valued, and that employees who do not accomplish extraordinary performance goals are still recognized as being important to the business unit's success. An occasional catered lunch or "pizza party" during regular business hours can be a simple way of

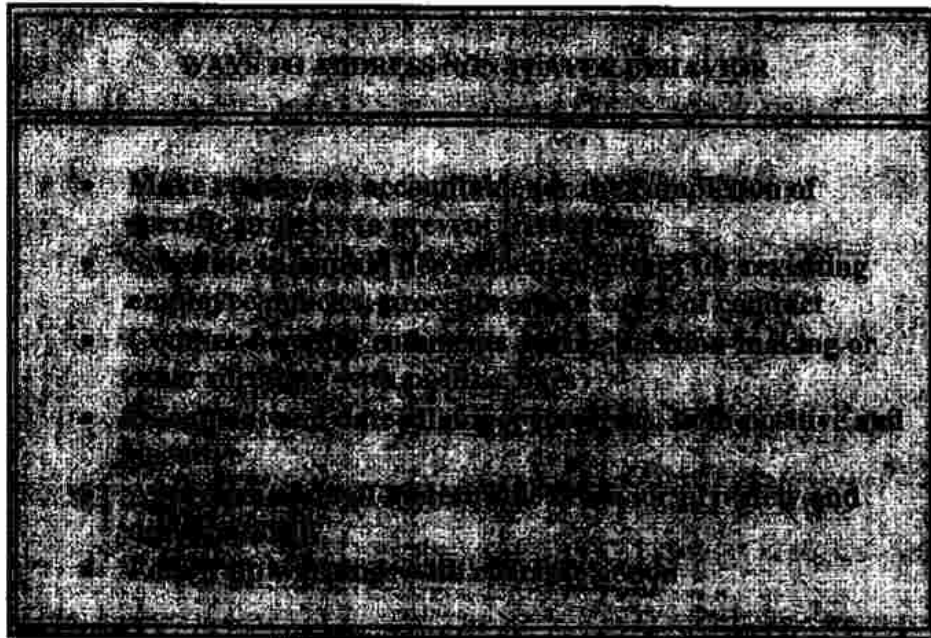
fostering a team spirit and showing appreciation of employees. Monthly surveys can be distributed to clients for the purpose of rating their satisfaction with various services, and "Department of the Month" awards can be developed to reward those departments with the highest overall ratings or positive comments from clients. Managed effectively, this can be a positive way to foster team spirit and friendly competition among staff.

Minimizing the Impact of Non-Players

Non-players who remain unchallenged by their managers can eventually have an extremely demoralizing effect on remaining, productive team members. Their impact can be especially damaging to superstars, who may begin to feel that their initiative and drive is being unfairly used by their managers to mask or compensate for the lack of productivity of non performers. Superstars' enthusiasm for their work may wane as a result, or they may even leave for another organization altogether. They may become aggravated when their ideas and contributions are consistently undermined with pessimistic comments and attitudes by co-workers, who, not surprisingly, usually fail to present workable alternative solutions, if any, along with their objections.

Steadies may quietly absorb the additional workload created by non-players' non-performance, but they may become increasingly resentful of the extra workload over time, eventually becoming less and less conscientious about filling the need that non-player conduct creates. They may tolerate the off-putting attitudes that non-players frequently display and ignore the cynical comments, but the impact may be significant over time, especially during an organizational crisis when fears are heightened and a positive attitude becomes more challenging to maintain.

Figure 2.5



For the sake of the overall wellbeing of the team, non-player behavior should be quickly identified, challenged and controlled. Employees should have some degree of confidence that undesirable behavior will not be tolerated at their expense. For that reason, noncompliant behavior, such as habitual late-coming, frequent and long-winded personal conversations over the phone, frequent absenteeism, breaks that exceed reasonably defined company guidelines, high levels of customer complaints, and poor productivity, should be quickly addressed and corrected.

Non-players should never be singled out for public humiliation in front of co-workers for disagreeable conduct. Apart from the fact that this may result in even more rebellious behavior, managers could expose themselves and the organization itself to unwanted litigation. A more subtle but effective strategy would be to conduct department meetings at reasonable intervals during which company policies and guidelines for employees are revisited, and employees given an opportunity to voice concerns or

challenges they have in meeting the requirements. A general warning about the consequences of failing to adhere to the official code of conduct should be issued to the department or organization as a whole before individuals are approached privately for special warning.

During meetings where organizational or departmental decisions must be made or announced, unhelpful, downbeat comments should be openly challenged by managers with positive ones. As mentioned in Unit 1, employees who openly disagree with a stated plan of action to a particular problem should be asked publicly and politely to provide an alternative plan of action either at that particular moment, or by a prescribed deadline. All warnings or challenges must be followed up with concrete action if they are to have any credibility in the eyes of the offender or other watching co-workers.

When an employee eventually needs to be confronted about consistent, disruptive non-verbal behavioral patterns, such as temper tantrums, looks or gestures of contempt, kicking office furniture or equipment or slamming doors, the communication style used is extremely important. The manager should use a positive confronting statement, describe the behavior in a non-threatening way, and summarize the possible reasons for the behavior (Chambers, 1998, p. 138-139). For example, the person can be approached in the following manner:

“Susan, help me to understand what it means when I ask you to fax a client the latest authorization report, and I observe you roll your eyes, walk away without a direct verbal response, and slam the door behind you. I feel that you were upset by my request, but I’m not certain.”

This approach is intended to give the person a chance to explain their position, without feeling that they are being directly attacked. Many non-players will actually deny that there was a problem in carrying out the request, and even apologize for having had a bad day. If there is a legitimate reason for frustration, the reason should be supportively addressed, but it should always be communicated to the employee that any existing problems need to be addressed to avoid more flare-ups. This strategy should be tolerantly used each time the behavior is displayed, will raise the employee's awareness her conduct, and perhaps even an aversion to being repeatedly asked nicely about the reasons behind it (Chambers, 1998, p.140-141).

Incidents of progressively more severe unethical or undesirable behavior should be recorded, described in detail, and dated so that a reliable case can be developed for discipline or even dismissal in the most severe cases. However, documentation should be done daily and begin long before a full-blown problem has developed, and major incidents involving all employees, not just difficult ones, should be recorded to prevent accusations of finger-pointing in case of future legal battles (Chambers, 1998). Positive events should be documented as well, as this will help to keep everything as objective as possible, and reassure third parties who may become involved that the concerns expressed are not merely subjective.

While completely eradicating non-player behavior from the workplace may not be possible for most organizations, taking these steps will help to contain its impact on the rest of the team, and to discourage new, more impressionable recruits or other employees from eventually adopting similar attitudes and behaviors.

In Summary ...

If employees do not feel supported or valued by their organization, they are far more likely to develop an emotional detachment to their workplace and eventually resent having to be there at all. Forty or fifty hours is quite a long time to spend in a place where one does not feel valued or encouraged to put forward the best possible effort. By ensuring that their employees' concerns are heard and addressed, that problems are proactively addressed rather than swept under the carpet, that their professional needs are effectively met and that their accomplishments are properly recognized, an organization will have taken very important steps to help manage the potential for debilitating stress and stalled productivity.

UNIT 3:

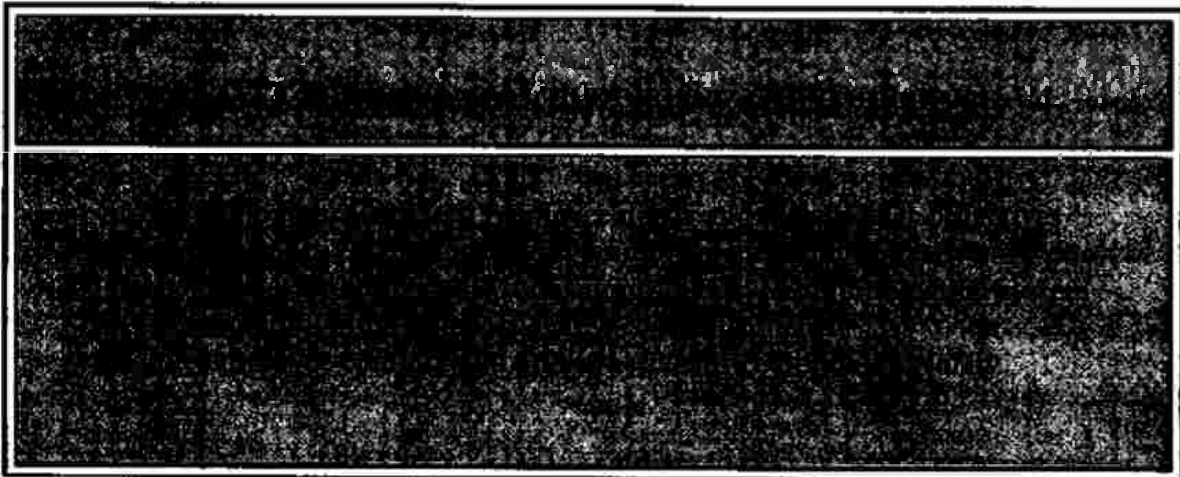
DEVELOPING A POSITIVE ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

The nature of an organization's culture is a key contributing factor to both the level of job satisfaction that its employees experience and the degree to which they are affected by workplace stress. Most working adults spend a significant amount of time at their place of employment. By choosing to proactively create a culture where employees feel supported and valued, an organization can reap significant rewards and provide a much needed buffer for its workforce against the stressors that are so prevalent in modern-day society. It will build a reputation for itself that will likely place it at a competitive advantage, increasing its credibility and image in the eyes of its clients and stakeholders, and attracting highly desirable recruits as business expands and new career opportunities become available.

A positive organizational culture will offset some of the stressors that may be an inherent part of its particular industry or service area, make the most of the abilities of the employees, and minimize stress-related costs like absenteeism and disability claims. Recruits will likely look forward to coming in to work, will feel a sense of loyalty to their employer, and will feel motivated to work hard to accomplish organizational objectives. Crises are likely to be handled much more efficiently and successfully when there is a sense of unity, a shared vision and desire for the continued success of the organization.

Several specific steps can be taken to accomplish this worthwhile ideal. Each step will form essential building blocks to the creation of a stable, accommodating atmosphere where employees can feel a sense of belonging and purpose, neutralizing the potential for excessive stress.

Figure 3.1



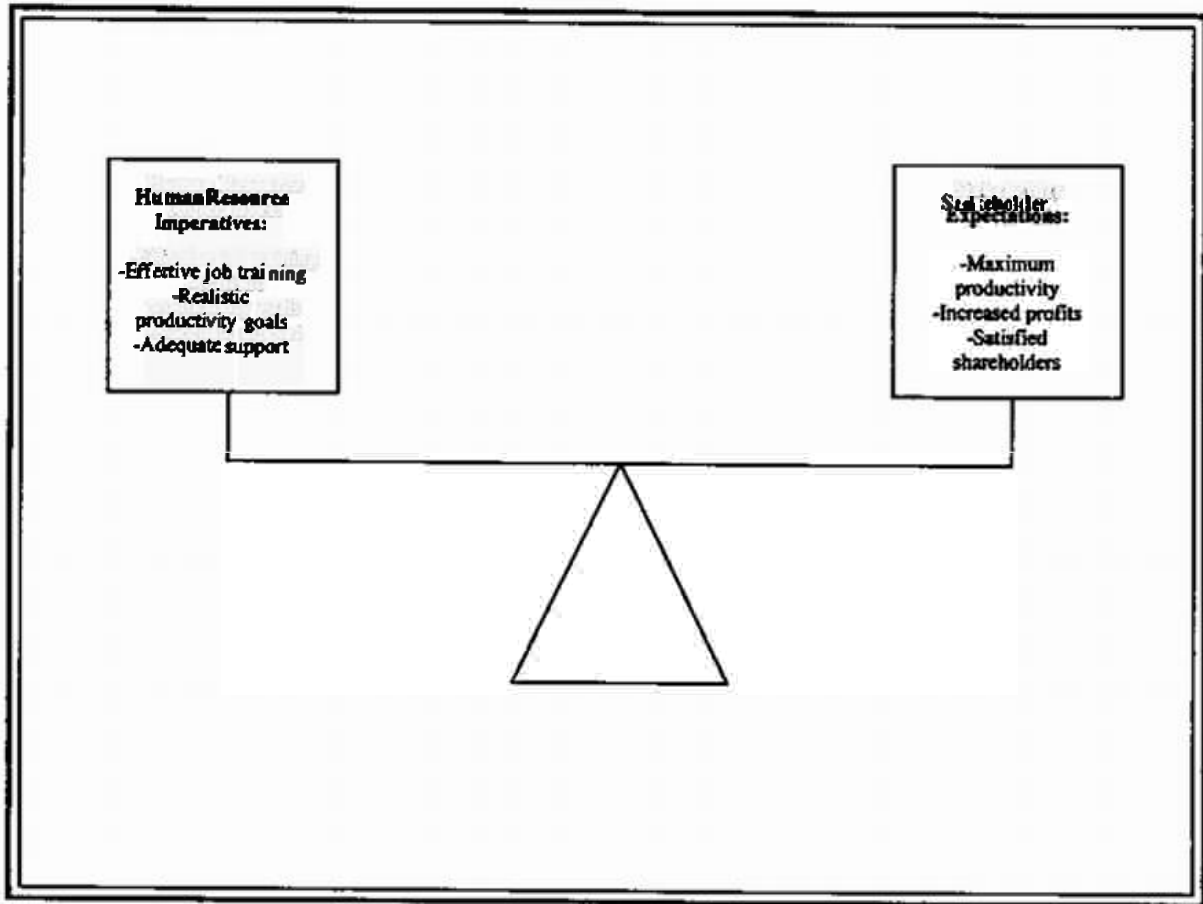
Maintaining Balance Between Employee Needs and Stakeholder Objectives

A prudent organization should recognize that while stakeholders' objectives are important, the methods used to accomplish them are just as important to their overall success. Management should be mindful of the potential consequences of placing more value on the satisfaction of their clients and investors than on their most valuable resource, the employees themselves. A key error made by many organizations is to be so zealous for success in achieving client satisfaction that employees' needs are all but forgotten. Instead, they are "driven to the ground" as productivity requirements and performance expectations are continually increased, while little or no incentives, rewards

or additional support is provided. Call centers and sales-driven organizations are often guilty of this practice.

Figure 3.2

Need for equilibrium between employee needs and organizational objectives



Creating a high-pressure, high-performance atmosphere in the hopes of bolstering productivity will do more to harm the company's overall performance and image than to improve the bottom line. In customer service arenas in particular, troubling compromises in performance standards may eventually occur. Individual employees may remain committed to providing excellent service in spite of perceived bullying from higher-ups,

but others may develop a great degree of frustration and resentment. This can translate into passive-aggressive retaliation that can take various forms, from a decline in the quality of customer service that they provide, to an unwillingness to show flexibility to the needs of co-workers in crisis situations.

For a proper balance to be maintained, there needs to be a realistic internal understanding of the company's reason for being. Management should ensure that employees have a thorough appreciation of how all aspects of their organization operate, what stakeholder objectives actually are, and the implications of failing to meet them. This will give them a sense of the importance of the role that they play in the organization and how valuable their involvement is. On the other hand, employees should be given liberal opportunities to express their ongoing concerns and the challenges that they typically face in carrying out their responsibilities. This will significantly decrease the frequency of poorly conceived managerial decisions that are concerned with client satisfaction and profitability at the expense of employee job satisfaction.

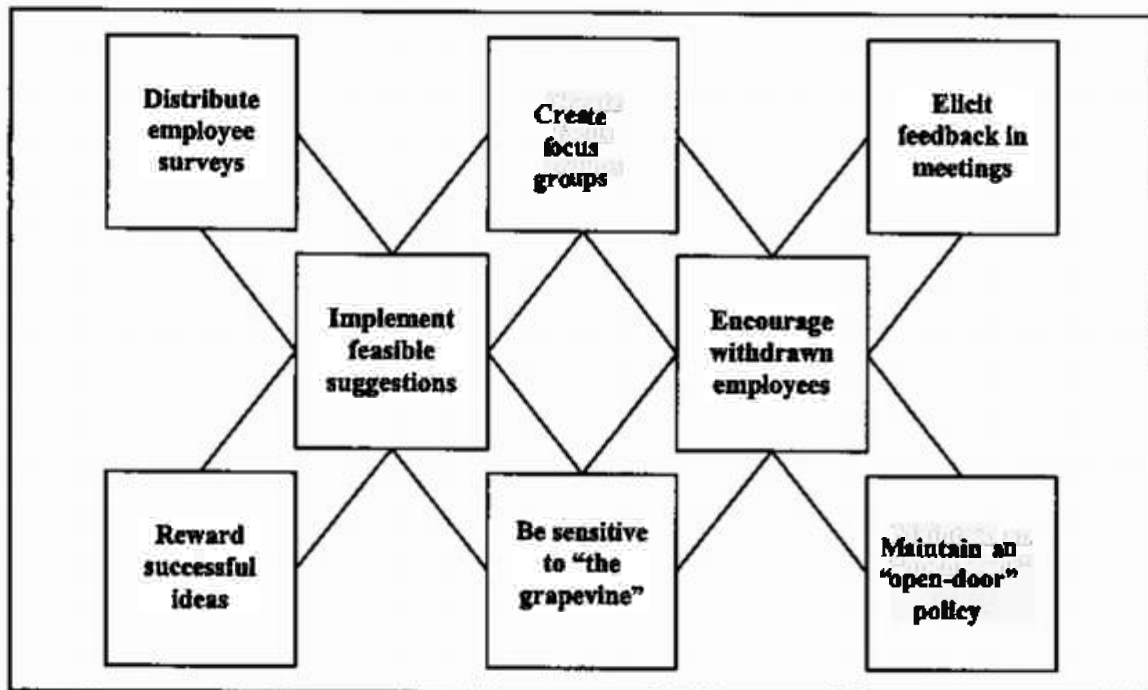
Participative Decision-Making and Problem Resolution

An autocratic working environment can be a major stress-producing stimulus for many employees. When decisions are made which negatively affect one or more aspects of an employee's routine or organizational role, the impact of the decision is much more serious if the affected individual has no control or influence in the decision-making process. Employees who feel that their input is valued are much more likely to feel that they have some degree of control over their working environment and their professional lives. Participative decision-making serves to decrease the odds that they experience

stress after unforeseen or unwanted changes are announced and implemented. Additionally, it decreases the chances that they will become resentful and passively rebellious when the decision results in adverse consequences. Instead, they will be much more likely to pull together to try to develop possible solutions, and will be much more patient and hopeful for a positive outcome.

Figure 3.3

Ways to promote participative decision-making



The use of surveys, focus groups and department meetings for gaining feedback should be a common practice, and will contribute to the development of an “open-door” culture within the organization. Close attention should also be paid to informal observations or comments coming from the “grapevine”. These may point to underlying problems with existing systems or co-ordination patterns that may not be formally

expressed in meetings or on surveys, and should be incorporated when determining a course of action for various organizational dilemmas. Information gathered from these activities should never be treated in "token" fashion or as an afterthought. Ideas should be incorporated whenever possible, as quickly as possible, as a demonstration to employees that their contributions are in fact valued and that management values their insight.

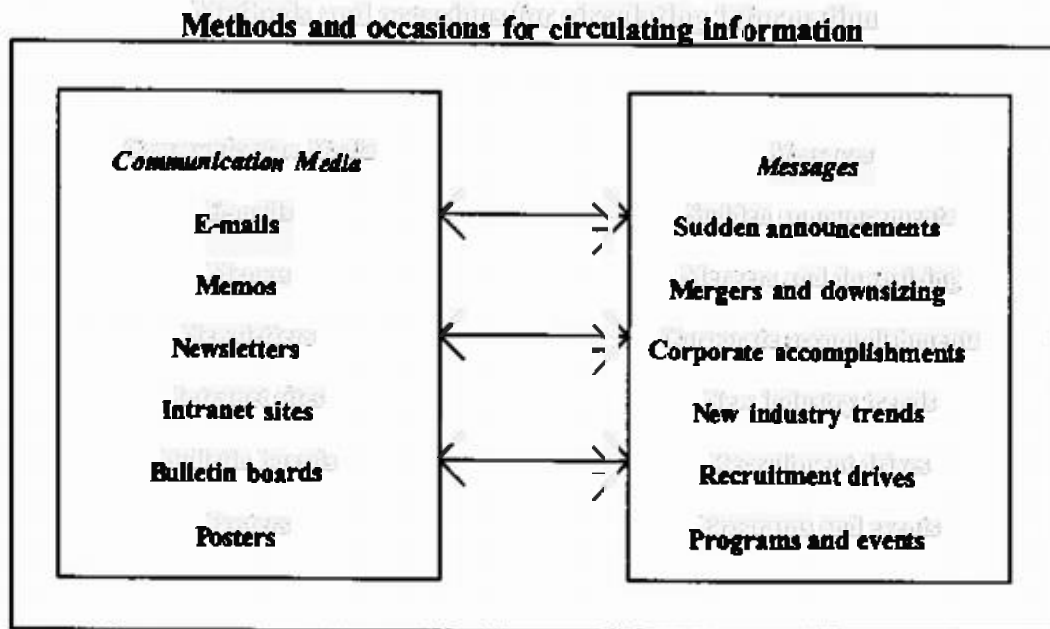
Employees that are less vocal in sharing their perspective should be gently encouraged, at a minimum, to give feedback on the ideas that have already been presented, and to share their views on how they might be impacted if they are actually implemented. Employees whose ideas are put into operation should receive positive recognition in the form of bonuses, awards, or newsletter write-ups to encourage more employees to put forward ideas of their own.

Maintaining a Comprehensive Organizational Communication System

An organization that keeps its employees well informed will help to create a more positive organizational culture, and provide a definite stress-management benefit to its employees. Every organization should ensure that there is a formal, regularly updated medium through which information is made readily available to employees, especially when there are major changes and there is the potential for false reports and speculation to develop. Unnecessary stress arises when major rumors about such events as takeovers, mergers, acquisitions, layoffs, new management, or other major organizational changes surface and flourish, without any formal statements being issued to employees by key management persons.

Newsletters, intranet sites, e-mail, memos, bulletin boards and posters can all be strategically used to pre-empt the damage that rumors can cause, and to reassure employees that they work for an organization that places a high value on keeping them accurately and truthfully informed. Employees should always be kept aware of both internal and external organizational developments. New recruitment drives, new job openings, newly made management decisions and implementation plans, major individual and corporate accomplishments, and other types of events, are all important circumstances about which employees should be kept informed. They should also be kept abreast of industry trends and competitive analyses in order to promote an overall awareness of organizational challenges and to help them to understand how and why various decisions are made.

Figure 3.4



E-mails and memos should be used for sudden developments which require an authentic, formally recognized voice of authority to give the announcement credibility and to reassure all employees that the situation is under control. Newsletters and intranet sites are more conducive to in-depth exposure, analysis and discussion of organizational developments and industry trends. Bulletin boards and posters are most effective for announcing or advertising calendar events and general information, such as upcoming seminars and programs, or extra-curricular activities being planned for employees. All employees should feel reassured that the information provided through all chosen organizational channels is timely and reliable.

Celebrating Individual and Corporate Accomplishments

The celebration of individual and corporate accomplishments within an organization is a surefire way to guard against fading morale, counteract the effects of stress, and to help maintain a positive organizational culture. While efforts to work diligently should receive positive reinforcement regularly, all tangible results over time from those efforts should also be formally recognized. A large organization may have a significant amount of money to dedicate to a wide range of activities, events and awards, but celebrating wins does not have to be expensive and elaborate to be effective. A celebration in a corporate setting should simply be viewed as an opportunity to relive an accomplishment (Daniels, 1994), a time to share what people did to meet and exceed organizational goals.

E-mails, memos, newsletter features, awards ceremonies and office brunches or luncheons can all be used appropriately to formally recognize individuals

or groups who have reached commendable milestones or achieved notable goals. None of the methods of employee recognition should be overused, or they will no longer be seen as meaningful. Care should also be taken to ensure that there is no favoritism or inequities in the manner in which achievements are recognized overall, or that one individual's, group's or department's contribution is more highly valued than another's. For example, if an individual has been formally recognized for successfully resolving a client crisis with an award at an office-hours function that all staff are required to attend, other individuals who reach similar milestones should be acknowledged in the same way. An e-mail announcement alone would be inappropriate.

The mode of acknowledgment used should also reflect the nature of the accomplishment and the degree of its impact on the organization as a whole. For example, when an individual in a sales firm manages to land a major new client, a memo or company-wide e-mail from a senior manager is appropriate. When a major crisis is handled effectively and with minimized losses, this type of victory may be recognized not only with a formal memo or e-mail from a senior manager, but can also be a featured story in the company newsletter. Colleagues will be encouraged to be more industrious in their own professional activities, and can learn from their example.

"Pizza parties", brunches or luncheons during office hours are also spontaneous, economical and effective ways to celebrate departmental or organizational developments. They can help to boost morale and relieve stress as employees have the opportunity to temporarily "switch gears". Formal after-hours dinners or ceremonies can be used to celebrate significant accomplishments that go well beyond management's usual expectations, and which have a significant, positive, lasting impact on the firm. The

positive impact of formal gatherings to celebrate wins is much more lasting when recipients of awards or honors are allowed to actively participate, instead of merely being passive recipients (Daniels, 1994). Individuals or groups should be allowed to share stories about the challenges and obstacles they may have faced along the way and how they developed solutions to overcome them.

Finally, care should be taken by presenters or management when making announcements or presenting awards not to make blanket statements such as “everyone pitched in”, or “teamwork paid off”, when this may not necessarily have been the case. Alternatively, care should be taken not to alienate other team or staff members by singling out one person for special recognition if the accomplishment may actually have required a significant level of help and know-how by additional parties. If an inaccurate picture is painted, the desired result of the ceremony or award, increased morale, may be ruined.

Figure 3.5

Blunders in celebrating wins

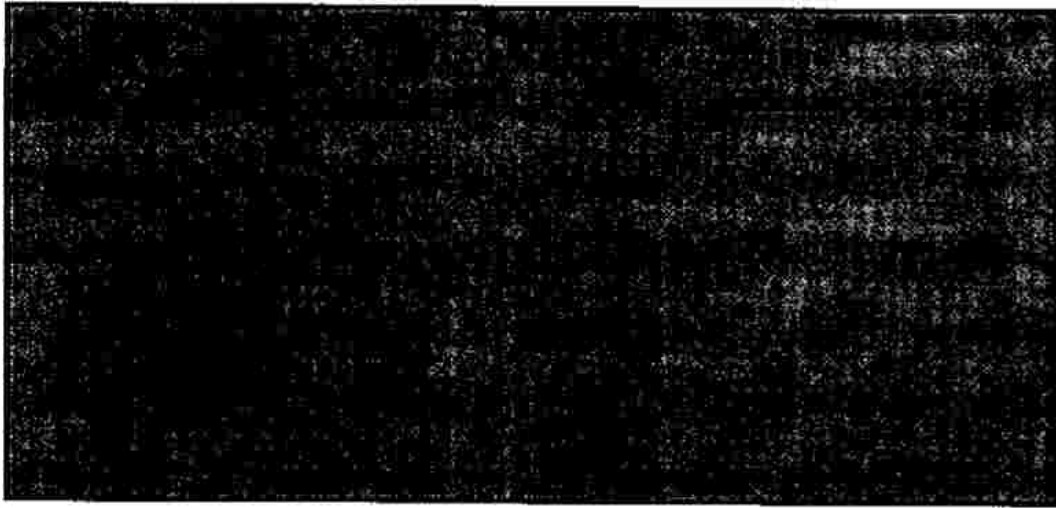
| | |
|--|--|
| | |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allowing too much time to pass • Undervaluing or overvaluing milestones • Favoritism • Overuse of positive reinforcement • Unfairly crediting one person • Unfairly crediting a group |

Attention to Ergonomics and Office Design

Apart from supporting employees with workflow challenges and encouraging them to develop professionally through training and advancement and strong professional relationships, stress levels on the job can also be minimized if employees feel comfortable in their working environment. Employees will feel valued and supported if their organization takes the time to make sure that their desks, chairs and computer stations are ergonomically sound, and if the office environment is by and large a pleasant one to work in.

Tendonitis, carpal tunnel syndrome, severe back pain, poor vision, migraines and other maladies have been increasing at significant rates among employees at white-collar jobs. These ailments can all have a serious negative effect on productivity when they go uncorrected and become progressively worse, and in some cases may result in higher rates of absenteeism. Many of them develop as a result of sitting for long hours in poorly designed chairs, using computers and keyboards that have not been positioned properly, and spending prolonged periods of time staring at computer screens. The extra investment in ergonomically designed keyboards, protective screens for computer monitors, properly designed chairs, and even providing footrests that help to prevent back pain are well worth the cost. They can save on high medical fees and employees will appreciate the effort to make them feel comfortable.

Figure 3.6



Computer hardware and office machines, such as fax and photocopying machines, should be well maintained. When malfunctions occur, they should be quickly corrected so that employees can continue their duties efficiently. Unnecessary delays can give rise to frustration and a feeling that those in charge do not view their work as being important.

Finally, apart from meeting the minimum building code requirements, office spaces should always be well lit and pleasantly decorated. Employees must spend a significant amount of time there, so it should be an attractive environment to work in. Office spaces with an abundance of large windows and natural light are favorable. Pictures, plants and modern office accessories are affordable ways to make the environment attractive. Sufficient storage should be provided for documents and files to prevent clutter and disorder. Whenever possible, desks should not be packed too tightly together, as this inhibits privacy and contributes to a feeling of claustrophobia, and, of course, stress.

In Summary...

Every organization develops a culture of its own, whether it is strategically shaped or not. Since employee stress levels are so strongly related to the atmosphere of the place where they work, developing a positive organizational culture is an important step in making them feel as comfortable as possible. They should be treated as stakeholders that are just as valuable as the clients they serve. Involving them in decision-making, keeping them well informed and properly recognizing various kinds of accomplishments are all essential factors in shaping a culture that develops a greater sense of loyalty in employees. Ergonomics and office design can also go a long way towards making employees feel right at home in the office, but it is important to note that cosmetic improvements to the workplace setting alone will never compensate for fundamental flaws in the existing culture.

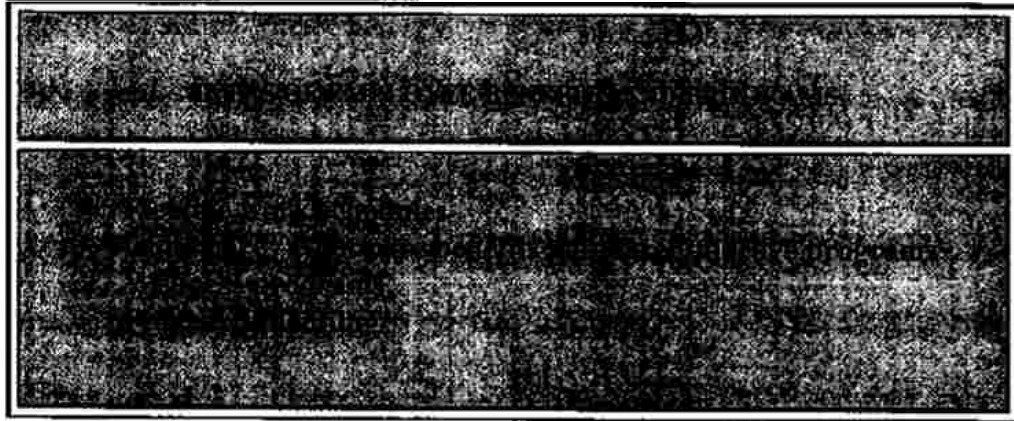
UNIT 4:
PROGRESSIVE BENEFITS AND PROGRAMS

Apart from the pressures that may arise exclusively from work-related circumstances, a very large percentage of employees acknowledge that much of their stress comes from their inability to balance their personal and professional lives. There are a number of benefits and programs that employers can make available to their staff to help them cope with competing responsibilities and modern-day stressors. The costs of implementing the programs may seem enormous, but, as can be seen from the outlay associated with workplace stress in corporate America, the competitive advantage may well go to those organizations that choose to make this type of investment a priority.

Many employees will strongly agree that simply throwing more money at them is not sufficient to resolve many of the pressing challenges that they face in managing their stress levels. Apart from the typical dental, medical and disability insurance programs that most employers provide to varying degrees, there is an extensive range of programs which an organization can provide as a means bringing significant relief from stress. For the sake of brevity, a few key areas will be outlined. Flexible work schedules, child care and elder care benefits and parental leave programs, wellness programs and financial planning advice are just a few of the ways in which workplace stress can be aggressively tackled. Depending on its size and available resources, an organization may not be able to provide employees with all the described options. But making at least some of them

available can help to make them feel more supported, ease overall strain, and offset the costs associated with absenteeism, high turnover rates, and stagnant organizational productivity and progress.

Figure 4.1



Flexible Work Schedules

By its very nature, full-time work requires that a significant portion of one's life must be spent at the office building, often from 45 hours to as many as 60 or even 90 hours per week. Because a rigid work schedule considerably restricts an employee's ability to take care of pressing personal concerns, allowing employees to have a greater degree flexibility is one of the most valuable ways to help them manage stress. All types of employees, whether single, married or with or without children, can find great psychological relief in knowing that they have some degree of control over the times and hours that they are obligated to spend at work.

Parents of young children in particular are always thankful and appreciative when there is "wiggle room" in their work schedules to allow for frequent and unexpected "episodes" that their babies and toddlers often have. A work schedule that allows for

timely babysitter pick-ups after work can also be a tremendous help in managing stress. Those without children also benefit psychologically from knowing that they can ask for time-off, within reasonable limits, to take care of personal obligations that can only be addressed during regular office hours. This will reduce the chances that the employee will simply call in sick instead and incur the cost of an entire business day's work to the company.

Depending on the nature of the job, employees may even be allowed to work from home for a set maximum number of hours per month. This will help parents who may have challenges with unexpected day-care challenges or school closings, but who can still work on projects and otherwise be productive. This kind of arrangement will also facilitate employees who may desire to attend college or certification classes during regular business hours, or who have other commitments that require their attention.

Employees who may need to scale back significantly on the hours that they are available should be allowed the option of part-time work or job sharing whenever possible. An employee may wish to pursue an academic program full-time while retaining their position part-time instead of full-time. Others may have physical or psychological health problems that require an increased degree of rest, but force themselves to come to work because they cannot afford to resign. Productivity in an employee who is not well will undoubtedly be compromised, and can even affect the morale of co-workers who have to manage the shortfall. Job sharing can enable employees with varying needs to split responsibilities in a way that still keeps their organization satisfied with productivity levels.

Allowing employees to work part-time may seem expensive, but will contribute to a greater sense of loyalty if their organization is sensitive to their needs. If the additional workload is too much for remaining co-workers to manage, perhaps a temporary part-time employee can be hired. Moreover, the cost of retaining these employees, or of hiring new recruits altogether they are released, may actually exceed the cost of retaining them and working around their temporary situation. At a minimum, fellow employees will recognize that should they require the same accommodation, it would be readily available.

Child Care / Elder Care Benefits and Parental Leave Programs

Many employees would benefit tremendously from greater assistance in managing the care of their children. Day care costs can easily reach and even exceed \$500 per month per child and create a great financial burden for parents, especially so for single parents. The care of school-age children who frequently develop colds or other illnesses can also prove to be a challenge. Many parents cannot afford to pay someone to look after sick children, and often choose to stay at home with them, resulting in lost productivity on the job.

In order to provide some relief, some larger organizations have gone as far as offering on-site or near-site day care centers for employees through relationships between management companies, non-profit and for-profit providers, and funded by parent fees and company grants (Morgan and Tucker, 1991). Other organizations provide referral services to approved day-centers with specially reserved spaces for employees whose regular day-care arrangements may have temporarily collapsed. For companies that may

not be able to provide this degree of support, small grants could be provided which could help employees to meet some of their overall expenses and relieve some of the pressure.

Many pregnant workers face a very difficult dilemma because of the limited maternity leave times that most companies offer. Most mothers would prefer to spend six months to a year at home with their babies, but are often forced to return after as little as six weeks. Many feel compelled to return in spite of concerns about proper bonding and care of their babies, for the sake of keeping their jobs. More flexible policies should be developed that demonstrate concern about the overall happiness of staff and their families. By having the option of longer maternity leaves, mothers can return to work with a greater degree of confidence that they have bonded properly with their infants, and that they are in good hands with a caregiver. This will of course result in a greater ability to concentrate and be productive at work.

Figure 4.2

| | |
|---|--|
| <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Suggested Pregnancy and Child Care Programs</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Paid disability leave for childbirth➤ Paid child care leave for at least two months➤ Unpaid leave for up to one year➤ Part-time or "work-from-home" options after childbirth➤ Child care referral services to nearby, approved day care centers | |
|---|--|

Flexible work schedules and the option of part-time hours, or even of working on projects from home, will also help to ease the transition from maternity leave to the working world, and alleviate the financial burden that may have arisen from extended, perhaps unpaid leave. Mothers who do have the option of returning for part-time work or returning full-time after an extended leave should have the opportunity to be kept updated, if they wish, on company developments and projects while they are on leave. This will help them to feel more at ease and more mindful of what needs to be done once they return.

As average life expectancy grows, more employees are also facing the serious dilemma of finding affordable care for aging parents. Similar benefits to the ones provided for child care could be provided to help employees offset elder care costs, as well as providing options for flexible or reduced hours during particularly difficult times when a parent may need additional attention or even hospitalization. Some organizations offer referral services to elder care facilities and provide up to 10 days of unpaid leave annually to care for sick family members. These types of plans can offer some degree of relief for those undergoing the stress of managing aging parents while working full-time.

Wellness Programs

Only 15 percent of employee terminations are the result of an inability to perform their tasks appropriately. On the other hand, personal and interpersonal factors account for 65 to 80 percent of all terminations (Employee Assistance Network, 2004). These factors can lead to significant levels of distress over time if left unidentified and unchecked by employees and employers alike. When employees demonstrate severe

signs of stress, illness or dysfunction, such as depression, personality changes, excessive absenteeism, and even signs of alcohol or drug abuse, the symptoms should never be simply ignored, or the employee simply fired over time for aberrant behavior. An employee assistance programs (EAP) can be set up so that employees can receive concrete help when personal crises develop. In the absence of a formal EAP, managers should approach the affected employee and ensure that he or she knows that the organization wants to provide support and help as far as is possible. A referral system should be in place, at a minimum, to which the employee can turn to find the medical or psychological counseling they may need.

When necessary, personal leave time should be granted to give the employee ample time to cope with changes they may be undergoing and to help them to recover if possible. Simply dismissing an employee in major crisis reflects poorly in the eyes of remaining staff. In some cases, this tactic can even foster a large degree of resentment in the terminated employee, sparking deviant retaliatory behavior, and placing everyone at risk. By treating all employees' concerns with compassion, morale is boosted and a greater sense of loyalty and job security is created.

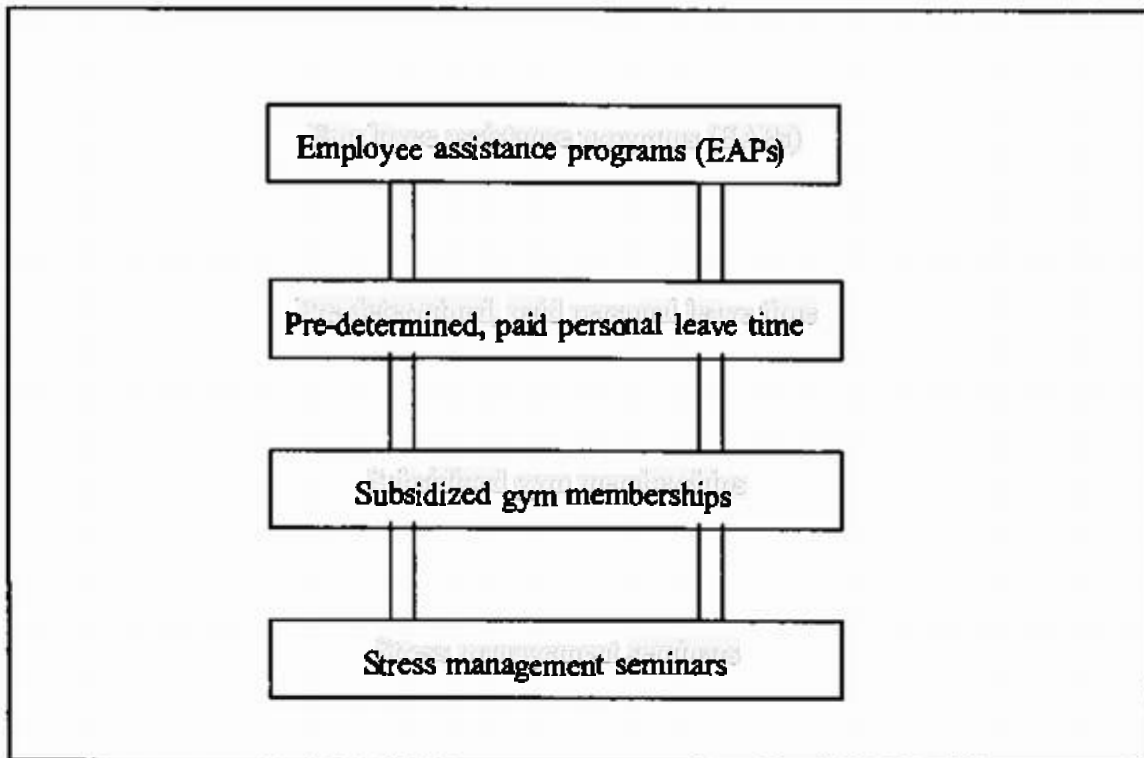
Exercise has long been touted as a key means to stress control, better health and lower overall health care costs. Gym memberships are therefore a sensible and beneficial type of support program which an organization can affordably provide for its employees. For those companies that do not find it feasible to set up their own work-out areas, arrangements could be made with nearby gyms to provide discounted rates. Alternatively, benefits that include an annual subsidy of \$100 could be provided to motivate employees to begin exercising more. Employees should be allowed flexible

schedules that would allow them sufficient time to work out during working hours, if they so desire.

In-house stress management seminars that teach employees about prioritizing tasks, proper time management, healthy eating and exercise habits, breathing and relaxation techniques, and managing interpersonal relationships can also help them to develop more effective coping strategies.

Figure 4.3

Suggested wellness programs and benefits



Financial Planning

Financial worries play a major role in workplace stress dynamics. Many employees have found themselves in a grueling battle for financial security that is becoming more and more tricky. Mortgage or rent payments, utility bills, groceries, car notes, credit card debt, student loan payments, babysitter payments, and a host of other expenses make saving for retirement or even simply for a rainy day seem like an impossible goal for many two-income families, and even more so for single parents.

However, many are also unaware of basic financial management guidelines that can help them to manage financial pressures more successfully. Employers can provide workshops that cover basic money management techniques such as balancing checkbooks, setting budgets, cutting out unnecessary expenses, paying off credit card debt more quickly, negotiating for better interest rates on mortgage payments, short-term savings plans, and investing in retirement savings plans. Even if the programs result in only one problem being tackled at a time, employees can still feel like they are receiving a small lifeline to help them climb out of what may seem like an impossibly deep hole.

Many employers offer profit-sharing and retirement plans which not all of their staff take advantage of, because they do not fully understand the benefits that they provide. In addition, people facing financial difficulties often feel that they cannot spare much money for contributions. Employers should take a more proactive role in educating their human resources about the benefits of investing in company plans, the importance of saving for retirement, and about the most sensible strategies for improving their economic standing over the long term.

In Summary...

Employees' personal lives cannot be completely separated from professional obligations, and organizations can no longer afford to ignore the increasingly difficult challenges that employees face in everyday life. Pregnancy and childbirth, child care needs, short- and long-term illnesses, depression, aging parents, and a host of other problems must be factored into the usual costs of running a business, and not treated as inconveniences to be avoided. By investing in wellness programs that address some of the practical, emotional and psychological needs of their employees, organizations will not only increase overall employee satisfaction, improve productivity and reduce costs, but may well prevent some far more tragic consequences of prolonged stress from occurring in the lives of their staff members over the long run.

CONCLUSION

The strategies presented in this guidebook can go a long way in helping organizations to develop a more compassionate corporate culture where their employees feel supported and encouraged to give their best while on the job. In many businesses, it may require a serious shift in the way management views organizational structures and decision-making, the delegation of authority, approaches to employee autonomy, attitudes about cost management and the appropriate balance between employee and stakeholder interests. Changing traditional mind-sets may be a daunting task, but cannot be avoided in business that want to be progressive, competitive and prepared to meet the ever-changing challenges.

Clearly, there are often stressors inherent to various industries and jobs that could prove nearly impossible to overcome. Still, even a moderate effort on the part of individual organizations to help ease the impact of these challenges would no doubt be appreciated by employees. Similarly, seemingly impossible difficulties and crises can develop in the personal lives of employees that can sorely test their ability to function productively at work. However, these difficulties should not be treated as inconveniences or as a threat to profitability when they do occur, but rather, viewed as part of the overall process of managing human resources.

Ultimately, the most successful organization is the one which views its employees as its most valuable asset, and treats their needs with the respect and concern that they deserve.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Stress in the American workplace is an issue which unquestionably deserves the growing attention it is now receiving. The world of work has traditionally been simply an important means through which we are able to provide food, shelter and clothing for ourselves and our families. However, it has come to represent a much more important part of our identities. It is also usually a place where we spend a considerable amount of time, and invest a substantial amount of effort. Therefore, the impact of our workplace conditions and policies on our overall emotional wellbeing cannot be denied.

Our perceptions about ourselves and the value we feel we bring to our jobs, as well as our opinion of how our employers view and treat us, play important roles in job satisfaction and in balancing job stress. We all have complex physical, emotional and psychological needs that employers can no longer afford to treat as “off-limits” from an entrepreneurial perspective. Rising family pressures, escalating personal debt levels, advancing technological and educational requirements, and fast-paced, competitive market conditions all work together to create an environment that stretches employees to new limits. It is clear that unless specific steps are taken to address employee needs more comprehensively, related health care, recruitment and productivity costs will continue to rise steadily.

The progressive training of managers, thorough training and development of employees, well-organized managerial communication, a positive organizational culture, and flexible, employee-focused managerial policies were the chief areas of importance to

survey respondents in regards to managing stress. Modern day employees want to be properly informed of organizational developments and to be included in decision-making. They want to know that their managers understand their personal and professional desires. They want to know that their employers are prepared to help them to be successful at what they do without sacrificing the needs of their families. Women need to feel reassured that they will not be penalized for having children. Those with special needs would like to feel that they will not be considered a liability to the company.

By training managers to be sensitive to the complexities of managing a diverse group of people with varying skills, abilities and needs, employees will be motivated and empowered to work harder. By including employees in decision-making and being attentive to their personal needs, they will be much more likely to feel loyal to their company and to feel a sense of responsibility for its overall success. By taking as many steps as possible to ensure that the organizational culture is encouraging and stable, employers will attract and retain top quality employees and improve their overall output and competitive position.

Without a doubt, though, employees also need to take control of their own circumstances as much as they possibly can to help manage their own stress. Although this may be extremely difficult, it may prove to be the only course of action for those whose employers remain indifferent to the growing personal/professional dilemma. For starters, employees must learn how to be much more vocal and firm with employers about their need for addressing personal issues. As more people, for example, firmly and openly express their intentions to pick up their children from school or day care on time, to care for sick children, and to take care of other family issues on occasion, more

personal leave time will become a much higher priority on a larger number of employers' list of benefits.

Employees should also, as far as possible, learn how to separate office hours from after-work hours. They must become determined not to allow worries about business deals or workplace difficulties to dominate their thoughts once they leave their workplace. Lap-top computers, pagers, beepers, cell-phones and other technology that keep many people inextricably tied to the office should be under the employee's control as opposed to being tools to control the employee. Those who are able to train themselves to "switch gears" after leaving the office will be more successful in managing their stress levels.

It is also helpful for employees to have a personal identity or a time schedule that does not completely revolve around work. One important way to accomplish this would be to try to incorporate a hobby such as an exercise class, golf, cooking, reading, plays or music lessons into one's weekly schedule. One can then turn his or her attention to this hobby as a diversion and a stress-reliever that helps to take the focus off of work. Although this will be especially difficult for parents of young children, there will be immeasurable value in scheduling time for indulging themselves in something enjoyable without pressing work or family needs to attend to.

All in all, though, employers themselves are in the strongest position to battle workplace stress on the front lines. Emotional and physical health is critical for their staff to be able to give their best, and should never be taken for granted. Companies that insist on remaining overly focused on productivity and not on the needs of its "producers" will only defraud themselves of their own success over time.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

Survey

SECTION A – Mandatory Questions

Based on the scale below, please circle the answer that most closely represents your opinion.

| | SA Strongly Agree | A Agree | N Neutral | D Disagree | SD Strongly Disagree |
|---|-------------------|---------|-----------|------------|----------------------|
| 1. In general, I feel overwhelmed at my job because of the number of responsibilities that have been assigned to me. | SA | A | N | D | SD |
| 2. I feel that my stress levels at work often affect my health and personal/family life. | SA | A | N | D | SD |
| 3. In general, an organization's management style and organizational culture contribute to the stress levels of its employees. | SA | A | N | D | SD |
| 4. Inadequate communication channels between departments and among staff can be a leading cause of stress at my job. | SA | A | N | D | SD |
| 5. An unclear job description and inadequate training can affect an employee's productivity and stress levels. | SA | A | N | D | SD |
| 6. The layout and design of your office / workspace could have an impact on your concentration and productivity. | SA | A | N | D | SD |
| 7. Overall, the accelerated development and use of technology has made employees' jobs easier and more productive. | SA | A | N | D | SD |
| 8. I regularly think about quitting my present job because of the degree of stress I experience. | SA | A | N | D | SD |
| 9. My employer is generally supportive in helping me to control my stress levels. | SA | A | N | D | SD |
| 10. An organization's investment in wellness / recreation programs for its employees is likely to improve stress levels and decrease absenteeism. | SA | A | N | D | SD |

Please make any additional comments below.

APPENDIX B

Likert Rating Calculations

Question 1: Feel overwhelmed because of the number of responsibilities on the job

$$\frac{(5 \times 4) + (4 \times 20) + (3 \times 10) + (2 \times 14) + (1 \times 2)}{50} = 3.2$$

Question 2: Stress levels at work often affect health and family life:

$$\frac{(5 \times 11) + (4 \times 21) + (3 \times 6) + (2 \times 12) + (1 \times 0)}{50} = 3.6$$

Question 3: Organization's management style and culture contribute to employee stress

$$\frac{(5 \times 21) + (4 \times 21) + (3 \times 5) + (2 \times 1) + (1 \times 0)}{50} = 4.32$$

Question 4: Inadequate communication channels at work are a leading cause of stress

$$\frac{(5 \times 24) + (4 \times 25) + (3 \times 1) + (2 \times 0) + (1 \times 0)}{50} = 4.46$$

Question 5: An unclear job description and inadequate training affects productivity /stress

$$\frac{(5 \times 24) + (4 \times 25) + (3 \times 1) + (2 \times 0) + (1 \times 0)}{50} = 4.46$$

Question 6: Layout and design of office and workspace could impact concentration/ productivity

$$\frac{(5 \times 10) + (4 \times 25) + (3 \times 10) + (2 \times 5) + (1 \times 0)}{50} = 3.8$$

Question 7: Increased use of technology has made jobs easier and more productive

$$\frac{(5 \times 8) + (4 \times 30) + (3 \times 6) + (2 \times 5) + (1 \times 1)}{50} = 3.78$$

Question 8: Regularly think about quitting current job because of overwhelming stress

$$\frac{(5 \times 2) + (4 \times 7) + (3 \times 12) + (2 \times 23) + (1 \times 6)}{50} = 2.52$$

Question 9: Employer is generally supportive in helping to control stress levels

$$\frac{(5 \times 1) + (4 \times 14) + (3 \times 21) + (2 \times 9) + (1 \times 5)}{50} = 2.94$$

Question 10: Investment in wellness/ recreation programs for employees decreases stress and absenteeism

$$\frac{(5 \times 9) + (4 \times 31) + (3 \times 3) + (2 \times 5) + (1 \times 2)}{50} = 3.8$$
