Healthy Work

A healthy workplace promotes employee well being and improves organisational effectiveness. Both employers and employees have a role and responsibility for the creation of healthy workplaces. In the creation of a healthy workplace, features of the work that are negative and intrinsically difficult to cope with and which cause stress need to be tackled. These features are referred to as stressors or demands or in terms of the Health and Safety in Employment Amendment Act 2002 - hazards.

What is stress?

Few would argue with the view that stress is an integral feature of many if not all workplaces. Despite this consensus there is much disagreement as to what stress is. However, increasingly there is agreement that stress results when individuals perceive an imbalance between the pressures and demands made on them and the resources they have to cope with these demands. This perspective concurs with the definition of stress given by the Occupational Safety and Health Services (OSH) in their recent publication “Health Work. Managing stress and fatigue in the workplace”.

Stress is defined by OSH as “an interaction between the person and their (work) environment and is the awareness of not being able to cope with the demands of one’s environment, when this realisation is of concern to the person, in that both are associated with a negative emotional response” (OSH Healthy Work, 2003, p. 6).

Stress affects people in multiple and different ways and there is a range of physical, cognitive, behavioural and psychological symptoms associated with this perception of imbalance. These responses may constitute harm and at times serious harm. In terms of the Health and Safety in Employment Amendment Act 2002 both employers and employees have a responsibility to prevent harm through the systematic management of hazards (i.e. the demands).

To effectively manage stress requires a two-pronged approach that simultaneously identifies and reduces the demands or stressors where possible that prevent wellness whilst also building the capacity and coping resources of individuals to enable them to cope effectively with the demands.

A comprehensive approach to the development of healthy work aims to: -

1. Identify and manage the perceived demands or stressors

2. Increase the capacity of employees to deal with demands or stressors.
The Health and Safety in Employment Amendment Act 2002

On May 5 the Health and Safety in Employment Amendment Act 2002 came into effect. The objective of the Act is to promote the prevention of harm to all persons at work through the systematic management of hazards. One of the key changes to the Act was the repealing of the definitions of the terms harm and hazard, and substitution of the following definitions:

**harm**
(a) means illness, injury, or both; and (b) includes physical or mental harm caused by work-related stress

**“hazard**
(a) means an activity, arrangement, circumstances, event occurrence, phenomenon, process, situation, or substance (whether arising or caused within or outside a place of work) that is an actual or potential cause or source of harm; and (b) includes (i) a situation where a person’s behaviour may be an actual or potential cause or source of harm to the person or another person; and (ii) without limitation, a situation described in subparagraph (i) resulting from physical or mental fatigue, drugs, alcohol, traumatic shock, or another temporary condition that affects a person’s behaviour.

Managing Stress

Traditionally the management of stress in the workplace has been seen to be the responsibility of individual employees. This individual approach assumes that if employees are stressed, they need to learn how to cope with the stress they are experiencing. This approach tends to allocate blame for being stressed to the individual who is seen as being unable to cope with the demands of the situation. Stress is seen as an individual weakness and the onus is put squarely on the individual to learn to cope more effectively.

The current perspective is to view stress as both an organisational issue and an individual issue. This perspective requires organisations to adopt a proactive, preventative approach. The spirit of the HSE Amendment Act 2002 endorses this view of tackling work-related stress and places a positive obligation on employers and individuals to deal with work-related stress.

Employers are required to:
- Design work to be safe and prevent harm occurring to employees
- Systematically identify and manage hazards, by eliminating them, isolating them or minimising them in order of that preference
- Monitor exposure to significant hazards that cannot be eliminated or isolated, and with informed consent, the health of people in relation to the hazard.
- Provide employees with information on stress and fatigue and train employees how best to respond to stressors
- Respond to reports of stress and fatigue

Employees are required to:
- Take all practicable steps to ensure their own safety and the safety of any other person while at work
**Approaches to tackling work related stress**

There are 3 approaches to tackling work-related stress. These approaches and relevant strategies in each approach are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1: Approaches and relevant strategies to managing with stress in the workplace.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Approach</th>
<th>Strategies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Preventative**  
Identification of work-related sources of stress and the elimination, isolation or control of the source of stress, where practicable | **Stress Awareness Seminars**  
Session to provide an overview of  
- the nature of stress  
- the possible causes and consequences of stress at work  
- how to identify symptoms  
- how to take appropriate preventative, management and treatment action.  
**Stress Risk Assessments**  
A Stress Risk Assessment (SRA) engages all employees, in evaluating the risk of work-related stress through the identification of the sources of stress (i.e. the demands or hazards) and the level of stress (i.e. the harm) as well as the development of practicable preventative and management solutions to deal with work-related demands. |
| **Management**  
Development of the skills and knowledge to recognise the signs and symptoms of stress in self and others, and development of the skills required to cope more effectively with demands that cannot be eliminated or modified. | **Wellness Management Programmes e.g. The Resiliency Builder**  
A wellness programme based on sound psychological principles and designed to increase individual capacity to deal more effectively with stress. The programme aims to increase the capacity of employees to deal with the challenging demands of the workplace through the development of  
- more effective behaviours  
- healthier thinking patterns  
- enhanced emotional functioning and improved self care practices |
| **Treatment**  
Treatment of stress symptoms through the provision of professional medical and psychological support. | **Stress Counselling**  
Confidential and professional counselling services for any employees who are experiencing stress-related problems  
**EAPs**  
This session will explore the Stress Risk Assessment process in more detail, in particular a Team-Based Risk Assessment. |
Why Stress Risk Assessments?
An international review of stress prevention in the workplace highlighted 3 issues. Firstly, most of the activity in the field of stress management has focused on reducing the effects of stress rather than on reducing the presence of stressors at work. Secondly, most activities are primarily aimed at the individual rather than the organisation and thirdly, there has been a lack of systematic stress risk assessment (Kompier and Cooper, 1999).

Conducting a Stress Risk Assessment signals to employees that the employer is being proactive and serious about managing stress in the workplace. It ensures that subsequent stress-related activities aimed at management or treatment of stress are targeted at specific problems and specific individuals.

A Stress Risk Assessment provides a tailored approach to managing stress rather than a “pray and spray” approach. In the long term it is more effective in terms of costs and time.

The potential benefits of conducting a Stress Risk Assessment include:
- Improved performance and well-being of staff
- Increased organisational commitment
- Decreased staff absenteeism and turnover
- Reduced risk of stress litigation

Methods of Stress Risk Assessment

Stress Risk Assessments involve engaging employees in evaluating the risk of work related stress. There are 3 stress risk assessment (SRA) methods that have been developed by the Keil Centre in Scotland. These are:

A Team-based SRA

Assesses team levels and sources of stress, and identifies locally-relevant solutions via employee involvement.

A Future-focused SRA

Identifies key work-related stressors associated with future projects/organisational changes, so they can be designed out in advance.

A Task-based SRA

To design out work-related stressors and other human factors issues associated with hazardous tasks - particularly relevant to safety-critical industries.

These 3 methods are incorporated into a software programme called StressTools developed by the Keil Centre in conjunction with local industry and Birkbeck College, University of London. StressTools is obtainable in New Zealand through PsychAssessments Ltd.
A Team-based Stress Risk Assessment

A Team-based Risk Assessment identifies a team's level of work-related stress, the most important work-related stressors affecting the team and provides a detailed understanding of how key team stressors cause stress and what management and the team can do to prevent or manage these key stressors. The team-based stress risk assessment focuses on work-related stressors and is completed on an anonymous basis. The aggregated results are feedback to the team.

A Team-based Stress Risk Assessment involves 4 steps. These are

**Step 1. Evaluating potential harm** - assessing levels of work-related stress.

Team members are asked to indicate how stressful they find their work. Their responses can be compared to external and internal benchmarks. This provides an indication of whether the perceived levels of work-related stress in the team are higher or lower than would be expected when compared to similar occupational groups.

**Step 2. Identifying the hazards** – which work-related stressors are causing stress?

Team members rate how often in the last month each work-related stressor has been a source of stress to them. The list of work-related stressors consists of a set of 40 generic stressors and 20 locally relevant stressors.

### Step 2: What is causing you stress?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>What is causing you stress?</th>
<th>Not</th>
<th>Occ</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Always</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Not being sure who I report to</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>The accumulated effect of minor daily hassles</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Lack of co-operation within the team</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Making difficult judgements and decisions, with significant consequences</td>
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<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Monotonous or repetitive work</td>
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<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Constant change</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>High workload</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Having to work long hours</td>
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<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Management not listening to me</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Lack of clear responsibilities within the team</td>
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<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Having to concentrate constantly and intensively</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Introduction of new work methods without appropriate training</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>Being unclear about what is expected of me in my job</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>Not being able to make the most of my skills in the job</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>Not being kept informed by management</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>Having to carry out tasks that conflict with each other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>Information not getting passed between different departments</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>Unsupportive superiors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>Constant interruptions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>Having to do my job without appropriate training</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**PLEASE ENSURE THAT YOU HAVE COMPLETED EVERY QUESTION**

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**Step 3. Evaluating risks** – what are the main sources of stress for team members?

Team members are asked to identify their most significant work-related stressors. They are asked to review the list of generic and locally relevant stressors presented in Step 2, and to select up to 3 of the most significant stressors.

**Step 4. Introducing controls** – what can be done by management or team members to prevent and to manage key work-related stressors?

Team members are asked to explain why the particular stressor causes stress and what they and the organisation can do to prevent or manage the stressor. Team members’ written comments about the most significant stressors are invaluable in understanding the nature of the problem and formulating appropriate, locally relevant solutions.

**Conducting a Team-based Risk Assessment**

1. **Choice a project co-ordinator**
   A team-based stress risk assessment needs a project co-ordinator. This should be someone who is well respected by the team members.

2. **Set up a data set**
   Set the team up as a data set in StressTools

3. **Create a workbook for the team**
   A separate workbook is developed for each data set.

Creation of a workbook involves:-
   a) Preparing an introductory paragraph for the workbook if the default introduction is not to be used.
   b) Defining the occupational groups
   c) Addition of locally work-related stressors. Prior to creating the workbook these stressors need to be identified by the project co-ordinator

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**Team-Based Risk Assessment Workbook**

The management team of .... wishes to complete a stress risk assessment, which involves seeking your views about stress. The intention is to identify the major work-related sources of stress affecting people who work in the .... department and, where possible, prevent / mitigate these. The management team has therefore commissioned ... (the project administrator) ... to oversee this project.

Please note the following points:
- participation is voluntary
- this stress risk assessment workbook is completed on an anonymous basis
- all participants will have access to a summary of the report
- your responses will be communicated to all staff on ....
- please return this workbook within 1 week of receipt

If you have any questions, please contact (the project administrator) at ...
4. Gathering Team-Based Risk Assessment data
There are 2 options for gathering data:

1. A printed paper version of the team-based risk assessment
2. A computerised version

5. Generation of results
The results of the team-based risk assessment are automatically generated by the StressTools programme. Reports can be generated per occupational group or for a combination of occupational groups. The results are generated as a set of Excel reports. There are results for each 4 steps of the team-based risk assessment process. See examples below

Step 1: Stress Levels - Evaluating potential harm.

![Step 1 Stress Levels Chart]

Step 2: Stressor exposure - Identifying hazards

![Step 2 Stressor Exposure Chart]
## Step 3: Ranked stressors - Evaluating risk

**Sample group 1, Sample group 2, Sample group 3 Group - Step 3: Ranked stressors (Top Ten) (11 People)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stressor</th>
<th>Top</th>
<th>2nd</th>
<th>3rd</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not having adequate tools and equipment to do the job</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High workload</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncertainty over the future of my job</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management not listening to me</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insufficient time scheduled to complete workload</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dealing with difficult clients / customers</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample local stressor n. 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of co-operation within the team</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction of new work methods without appropriate training</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being unclear about what is expected of me in my job</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Number of people

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>0</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Step 4: Introducing controls

Follow steps 4 (a) to 4 (e) below: Please note that the comments you add below may be published in the stress risk assessment report. You may wish to answer in a way that prevents you from being identified.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step 4 (a)</th>
<th>Step 4 (b)</th>
<th>Step 4 (c)</th>
<th>Step 4 (d)</th>
<th>Step 4 (e)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Top source of work-related stress is number:</td>
<td>Getting better ☐</td>
<td>Staying the same ☐</td>
<td>Getting worse ☐</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second source of work-related stress is number:</td>
<td>Getting better ☐</td>
<td>Staying the same ☐</td>
<td>Getting worse ☐</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third source of work-related stress is number:</td>
<td>Getting better ☐</td>
<td>Staying the same ☐</td>
<td>Getting worse ☐</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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6. Formulating action plans

The team-based risk assessment is a tool for gathering information about potential sources of stress. The most important part of the undertaking of a risk assessment is the actions that are taken as a result. The first step in the formulation of the action plans is the feedback of the results. Once there is an understanding of the team-based risk assessment results the key issues / sources of stress that need to be tackled are decided on and explored and a set of written recommendation developed.

The following questions can be considered when identifying the key areas to focus on:
• What are the top sources of stress according to Step 2 and Step 3?
• Is there an overlap in these sources of stress?
• Do any of the top sources of stress refer to the same underlying issues?
• What sources of stress are most relevant to people in the “high stress” group?

A framework for preventing stress and developing healthy workplaces
A comprehensive Stress Risk Assessment ensures that subsequent interventions are targeted at specific work-related stressors. Three levels of intervention exist to tackle the stressors identified through the Team-based Risk Assessment process. These are:
1. Prevention. Identify and remove work stressors if possible creating a healthier workplace.

2. Management. Enhance the capacity of individuals to deal with the demands of the workplace.

3. Treatment. Treat individuals for the symptoms being experienced.

Primary Interventions
Primary interventions aim to eliminate or reduce the sources of stress. The strategies used to do this can be categorised in terms of:
Changes to the organisational environment:
• Changes in organisational culture
• Changes in safety culture
• Organisational restructuring
• Changes in technology and physical environment
• Changes in career development opportunities

Changes to the job environment:
• Redesign of jobs
• Changes in work loads
• Changes in work arrangements
• Changes in participation in decision-making
• Changes in levels of authority and responsibility
• Changes in work relationships
Secondary Interventions
Secondary interventions aim to educate and train individuals to recognise their response to stressors and to cope more effectively with stressors that cannot be eliminated or modified. This could involve the individual making many changes. The need to make these changes and skills to do so are usually developed through stress management programmes or wellness programmes.

The changes could include:

Changes to their physical environment
- Change job

Changes to their behaviour
- Balancing work and home
- Socialising more with friends and family
- Behave more assertively

Changes to their physical conditions
- Change diet and sleep habits
- Change exercise habits
- Develop relaxation skills

Changes to their psychological conditions
- Change expectations and aspirations
- Change thinking styles e.g. avoid black and white thinking

Treatment
Treatment interventions aim to treat individuals who have been exposed to stressors and have not coped adequately. The interventions are symptom-directed. They include individual stress counselling, EAPs, coaching and medical treatment.

Table 2 compares primary, secondary and tertiary organisational preventative strategies in terms of their scope, target, underlying assumptions. Primary interventions are stressor-directed. They are proactive and focus more on organisational and job changes. Secondary and tertiary interventions focus on increasing the individual’s capabilities to deal with demands they encounter.
Table 2. Primary, secondary and tertiary organisational preventative strategies.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scope</th>
<th>Target</th>
<th>Underlying assumption</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>Preventative – Eliminate, isolate or minimise the stressors in the work environment</td>
<td>Work environment, technologies or structure</td>
<td>Most effective approach to stress management is to remove stressors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Job redesign, organisational restructuring, Culture Change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>Preventative/ Reactive – Modify individuals’ responses to stressors</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>May not be able to remove/reduce stressors, so best focus on individuals’ reactions to these stressors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Stress management Programmes, Wellness Programmes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tertiary</td>
<td>Treatment – Minimise the damaging consequences of stressors</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Focus is on ‘treatment’ of problems once they occurred</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>EAPs, medical treatment, individual counselling, coaching</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Modified from Cooper, Dewe, & O’Driscoll (2001, 189)

Conclusion
Workplace stress is costly to both the individual and organisation. There are moral, economic and legal reasons for proactively developing healthier workplaces through tackling work-related stress. Internationally and locally organisations are using a Stress Risk Assessment process to ensure that workplace stress is tackled at a preventative level. Thus ensuring that the subsequent actions are targeted. The prevention of stress and the development of a healthy workplace is a challenging process, which requires the involvement of both the organisation and the individual.
References


[www.workinfo.govt.nz](http://www.workinfo.govt.nz)