OCCUPATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

WORK RELATED STRESS

WHAT IS STRESS?

- A natural reaction to excessive pressure
- When perceived demands exceed the individual's ability to cope
- It is not a disease but if excessive/prolonged can lead to mental and physical ill health
- There is no such things as positive stress (only positive pressure) – stress is always negative
- Stress-related disorders a DSM classification

HSE Definition

Work-stress is the process that arises where work demands of various types and combinations exceed the person's capacity and capability to cope.

WHAT IS STRESS?

- Hinckle (1973) - External forces exerting pressure upon an individual, producing strain
- Cannon (1929) – defined stress in terms of the internal physiological state of people expose to threatening or exciting situations
  - 'Fight' or 'Flight' occurs in stressful situations
- Selye (1946) provided a more elaborate model of the human response to stressors.
  - The General Adaptation Syndrome

WHAT IS STRESS?

1) Pressure caused by an outside stimulus

- Engineering model (physics)
- External forces exert pressure and produce strain
  - E.g., focus on daily hassle/stressful life events
  - We can easily measure the stress a person is subjected to (Hinckle, 1973)
  - Does not take account for individual differences!

WHAT IS STRESS?

2) Cannon (1929) – 'Fight' or 'Flight' occurs under stressful situations

- Defines stress in terms of the internal physiological state of people expose to threatening or exciting situations

- Selye (1946) provided a more elaborate model of the human response to stressors.
  - The General Adaptation Syndrome

SELYE'S 1946 GENERAL ADAPTATION SYNDROME

- Stress response involves three stages:

1) **ALARM REACTION:**
   - Lowered resistance initially, followed by the activation of defence mechanisms (e.g., adrenalin)

2) **RESISTANCE:**
   - Stage of max. adaptation and hopefully the successful return to equilibrium. This will not happen if the stress agent continues. They will move on to the next stage.

3) **EXHAUSTION:**
   - Failure of defence/adaptive mechanisms

STRESS AS A TRANSACTION

- Psychological emphasis – Stress exists when the person FEELS they cannot cope with the demands of the environment
- Interaction of person and environment
- Transactional model of stress and coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).
  - Importance of ***cognitive appraisals***

THE TRANSACTIONAL MODEL OF STRESS AND COPING (LAZARUS & FOLKMAN, 1984)

- According to the transactional model, the stress and coping process involves two main elements:

an **evaluation** of a situation that produces negative emotions

coping efforts which attempt to reduce these negative emotions

This process of evaluation is known as **Cognitive Appraisal**

- an individual's evaluation of the meaning of a particular encounter for well-being

THE TRANSACTIONAL MODEL OF STRESS AND COPING (LAZARUS & FOLKMAN, 1984)

- Stress is a result of an interaction between an individual's characteristics and appraisals, the external or internal event (stressor) environment, and the internal or external resources a person has available to them.

Lazarus's initial model maintained that when individuals confront a new or changing environment they engage in a process of **appraisal**, which is of two types: Primary and Secondary

THE TRANSACTIONAL MODEL OF STRESS AND COPING (LAZARUS & FOLKMAN, 1984)

1) **Primary Appraisal**
   a) *What is at stake in this encounter?*
   b) Motivational relevance
   c) Motivational congruence

Three kinds of stressor:
1) Pose harm
2) Threaten
3) Challenge

1) **Secondary Appraisal**
   a) *What can I do to cope and how effective will this be?*
   b) Emotion-focused coping potential
   c) Problem-focused coping potential

THE TRANSACTIONAL MODEL OF STRESS AND COPING (LAZARUS & FOLKMAN, 1984)

- Stress experienced when harm or threat is HIGH and perceived coping ability is LOW
- If perceived coping ability appraised to be HIGH, stress likely to be minimal

STRESS ARISES FROM A MISMATCH BETWEEN PERCEIVED DEMANDS AND RESOURCES

(Both of which can change over time)

WHAT IS COPING?

- A response to negative events or emotions, and involves cognitive and/or behavioural efforts to manage to adapt to the stressful situation
- Psychological theories of coping attempt to identify the mechanisms through which individuals cope with events that are **perceived** to be stressful or threatening
- Emotions and coping are often considered to be part of the same adaptational system
  - *E.g., Lazarus and Folkman (1984); Folkman and Lazarus (1988)*

DIMENSIONS OF COPING

1) Problem focused coping

a) targets the causes of stress in practical ways which tackles the problem or stressful situation that is causing stress, consequently directly reducing the stress
b) aim to remove or reduce the cause of the stressor

Taking control: Changing or escaping from the stress/removing the stress

Information seeking: Rational action. Trying to understand the situation and putting cognitive strategies into place to avoid it in the future.

Evaluating pros and cons of different options for dealing with the stressor.

DIMENSIONS OF COPING

2) *Emotion focused coping*

a) involves trying to reduce the negative emotional responses associated with stress.
b) sometimes the only realistic option when the source of stress is outside the person's control
c) drug therapy can be seen as emotion focused coping

Keeping busy
Letting off steam
Distraction techniques
Building oneself up to expect the worst

DIMENSIONS OF COPING

Avoidant coping: Can putting your head in the sand ever be a good thing??

DIMENSIONS OF COPING

Avoidant coping:

- May be adaptive at an early stage in a stressful encounter, when we lack the resources to engage in problem-focused coping
- However, in the longer term, and if faced with an ongoing stressor, avoidance will prevent adaptation to and mastery over the situation
- Some types of avoidance (e.g., drug or alcohol misuse) are more dangerous and less adaptive than other types of avoidance (e.g., distraction)

STRUCTURAL MODELS OF WORK-RELATED STRESS

- Karasek (1979) devised the Demand-Control Model around two particularly important features of the work environment

1) DEMANDS

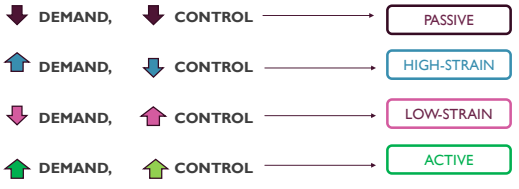
- Related to the amount of work a person does, but also factors such as time pressures and amount of mental/physical effort involved

2) CONTROL

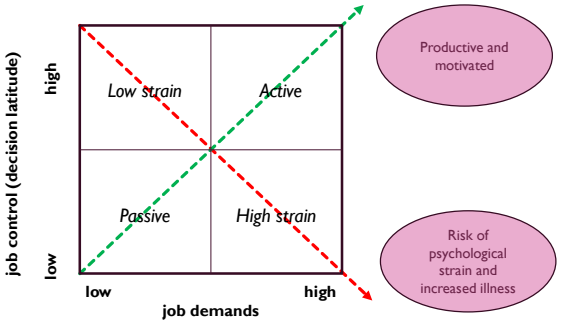
- Extent to which the job allows employee to use their skills/capabilities (skill discretion)
- Amount of control employee has over their work situation (decision latitude)

THE JOB DEMAND-CONTROL MODEL (KARASEK, 1979)

- Four categories of job were described through combining levels of **demand** and **control**:



THE JOB DEMAND-CONTROL MODEL (KARASEK, 1979)



SUPPORT AT WORK

- Johnson and Hall (1988) – the Demand-Control-Support Model
  - In this model, high levels of support are thought to act as a buffer against negative effects of work demands
  - Jobs with higher levels of support, but equal levels of demands, tend to be healthier

SUPPORT AT WORK

- Two hypotheses:

1) **The Strain Hypothesis:**
   - Employees working in a high-strain job (high D, low C) experience the lowest well-being/highest stress
   - The strain hypothesis – emotional/practical support can help reduce the impact of high work demands.

2) **The Learning Hypothesis:**
   - High C, high D plus support can lead to improved motivation and satisfaction at work

EVALUATION?

- Lots of support for the strain hypothesis
  - Low control and high demands interaction
- Moderating influence of social support is less consistent
- Measures are broad (responsibility pressure, quality concern, role conflict, work overload and job control
- Certain people are more vulnerable to strain and others benefit more from control

WHY ARE WE SO INTERESTED IN WORK-RELATED STRESS??

THE SCALE OF THE PROBLEM

- **HSE:**
  - Work related stress the biggest contributor to number of working days lost per year
  - Estimate of 23.3m working days lost in GB in 2014/15; 9.9m of these accounted for by stress, depression or anxiety

http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/

THE SCALE OF THE PROBLEM

Occupations with the highest estimated prevalence rate of work-related stress in Great Britain, averaged over the last three years (2009/10 - 2011/12)

Nurses with
2,730 cases
per 100,000 people

Teaching and education professionals
2,340 cases
per 100,000 people

Welfare and housing professionals
2,290 cases
per 100,000 people

Health professionals; teaching and education professionals, and caring personal services

THE SCALE OF THE PROBLEM

- The main work activities attributed by respondents as causing their work-related stress, or making it worse, were:
  - work pressure,
  - lack of managerial support
  - work-related violence and bullying

WHY SHOULD ORGANISATIONS INTERVENE?

- Improved quality of life for workforce
- A healthier, more productive workforce
  - Underperformance
  - Time off through illness
- Business benefits from reduced sickness absence – increased productivity

WHY SHOULD ORGANISATIONS INTERVENE?

- Litigation / fulfilment of statutory duties
  - Health and Safety at Work Act
- Power struggle
  - The rights of employees to health versus the needs of the company
  - Perception of rights and needs

CONSEQUENCES AND COSTS OF WORK STRESS

WHAT OUTCOMES CAN BE OBSERVED DUE TO WORK RELATED STRESS??

Physical symptoms	Behavioural symptoms	Ailments
Lack of appetite Craving food when under pressure Constant tiredness Nail-biting Nervous twitches Nausea Frequent crying or desire to cry Inability to sit still Sweating Constipation/diarrhoea Headaches Cramps	Irritability with people Unable to cope Difficulty making decisions Dread of the future Difficulty concentrating Inability to finish any tasks Feeling of being a failure Loss of interest in other people Loss of sense of humour Self-hatred	Hypertension: HBP Heart attack Migraine Intense itching (pruritus) Constipation Colitis Rheumatoid arthritis Menstrual difficulties Flatulence & indigestion Skin disorders depression

CONDITIONS THAT INFLUENCE EMPLOYEE WELL-BEING

CONDITIONS THAT INFLUENCE EMPLOYEE WELL-BEING

Aspects of the **situation** and **individual differences** are both important in determining the impact of work on individual employees

1) **Situational factors:**
   - Not all situational factors are sources of stress for everybody in all workplaces.
   - Cox et al. (2000) – HAZARD: working conditions have the potential to cause harm, but much can still depend on individual differences (personality, coping styles, ability, etc)

CONDITIONS THAT INFLUENCE EMPLOYEE WELL-BEING

SITAUTIONAL FACTORS??

Demands
Control
Support
Relationships at work
Roles at work
Change
Working conditions
Career-related issues

SITUATIONAL FACTORS

DEMANDS

- **Job content and workload**
  - Increased stress in fast paced environments, intensive working and meeting tight deadline frequently
  - Quantitative workload – too much to do
  - Qualitative workload – too difficult for the individual
  - Emotional dissonance (Zapf, 2002) – employee has to hide/mask emotions, e.g., airline steward

SITUATIONAL FACTORS

DEMANDS

- **Working hours**
  - Long working hours take a toll on employee health
  - Both the individual and the quality of their work suffers
  - Recognition that working above 40hrs/week is unproductive and can create ill-health (Sparks et al., 1997)
  - However, what if the person has to work long hours in order to complete the tasks of the job? (Burke & Cooper, 2008). Interaction between working hours and job workload

SITUATIONAL FACTORS

DEMANDS

- **Shift work**
  - Demir et al. (2003) – working night shifts leads to exhaustion, loss of energy and detachment from patients in nurses
  - Shift work can have a profound effect on physical functioning, changes in blood temp and pressure, sugar levels and impact on sleep patterns, mental efficiency and work motivation

SITUATIONAL FACTORS

DEMANDS

- **Work-life interface**
  - Growing research about how work and non-work demands interact – consequences for the employees' well-being
  - Can be one of two variations (Lewis & Cooper, 2005):
    - 1) work interference with family – demands of work create difficulties for home life
    - 2) family interference with work – demands of home life create difficulties for work
  - Simply put – the time spent on one is effectively taken away from the other. Also relates to cognitive, emotional and physical demands.

SITUATIONAL FACTORS

CONTROL

- Control over quality of work
- Control over work pace
- Influence over policies and procedures
- Control of holidays or leave
- Control of methods used in work
- Control over decision-making
- Etc, etc, etc

SITUATIONAL FACTORS

CONTROL

High levels of control tend to be beneficial (Weinburg & Cooper, 2007)

Bond et al. (2006): high levels of control associated with higher levels of job performance and lower levels of absense

SITUATIONAL FACTORS

RELATIONSHIPS AT WORK

- **Workplace bullying**
  - Recognised as a major occupational stressor, with massive financial and legal implications for organisations
  - Giga et al. (2008) – annual cost of bullying = £13.75 billion
    - In relation to absenteeism, turnover and productivity
  - Bullying can be experienced at individual, team and organisational levels

SITUATIONAL FACTORS

ROLES AT WORK

- **Role ambiguity**
  - When individuals do not have a clear picture about their work objectives, expectations of them, responsibilities,e tc
  - Can be present at the start of a new job, getting a new boss, unrealistic job description, or change in the organisation itself (Beehr, 1995).
  - Tubre and Collins (2000) – role ambiguity significantly linked to low job performance

SITUATIONAL FACTORS

ROLES AT WORK

- **Role conflict**
  - When individual is torn by conflicting job demands, or doing things they do not want to do
- **Responsibility**
  - Responsibility for people or responsibility for things
    - For people is particularly stressful – amount of time spent interacting with others, attending meetings, meeting deadlines, etc

SITUATIONAL FACTORS

CAREER-REALTED ISSUES

- A host of issues can act as potential stress factors
  - Lack of job security
  - Fear of redundancy
  - Numerous performance appraisals
- For most, progression is important
  - In early years, progression more likely – earn more money and enjoy increased status
  - At middle age, career progress slows or stops. Job opportunities become fewer and energy levels can flag. Also, younger applicants become a threat

WHAT ABOUT INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES IN PEOPLE?

INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES AND OCCUPATIONAL STRESS

- Why are some people more vulnerable to stress than others??
- Individual differences in personality, cognitions and emotions can have **direct** and **indirect** effects on stress outcomes

INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES AND OCCUPATIONAL STRESS

- Individual differences that are often investigates in work-related stress research:
  - Neuroticism/emotional instability
  - Type A personality
  - Locus of control; self-efficacy and self-esteem
  - Coping styles

TYPE A BEHAVIOUR PATTERN

- 'Stress-prone behaviour pattern'
- Type A Behaviour is a multidimensional concept combining action and emotion and manifests in individuals showing the following:
  - Competitiveness
  - Time-urgent behaviours (trying to do too much in too little time)
  - Easily annoyed/aroused hostility and anger
  - Impatience
  - Achievement-oriented behaviour
  - Exhibit a vigorous speech pattern

TYPE A BEHAVIOUR PATTERN

- Furnham (1990)
  - Type A's respond more quickly to stress and in a more emotional way
  - Exhibit a greater need for control than Type B's (more relaxed, reflective)
  - Show greater physiological responses to stress

LOCUS OF CONTROL

- *Locus of control:* an expectancy concerning the degree of personal control we have in our lives
  - **Internal**
    - Life outcomes are under our personal control
  - **External**
    - Outcomes have less to do with one's own efforts than with the influence of external factors

LOCUS OF CONTROL

- A generalised expectancy (Rotter, 1966)
- People with an **internal** locus of control:
  - Behave in a more self-determined fashion
  - Achieve better grades
  - Are more resistant to social influence
  - Engage in more health-promoting behaviours; experience less depression and anxiety

INTERVENTION STRATEGIES FOR PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING AT WORK

STRESS MANAGEMENT INTERVENTIONS

- HSE's Stress Management Standards
  - The six management standards cover the primary sources of stress at work
  - Define the characteristics, or culture, of an organisation where the risks from work related stress are being effectively managed and controlled
  - Cover six key areas of work design that, if not properly managed, are associated with poor health and well-being, lower productivity and increased sickness absence.

HSE
Health & Safety Executive

Health & Safety Executive

- Management of stress at work

http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/

HSE'S STRESS MANAGEMENT STANDARDS

- **Demands:**
  - Workload, work patterns and the work environment
- **Control:**
  - How much say the person has in the way they do their work
- **Support:**
  - Encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided by the organisation, line management and colleagues
- **Relationships:**
  - Promoting positive working to avoid conflict and dealing with unacceptable behaviour
- **Role:**
  - Whether people understand their role within the organisation and whether the organisation ensures that they do not have conflicting roles
- **Change:**
  - How organisational change (large or small) is managed and communicated in the organisation

HSE'S STRESS MANAGEMENT STANDARDS

- These Management Standards represent a set of conditions that, if present, reflect a high level of well-being and organisational performance
- Demonstrate good practice and allow assessments of the current situation
- Help simplify risk assessment for work related stress by:
  - Identifying the main risk factors for work related stress
  - Helping employers focus on the underlying causes and their prevention
  - Providing a way in which organisations can gauge their performance in tackling the key causes of stress

CHALLENGES?

- Harm is not easy to define
- Hazards are determined by the way in which people perceive them
- Difficult to establish cause and effect in individual cases
- Difficult to distinguish between minor and serious harm
- Everyone is potentially exposed
- Work/life issues

STRESS MANAGEMENT INTERVENTIONS

Ivancevich et al. (1990)

- "any activity, program, or opportunity initiated by an organisation, which focuses on reducing the presence of work-related stressors or on assisting individuals to minimise the negative outcomes of exposure to these stressors".

STRESS MANAGEMENT INTERVENTIONS

Primary stress management interventions

- Attempt to eliminate the sources of stress in organisations by focusing on changing the physical or socio-political environment to match individual needs and granting them with more control over their work situation (Cooper et al., 2001).
- Improving communication processes, redesigning jobs or involving employees in the decision-making process are all examples of primary level interventions.

STRESS MANAGEMENT INTERVENTIONS

- **Primary stress management interventions**
  - Redesign the task
  - Redesign the work environment
  - Establish flexible work schedules
  - Include the employee in career development
  - Analyse work roles and establish goals
  - Build cohesive teams
  - Establish fair methods for the distribution of rewards

Arnold et al,. 2010 – pages 474 and 475

STRESS MANAGEMENT INTERVENTIONS

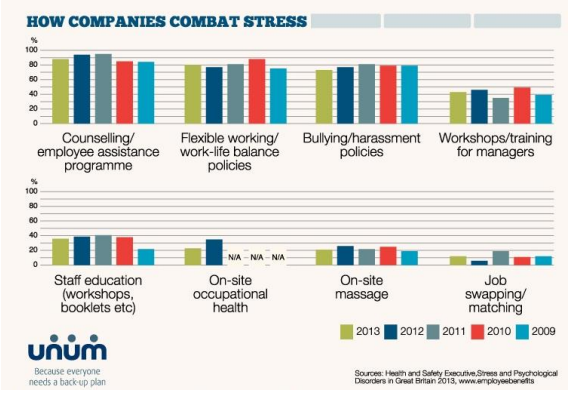
Secondary stress management interventions

- Tend to help individuals manage stress without trying to eliminate or modify workplace stressors.
- Stress management programmes assist individuals to identify stress symptoms in themselves and others, and to acquire or improve their coping skills.

STRESS MANAGEMENT INTERVENTIONS

Tertiary stress management prevention

- Strategies seek to assist individuals who are experiencing on-going problems stemming either from the work environment or their work lives.
- The purpose of such programmes is to adapt individual behaviour and lifestyle without much reference to changing organisational practices.



QUESTIONS?