Managing Stress at Work: Theory and Practice

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Concept of Stress

Definition:

- Stress may be equivalent to physiological responses to the environmental demands which are either positive or negative (disturbs body equilibrium).

- Stress is an environmental stimulus, a stressor.

- Stress is a transaction between the person & the environment,...mediated by appraisal & coping.
Occupational Stress

- Job stressor: Condition at work requiring adaptive response
  - Objective
  - Perceived

- Job strain: Negative response to stressor
  - Psychological: Anger
  - Physical: Increased blood pressure
  - Behavioral: Absence
Model of Job Stress Process

(Frese & Zapf, 1988)

- **Objective stressor**: Fire breaks out
- **Perception**: Employee sees fire
- **Appraisal**: Employee appraises fire as threatening
- **Short-term strain**: Employee experiences fear and nausea and jumps out window
- **Long-term strain**: Employee develops posttraumatic stress disorder
Sources of Job Stress

Factors intrinsic to the job
(e.g. Workload, New Technology, Environmental Conditions)

Role in organization
(e.g. Role Conflict, Degree of Responsibility)

Relationships with others
(e.g. Supervisor, Colleague or Subordinates)

Career achievement
(e.g. Promotion Opportunity, Job Security)

Organizationalal climate
(e.g. Communication, Team Spirit)

Home/Work interface
(e.g. Work/Family Conflict; Work that Affects Family Life)
Other Sources of Job Stress

- Office politics
  (e.g. people build themselves up by tearing others down)

- Lack of autonomy
  (e.g. no chance to use personal initiative in carrying out work)

- Job insecurity

- Emotional labour
Some Negative Consequences of Job Stress:

1. Lower job satisfaction
2. Physical health problem (e.g. backache, gastro-intestinal problems)
3. Mental health problem (e.g. anxiety, depression, insomnia)
4. Behavioural outcome (e.g. smoking / drinking, aggression)
5. Job performance (lower productivity)
6. Safety performance (industrial accidents, injuries, deaths)

All of the above may lead to Absenteeism, Intent to Turnover, or Turnover
Coping

**Primary Appraisal**
1. Relevant to you?
2. Relevant but not threatening
3. Relevant & threatening

**Secondary Appraisal**
Assess whether you have enough resources

Can you cope?
Coping Strategies
(Lazarus & Folkman, 1984)

Emotion-focused Coping (EFC)
Problem-focused Coping (PFC)
Research findings in Greater China
(Siu, Spector, & Cooper, 2006)

Chinese Coping Behaviours
1. Social Support
2. Hobbies/Relaxation
3. Positive Active Coping
4. Passive Adaptive Coping
Relaxation

- Exercises
- Meditation
- Mindfulness
- Massage
- Muscle relaxation
- Music therapy
- Imagery
Problem-focused Coping

- Forward planning
- Logical, not emotional
- Time management
Cognitive Strategies

- Self-esteem
- Self-efficacy
- Be a flexible perfectionist (Strive for Excellence)
Stress Moderators

- Self-efficacy
- Be optimistic
- Avoid getting angry
- Internal locus of control
- More communication with family members
- Build up genuine friendship
- Exercise regularly
There are a number of options to consider in looking at the prevention of stress, which can be termed as primary, secondary and tertiary levels of prevention and address different stages in the stress process.

- **Primary prevention** is concerned with taking action to reduce or eliminate stressors (i.e. sources of stress) and positively promoting a supportive and healthy work environment.

- **Secondary prevention** is concerned with the prompt detection and management of depression and anxiety by increasing self awareness and improving stress management skills.

- **Tertiary prevention** is concerned with the rehabilitation and recovery process of those individuals who have suffered or are suffering from serious ill health as a result of stress.

To develop an effective and comprehensive organizational policy on stress, employers need to integrate these three approaches.
Tackling Workplace Stress

- Job Resources (Primary Intervention) (supervisory support, FEPPs, etc.)
- Personal Resources (Secondary Intervention) (Psychological Capital - Resilience, Self-efficacy, Hope, Optimism) (Recovery, Energy Management)
Enhancing Personal Resources to Tackle Workplace Stress and Achieve Work-life Balance
Self-efficacy

Resiliency

Hope

Optimism
From Burnout to Work Engagement
Modified the JD-R Model of Work Engagement (based on Bakker & Demerouti, 2007).
A Two-Day Training Programme Among Health Care Workers (commissioned by the HA) (March 2006 to Feb 2007)

- Stress Management
- Positive Psychology Approaches
  - Resilience to cope with crisis
  - Art of happiness & humor in the workplace
- Enhance Effective Communication & Resolve Interpersonal Conflicts
- Achieving Work-family Balance
Participants

- 1,034 health care workers
- 937 (22.6% males, 77.3% females, 0.1% unidentified) completed the pretest; 891 (21.8% males, 77.4% females, 0.8% unidentified) completed the posttest
Results: Resilience

Comparison of resilience (before training vs. after training)

Note. ** Higher scores represent better resilience
### Other Results

#### Comparison of job stressors and outcomes (before training vs. after training)

- **Perceived work stress**
- **Physical/psychological symptoms**
- **Work-family conflict**
- **Emotional labour demand**
- **Burnout**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Before training</th>
<th>After training</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perceived work stress</td>
<td>4.30</td>
<td>3.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical/psychological symptoms</td>
<td>2.96</td>
<td>2.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work-family conflict</td>
<td>3.19</td>
<td>2.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional labour demand</td>
<td>3.87</td>
<td>3.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burnout</td>
<td>2.90</td>
<td>2.74</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Lower scores represent lower job stressors and better outcomes.*

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**Note:** Lower scores represent lower job stressors and better outcomes.
Other Results

Comparison of other outcomes (before training vs. after training)

Note. ** Higher scores represent better outcomes.
Other Results

Comparison of coping strategies (before training vs. after training)

- **Note.** Higher scores represent better coping strategies.
Recovery, strain and workload: An intervention study in Hong Kong teachers
Human Energy

Physical Energy

Mental Energy

Spiritual Energy

Emotional Energy

(Schwartz & McCarthy, 2007)
People use different ways to allocate and maintain their energy (Human Energy Management, HEM).

HEM as a personal resource and as a means to attain other resources that can help individual to control and impact upon their work environment successfully (e.g., Hobfoll, 1989).
Recovery

Recovery refers to a process during which individual functional systems that have been called upon during a stressful experience return to their prestress levels (Meijman & Mulder, 1998).

Recovery processes (i.e., unwinding from one’s job during off-job time) are important for reducing the negative effects of work stress (Geurts & Sonnentag, 2006).

Recovery experience could be trained through 9 hours intervention (Hahn, Binnewies, Sonnentag & Mojza, 2012).
Recovery

Sonnentag & Fritz, 2007
Sample and Method

- quasi-experimental study
- 2.5 days training on recovery experience
- Primary and Secondary teachers from Hong Kong
  - Training group: 50 participants
  - Control group: 48 participants
Contents of Training

1. Stress and Coping:
   ● Sources of workplace stress and burnout
   ● Effective coping strategies
2. Managing Stress:
   ● Critical incident stress management
   ● Techniques in post-incident debriefing
   ● Introduction to cognitive behavioral therapy
3. Stressor-emotion model:
   1. Stress, violence and aggression
   2. Tips for prevention of challenging behaviors in hospitals/classroom*
4. Self-healing Techniques:
   1. Muscle relaxation, imagery, and mindfulness
5. Emotion Management to reduce Burnout:
   Anger management
   ABCDE model of stress and avoid thinking errors
6. Applying Positive Psychology in the Workplace:
   1. Introduction to positive psychology
   2. Art of happiness in the workplace
   ● Human virtues and character strengths (e.g., forgiveness, gratitude)*
   ● The role of resilience, optimism*, self-efficacy*, and hope* to cope with stress
7. Effective Communication:
   1. Improving communication skills in hospitals/classroom* to deal with challenges
   2. Methods of managing conflict: Agreement frame, reframing
   (1) Four recovery experience: psychological detachment from work, relaxation, mastery, and control; and practical tips
   (2) Human energy management strategies: Physical, emotional, mental & spiritual
   (3) How to sleep well?
Summary of Results

- Recovery processes can be improved
- Individuals who were exposed to high workload benefited more from the training.
Research/Practical Implications

- Recovery experience could be trained in a Chinese context. The training could mitigate the negative effects of high workload also.
- Organisations, especially those with high workload, could provide training on recovery to employees.
- To the best of our knowledge, this is the first study to show that, not only recovery experience could be trained in a Chinese context, the training would be more effective for those who work under high workload.
Thank You!