"Spice of Life - Kiss of Death"

Work-Related Stress

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For my husband John, our daughter Katelyn

and in memory of my dear friend and colleague

William Fennelly

DECLARATION

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment of the programme of study leading to the award of MA in Strategic Human Resource Management is entirely my own work and has not been taken from the work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the significant problems that have recently emerged at Mahon Farrelly & Associates with respect to long-term illness and reports of work-related stress. There has been a growing recognition that the experience of stress at work has undesirable consequences for the health of employees and their organisations.

There is an increasing consensus around defining work-related stress in terms of the "interactions" between employees and their exposure to a hazardous work environment. Stress is experienced when the demands of work factors exceed the ability to cope with or control the situation. Defining stress in this way focuses attention on the work-related causes and the control measures required.

Work-related stress results from the interaction of the individual and the working environment. **(Person-Environment Fit)** This reports focuses on the work environment, and covers its effects both on the individual worker and the organisation.

The problem of work-related stress in general lies with the design and management of work organisation. In addition, today's fast and unprecedented change in the world of work and its organisation is intensifying the problem of stress. The experience of change itself, especially where individuals experience lack of control or involvement and uncertainty, can cause stress. Employees in jobs perceived to have both low decision latitude and high job demands are particularly likely to report poor health, low satisfaction and high levels of stress.

This report reviews the nature of stress, its causes, the extent of the problem at Mahon, Farrelly & Associates that was highlighted by conducting a series of semi-structured interviews and sending out a questionnaire called "Check Your Stress Levels". This was conducted in order to investigate stress-inducing work-place practices, which account for absenteeism; examine ways of reducing workplace stressors and make recommendations for the management of work-related stress.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1.0   INTRODUCTION

The topic of this thesis concerns work-related stress and long-term illness and has been prompted by a recent development at Mahon, Farrelly & Associates. The company has experienced a change in the nature of absenteeism, which until eighteen months ago was confined to what has popularly become known as the "Thursday, Friday, Monday Syndrome" or illness coinciding with long bank holiday weekends. However, at present, serious problems have emerged with respect to long-term illness and reports of work-related stress.

The serious nature of the problems experienced was exacerbated by the untimely death in March 2004 of our dear friend, colleague and partner, aged 36, who died as a result of a tragic home accident. His sudden death was a poignant reminder of the dangers posed by certain stressors in the context of an individual feeling exposed to and unsupported within a stressful environment. The stress levels experienced by an individual may increase and may lead to a variety of health problems and resultant absenteeism. It is a further reminder that stress must be recognised as playing a potentially critical role in determining an individual's well-being and /or illness in the workplace.

1.1   Working for Mahon, Farrelly & Associates

The position held by the author for the past eight years is as Human Resources Manager within Mahon, Farrelly & Associates in Dublin. The company employs 150 staff, 90 of which are located at Head Office and the remaining in branch offices in Terenure, Dun Laoghaire, Drumcondra and Cork. Mahon, Farrelly & Associates' services pertain to the

residential, commercial, financial services, retail and industrial property sectors in Ireland. All services and practices conform to the standards set by the governing body, the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors.

Personnel are divided into two categories, namely fee earning and non-fee earning. Fee earning personnel include negotiators, chartered surveyors and valuers while non-fee earning staff comprise support and technical staff. (See Appendix 1, Organisation Chart)

Culture may be defined by **(Schein 1985)** as *"A pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group learned as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way you perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems."*

The culture that exists in Mahon, Farrelly & Associates may be typified as *"Task-Orientated"* with a focus on legality, legitimacy and bureaucracy. A particular task is more important than the individual involved in accomplishing that task.

1.2   History of Mahon, Farrelly & Associates

The firm was founded in 1922 as Franks and Franks, occupying offices in No. 23 St. Stephen's Green, specialising in estate management. Mr. Henry Mahon took over the firm in 1932 and changed the name to Henry Mahon & Associates. The business was at that time a small valuation practice, which gradually built up to 12 employees by 1958. In 1964 the firm had reached a total of 30 persons, and had outgrown temporary premises in No's. 18 Kildare

Street and 22 St. Stephen's Green. With nearly 60 people employed in 1969 and further development of client services planned, No. 26 St. Stephen's Green, a modern office building, was developed. It is currently the company's principal place of business.

The name has been altered to Mahon, Farrelly & Associates in more recent times. The company is independent and solely owned by its Directors, all of whom are exclusively involved in the business. The Board of Directors is currently comprised of two women and ten men. The firm opened an office in Cork in 1969. This expansion was followed in 1976 by the establishment of an office in Belfast. The Cork office deals with commercial and residential property, while that in Belfast deals solely with commercial property.

Suburban offices were opened in Dun Laoghaire in 1976 and Terenure in 1994. The suburban offices cater for residential transactions only. In September 2000, a regional office in Drumcondra was opened; catering for both residential and commercial. In recent years the company has invested substantial funds in information technology, to improve service to clients and enhance reporting requirements. In 1996 it was accredited with the ISO 9002 Award for Quality.

1.3   Data Collection within Mahon, Farrelly & Associates

At an organisational level, the manner in which Mahon, Farrelly & Associates collected information relating to absenteeism was typically from attendance sheets, time cards, medical records, and other personnel files.

The most common formula used to calculate absenteeism is as follows: -

Total absence (days/hours) in a particular period

_____X 100%

Total possible time (days / hours)

This index calculates the percentage of the total time available in a specified period that has been lost as a result of an employee's absence. **Cowling (1990)** suggested the existence of a significant correlation between the nature of the job and absenteeism, pointing to job satisfaction as a significant component of motivation to attend. It is important that our organisation maintains accurate records of absenteeism, which must be plotted regularly so as to increase awareness of any upward trends.

Towards the end of 2000 and the beginning of 2001, patterns of absenteeism began to emerge, with definite trends forming. The initial tendency was for a prevalence of the "Friday Syndrome", progressing to the "Monday / Friday Syndrome" and eventually advancing to the "Thursday / Friday / Monday Syndrome" associated with long bank holiday weekends. This presented a serious problem for Mahon, Farrelly & Associates and was subsequently brought to the attention of the Directors by means of a report relating to the financial costs of absenteeism for the company.

The results were extremely alarming, with the costs of absenteeism up to the end of November 2001 amounting to a staggering €222,000 (IR£ 175,000). Furthermore, this cost related exclusively to salaries paid and did not include expenses incurred for overtime or

temporary cover. The Board of Directors were astonished at these figures and it was immediately decided to address the issue of absenteeism.

The reversion to reality, which frequently follows a downturn, is quite extraordinary. While six months previously the Board was informed of the emerging trend relating to absenteeism, the high degree to which they were immersed in the day-to-day activities of the business hindered them from addressing adequately the critical levels of absenteeism. Following the dreadful atrocities of the 11th September, the economy entered a downturn, with residential and commercial properties consequently being disposed of at a slower rate. The subsequent issue of the yearly absence report (up to and including 31st December 2001) was received with great interest. Ultimately, indirect costs in the company were exceeding the direct costs of absenteeism. In other words, the true cost of absenteeism was far greater than simply the cost pertaining to the days lost.

Over the past three decades there has been a growing belief within all sectors of employment that the experience of stress at work has undesirable consequences for the health and safety of individuals and for the health of their organizations, resulting in both short and long-term absenteeism.

The dramatic transformation of the workplace in recent years has resulted in many people changing jobs more frequently than had previously been the case. In addition, short-term contracts are becoming increasingly common and a rising number of people are now working from home. Long hours, mobile phones, email and the web are, for many, part of the norm.

This fast-moving global society presents very different challenges for individuals in the workplace compared to those experienced by previous generations.

It was felt that the research questions formulated below allowed for the necessary flexibility in order to ascertain the nature of work-related stress. The exploratory nature of the subject matter required this open-ended approach.

1.4   Research Questions

- There are three basic questions that need to be addressed:
- What is the nature of stress in the workplace?
- How does work stress affect health and well being?
- Identify the stress inducing practices in the workplace, which account for absenteeism.

1.5   Research Objectives

- Identify the stress inducing practices.
- Look at employer's legal responsibility.
- Examine ways of reducing workplace stressors, which contribute to absenteeism.
- Make recommendations on strategies to improve health at work and reduce absenteeism.

It is paramount for Senior H. R. Professionals to have a general awareness and ability to focus on identifying the stress inducing practices in the workplace, which account for absenteeism as well as examining the long-term picture going forward. Also Mahon, Farrelly &

Associates as employers have a legal duty to promote the health and safety of employees at work. In addition, an investigation into ways of reducing work-related stressors, which are contributing to absenteeism, will be carried out.

Finally, the aim is to develop and produce a policy pertaining to work-related stress and raise employees' awareness regarding the cause and effect of stress both at home and at work.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

2.0 WHAT IS STRESS

Stress may be defined by (*Clarke* 1997) as an organism's response to environmental demands or pressures. In the first studies of stress, conducted in the 1950's, the term stress was used to denote both the causes and the experienced effects as a result of these pressures. More recently, however, the term 'stressor' has been used for the actual stimulus that provokes a stress response.

Stress in humans results from interactions between persons and their environment that are perceived as straining or exceeding their adaptive capacities and threatening their wellbeing. Variations with respect to how stress is perceived, indicates that human stress responses reflect differences in personality, as well as differences in physical strength or general health.

Levi, 2002, cites *Stress* as constituting a pattern of 'stone-age' reactions, preparing the human organism for 'fight or flight', (i.e., for physical activity). This stress response was adequate in the context of stone-age man having to face a wolf pack. However, when today's worker is struggling to adjust to rotating shifts, highly monotonous and fragmented tasks or threatening or over-demanding customers, the stress response is often maladaptive and indeed disease provoking.

Health and well-being can be influenced by work, both positively *(spice of life)* and negatively *(kiss of death)*. Work can provide a goal and meaning in life. It can offer structure and content on a daily basis and also over the longer term, it can contribute towards our identity, self-respect, social support and material rewards. This is more likely to happen when

work demands are optimal rather than maximal, when workers are allowed to exercise a reasonable degree of autonomy and when the work 'climate' within the organisation is friendly and supportive. If this is the case, work can be one of the most important health-promoting factors in life.

If, however, work conditions are characterised by the opposite attributes, they are - at least in the long run - likely to cause ill health, accelerate its course or trigger its symptoms.

The definition of stress is not simply a question of semantics –playing with words– and it is important that there is consensus at least in broad terms in respect to its nature. A lack of such agreement would seriously restrict meaningful research into stress and the subsequent development of effective stress management strategies. Given this, it is an unfortunate yet frequent misconception that a lack of consensus exists with regard to defining stress as a scientific concept. Furthermore, the belief that stress is in some way undefinable and unmeasurable belies a lack of knowledge of the relevant scientific literature.

2.1   Conceptualisation & Frameworks

While several reviews of the scientific literature on stress have identified three different approaches to the definition and study of stress (*Lazarus,* 1966; *Appley & Trumbull,* 1967; *Cox,* 1978, 1990; *Cox & Mackay,* 1981; *Fletcher,* 1988, *Cox,* 1993) the focus here is on that known as the psychological approach.

2.1.1 Psychological Approach

According to this approach to the definition and study of stress it is conceptualised in terms of the dynamic interaction between the person and their work environment. When studied, it is either inferred from the existence of problematic person-environment interactions or measured in terms of the cognitive processes and emotional reactions, which underpin those interactions. This has been termed the 'psychological approach'. The development of psychological models has been, to some extent, an attempt to overcome the criticisms leveled at the earlier approaches. A consensus is currently developing around this approach to the definition of stress. For example, psychological approaches are largely consistent with the International Labour Office's definition of psychosocial hazards (International Labour Organization, 1986) and with the definition of well-being recommended by the World Health Organization (1986). They are also consistent with the developing literature on personal risk assessment (see, for example, *Cox and Cox*, 1993; *Cox*, 1993; *Cox and Griffiths*, 1995, 1996). These consistencies and overlaps suggest an increasing coherence in current thinking within occupational health and safety. Variants of this psychological approach dominate contemporary stress theory, and among them, two distinct types may be identified: *the interactional and the transactional*. The former focuses on the structural features of the person's interaction with their work environment, while the latter is concerned more with the psychological mechanisms underpinning that interaction. Transactional models are primarily concerned with cognitive appraisal and coping. In a sense, they represent a development of the interactional models, and are essentially consistent with them.

2.2   INTERACTIONAL THEORIES OF STRESS

Interactional theories of stress focus on the structural characteristics of the person's interaction with their work environment. Two particular Interactional theories stand out as seminal– **The Person-Environment Fit Theory** of *French et al.* (1982) and the **Demand-Control Theory** of *Karasek* (1979).

2.2.1   Person-Environment Fit

Several researchers (e.g. *Bowers*, 1973) have suggested that the goodness of fit between the person and their work environment frequently offers a better explanation of behaviour than individual or situational difference –. Largely as a result of such observations, *French* (1982) and his colleagues formulated a theory of work stress based on the explicit concept of the Person-Environment Fit. Two basic aspects of fit were identified:-

- The degree to which an employee's attitudes and abilities meet the demands of the job.

- The extent to which the job environment meets the workers' needs, and in particular the extent to which the individual is permitted and encouraged to use their knowledge and skills in the job.

It has been argued that stress is likely to occur, and well-being is likely to be affected, when there is a lack of fit in either or both respects (*French et. al.*, 1974). Two clear distinctions are made in this theory:

Firstly, between objective reality and subjective perceptions and **secondly,** between environmental variable (e) and person variable (P). Given this simple 2 x 2 configuration of P x E Interaction, lack of fit can in effect occur in four different ways and each appear to challenge the worker's health. There can be both a lack of subjective and objective P-E Fit: these are the main foci of attention, with particular interest being expressed in the lack of subjective fit: how the worker sees their work situation. This provides a strong link with other psychological theories of stress. There can also be a lack of fit between objective environment (reality) and the subjective environment (hence, lack of contact with reality), and also a lack of fit between the objective and subjective persons (hence, poor self-assessment).

French et al., **(1982)** have reported on a large survey of work stress and health in 23 different occupations in the United States and a sample size of 2010. The survey was framed by the P-E Fit Theory, and in their summary, the authors commented on a number of questions of theoretical and practical importance. In particular, they argued that their subjective measures mediated the effects of objective work on health. Their data showed that there was a good correspondence between the objective and subjective measures and that the effects of those objective measures on self-reported health were to a very high degree accounted for by the subjective measures. This has been reflected more recently in the work of various researchers such as *Bosma & Marmot,* (1997) and *Chen and Spector* (1991). In the study of *French et. al.'s,* objective occupation only accounted for some 2 to 6 percent of the variance in self-reported health beyond that accounted for by the subjective measures.

2.2.2 Demand Control Model

Karasek **(1979)** drew attention to the possibility that work characteristics may not be linearly associated with worker health and that they may combine interactively in relation to health. He initially demonstrated this theory through secondary analyses of data from the United States and Sweden, finding that employees in jobs perceived to have both low **'decision latitude'** and high **'job demands'** were particularly likely to report poor health and low satisfaction. *Karasek* **(1979)** defined **'decision latitude'** as 'the working individual's potential control over his/her tasks and his/her conduct during the working day'. He defined **'job demands'** as 'the psychological stressors involved in accomplishing the workload'.

Johnson **(1989) and** *Johnson et.al.* **(1991)** expanded Karasek's model by adding a third dimension, resulting in the "Demand-Control-Support" Model. The dimension "social support" refers to overall levels of helpful social interaction available on the job from both co-workers and supervisors. "Social Support" plays an essential role in the management of stress at work. It serves as a buffer against possible adverse health affects of excessive psychological demands.

Finally, whether perceived job demands and decision latitude combine additively or through a true interaction, it is clear from Karasek's work that they are important factors determining the effects of work on employees' health.

2.3 TRANSACTIONAL DEFINITIONS

Most transactional theories of stress focus on the cognitive processes and emotional reactions underpinning the person's interaction with their environment. For example, *Siegrist's* transactional model of *"effort-reward imbalance"* argues that the experience of chronic stress can be best defined in terms of a mismatch between high costs spent and low gains received *Siegrist* (1990). In other words, according to the model, stress at work results from high effort spent in combination with low reward obtained. Two sources of effort are distinguished: an *extrinsic* source, the demands of the job, and an *intrinsic* source, the motivation of the individual worker in a demanding situation. Three dimensions of reward are important: financial gratification, socio-emotional reward and status control (i.e., promotion prospects and job security). Adverse health effects, such as cardiovascular risk, are most prevalent in occupations where situational constraints prevent workers from reducing "high cost - low gain" conditions.

2.3.1 Theories of Appraisal and Coping

Most transactional models appear to build on the conceptual structures suggested in the interactional models of the Michigan school and *Karasek* (1979) and colleagues. They focus on the possible imbalance between demands and ability or competence. This is most obvious in the models advanced by Lazarus and Folkman in the United States (for example, *Lazarus and Folkman*, 1984) *and Cox and Mackay* in the United Kingdom (for example, *Cox*, 1978; *Cox*, 1990; *Cox and Mackay*, 1981). According to transactional models, stress is a negative *psychological state* involving aspects of both cognition and emotion. They treat the stress

state as the internal representation of particular and problematic transactions between the person and their environment. Appraisal is the evaluative process that gives these person-environment transactions their meaning (*Holroyd and Lazarus*, **1982**). Primary appraisal involves a continual monitoring of the person's transactions with their environment (in terms of demands, abilities, competence, constraints and support), focusing on the question 'Do I have a problem?' The recognition of a problem situation is usually accompanied by unpleasant emotions or general discomfort. Secondary appraisal is contingent upon the recognition that a problem exists and involves a more detailed analysis and the generation of possible coping strategies: 'What am I going to do about it?'. Stress arises when the person perceives that he or she cannot adequately cope with the demands being made on them or with threats to their well-being (*Lazarus*, **1966, 1976**; *Cox*, **1990**), when coping is of importance to them (*Sells*, **1970**; *Cox*, **1978**) and when they are anxious or depressed about it (*Cox and Ferguson*, **1991**). The experience of stress is therefore defined by, first, the person's realisation that they are having difficulty coping with demands and threats to their well-being, and, second, that coping is important and the difficulty in coping worries or depresses them. This approach allows a clear distinction between, the effects of a lack of ability and of stress on performance. The question of 'consciousness' has been raised in relation to stress and the appraisal process (*Cox & Mackay*, **1981**). Appraisal is a conscious process. However, in its earliest stages, changes characteristic of the stress state may be demonstrated, yet the existence of a problem may not be recognised or recognition may only be 'vague'. It has been suggested that different levels of awareness may exist during the appraisal process. These may be described by the following sequence:

1. Growing awareness of problem markers, both individual and situational, including feeling uncomfortable, not sleeping, making mistakes, etc.

2. Recognising the existence of a 'problem' in a general or 'hazy' way.

3. Identifying the general problem area and assessing its importance.

4. Analysing in detail the nature of the problem and its effects.

It is useful to think of the stress state as embedded in an *on-going process* that involves the person interacting with their environment, making appraisals of that interaction and attempting to cope with, and sometimes failing to cope with, the problems that arise. The experience of stress through work is therefore associated with exposure to particular conditions of work, both physical and psychosocial, and the worker's realisation that they are having difficulty in coping with important aspects of their work situation. The experience of stress is usually accompanied by attempts to deal with the underlying problem (coping) and by changes in cognition, behaviour and physiological function (e.g., *Aspinwall and Taylor,* **1997;** *Guppy and Weatherstone,* **1997**). Although probably adaptive in the short term, such changes may threaten health in the long term. The experience of stress and its behavioral and psychophysiological correlates mediate, in part, the effects of many different types of work demand on health. Many authors have made this point over the last three decades (for example, *Levi,* **1984;** *Szabo et al.,* **1983;** *Scheck et al.,* **1997**).

2.4 SUMMARY: FRAMEWORKS, THEORIES & DEFINITIONS

Stress can be defined as a psychological state, which is both part of and reflects a wider process of interaction between the person and their work environment. It may be triggered by emotional upset, disruptions in ones lives and control or the lack of it. It is concluded that there is a growing consensus around the adequacy and utility of the psychological approach to

stress. Several overview models have been offered as summaries of the stress process. The most notable is that of Cooper (see, for example, *Cooper & Marshall*, **1976**), as presented in Figure 2: Cooper's model usefully focuses on the nature and detail of work stresses and their individual and organisational outcomes.

Figure 2: Cooper's model of the dynamics of work stress (adapted from Cooper & Marshall, 1976)
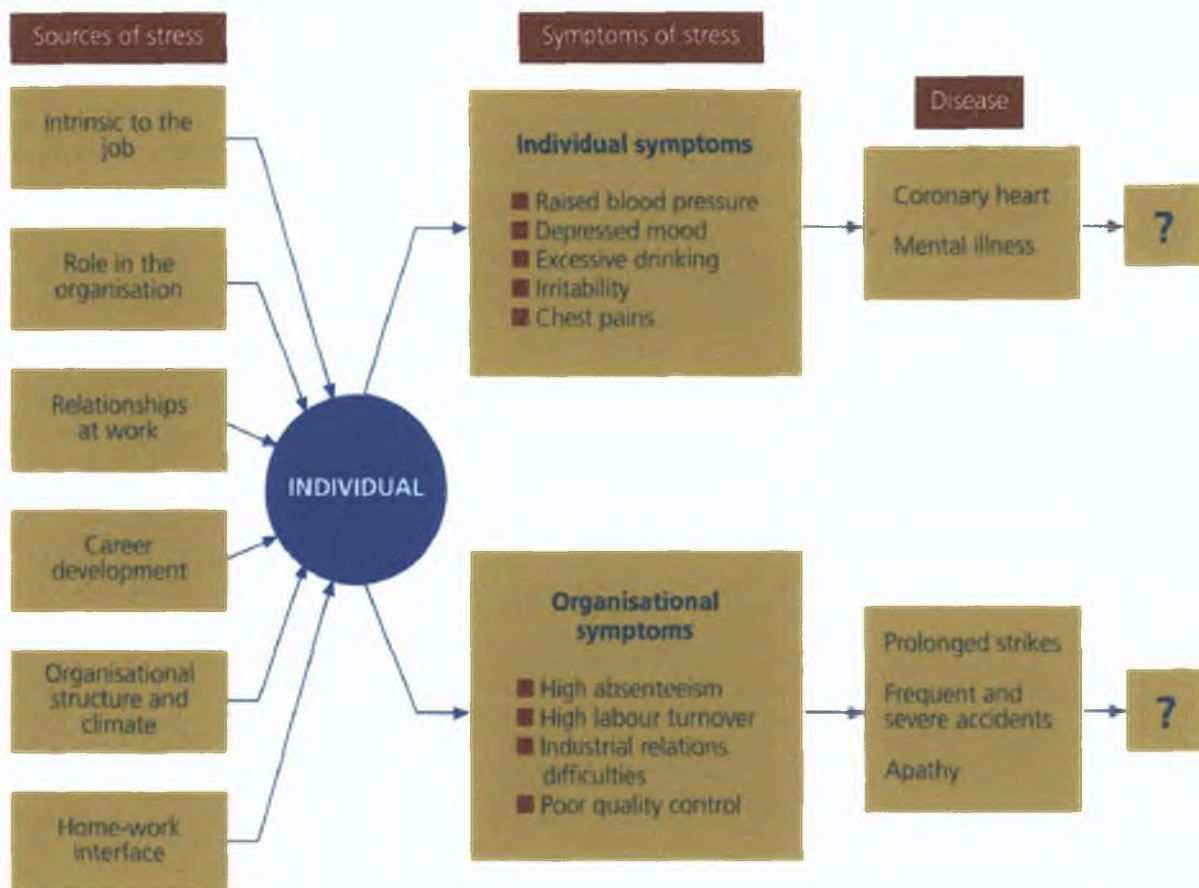
The stress state is a conscious state but the level of awareness of the problem varies with the development of that state. Part of the stress process are the relationships between the objective work environment and the employee's perceptions of work, between those perceptions and the experience of stress, and between that experience and changes in behaviour and physiological function, and in health. Coping is an important component of the stress process

but one which is relatively poorly understood. Stress may be experienced as a result of exposure to a wide range of work demands and, in turn, contribute to an equally wide range of health outcomes: it is one link between hazards and health.

2.5   COPING

Coping is an important part of the overall stress process. However, it is perhaps the least well understood despite many years of research. This point is widely acknowledged in the literature (see, for example, *Dewe et al.,* **1993, 2000**). *Lazarus (*1966*)* has suggested that it has three main features.

Firstly, it is a *process;* it is what the person actually thinks and does in a stressful encounter. Secondly it is *context-dependent;* coping is influenced by the particular encounter or appraisal that initiates it and by the resources available to manage that encounter. Finally, coping as a process is and should be defined '*independent of outcome*'; that is, independently of whether it was successful or not (see *Folkman,* **1984**; *Folkman et al.,* **1986a, 1986b**; *Lazarus & Folkman,* **1984**). There have been two approaches to the study of coping: that which attempts to classify the different types of coping strategies to produce a comprehensive taxonomy and that which considers coping as a problem solving process (*Dewe,* **2000**).

2.5.1   Coping Taxonomies

Lazarus (**1966**) has argued that a person usually employs both task and emotion-focused coping strategies. The former is an attempt at some form of action directly targeted at dealing

with the source of stress (adaptation *of* the environment), while the latter seeks directly to attenuate the emotional experience associated with that stress (adaptation *to* the environment). Most authors emphasize that no one type of coping strategy is necessarily better than any other in solving a problem. People use a mixture of strategies in most situations, although certain situations may tend to be associated with particular types of strategy. Some studies have tried to explore the existence of systematic links between stressors and coping styles, but found little empirical support for their hypotheses. *Salo* (**1995**) found differences in teachers' ways of coping, but those differences related to the amount, not the source, of stress experienced, and the timing (changed throughout the autumn term). Although in theory Lazarus' model allows for environmental feedback to alter the perceptions –and, hence, perhaps to determine future coping – in practice his taxonomy is rather static and emphasizes coping *styles*, whilst tending to ignore coping *behaviours* (*Dewe et al.,* **1993**).

2.5.2 Coping as Problem Solving

Coping can also be viewed as a problem solving strategy (Cox, 1987; Fisher, 1986; Dewe, 1993; Aspinwall & Taylor, 1997). Cox (1987), for example, has described a cycle of activities, beginning with recognition and diagnosis (analysis) followed by actions and evaluation through to reanalysis, which possibly represents the ideal problem-solving process. Coping may be seen as functional in its attempts to manage demands, by either changing them, redefining them (re-appraisal) or adapting to them. The styles and strategies used must be relevant and applicable to a given situation. The choice and successful use of these responses will be determined by both the nature of the situation, by the personal and social resources available and also by the type of causal reasoning adopted in the appraisal process.

2.6   INDIVIDUAL & GROUP DIFFERENCES

Most contemporary theories of stress allow for individual differences in the experience of stress, and in how and how well it is coped with. *Payne* (1988) presented a series of questions, including:

- How do individual differences relate to perceptions of stress in the work environment?

- Do they affect the way people cope with stress?

- Do they act as moderators of the stress health relationship?

- How do individual differences, such as competence and work ability, relate to the development of ill health?

There would appear to be two different approaches to research on individual differences based on *Payne's* (1988) questions. Effectively individual difference variables have been investigated as either: (1) components of the appraisal process, or (2) moderators of the stress-health relationship (see *Cox and Ferguson*, 1991). Hence, researchers have asked, for example, to what extent particular workers may be vulnerable to the experience of stress, or the extent to which 'hardiness', for example, (*Kobasa*, 1979; *Kobasa & Pucetti*, 1983; *Kobasa et al.*, 1981, 1982) moderates the relationship between job characteristics and worker health? This distinction between individual differences as components of the appraisal process and moderators of the stress-outcome relationship, can be easily understood in terms of transactional models of stress (e.g., *Cox and Griffiths*, 1996).

Primary appraisal is, by its very nature, subject to individual differences. *Firstly*, individual differences may exist in relation to the person's perception of job demands and pressures. *Secondly*, people vary in their ability to cope with demands, and in their perceptions of those abilities. Such variation may be a function of their intelligence, their experience and education, or their beliefs in their ability to cope (self efficacy: **Bandura, 1977**; job self-efficacy: **Schaubroeck & Merritt, 1997**). *Thirdly*, reasons may vary in the amount of control that they can exercise over any situation, not only as a function of that situation but also as a function of their beliefs about control. *Fourthly*, reasons may vary in their need for social support and the skills that they have for exploiting such support, and in their perceptions of support. *Finally*, the stress-health relationship is clearly moderated by individual differences, not only in secondary appraisal, but also in coping behaviour and emotional and physiological response tendencies, latencies and patterns.

2.6.1 Type A Behaviour

Over the last 30 years, much attention has focused on individual vulnerability in relation to coronary heart disease and on the role of psychological and behavioural factors in reacting to, and coping with, stressful situations. The concept of type A behaviour was originally developed as a description of overt behaviour by **Friedman & Rosenman (1974)** but has since been considerably broadened and as some have argued, weakened as a result (*Arthur et al.*, 1999; *Powell*, 1987). **Friedman & Rosenman (1974)** described *Type A behaviour* as a major behavioural risk-factor for cardiovascular illness. There are at least three

characteristics that mark out the type A individual whose risk of coronary heart disease appears, from studies in the United States, to be at least twice that of the non-A Type:

- A strong commitment to work and much involvement in their job

- A well developed sense of time urgency (always aware of time pressures and working against deadlines)

- A strong sense of competition and a marked tendency to be aggressive

Such behaviour is probably learnt, and is often valued by and maintained through particular organisational cultures. There is some confusion in the literature as to the status of the behaviours referred to above and their relative importance and that of related constructs.

Some refer to type A behaviour as a learnt style of behaviour, others as a coping pattern, and still others as a personality trait (*Powell,* **1987**). At the same time, there have been various suggestions as to its most important dimension. For example, *Glass* (**1977**) has argued that control is the determining factor, while Williams *et al.* (1985) and others have argued in favour of hostility or aggression (see for example, *Dembroski et al.*, **1985**; *MacDougall et al.*, **1985**), and others for low self-esteem (*Friedman & Ulmer*, **1984**). Various different measures have been developed, not all of which inter-relate strongly (e.g.: *Arthur et al.,* **1999**; *Powell,* **1987**), thus questioning their operational precision and construct validity. Perhaps, of the three, the two that have attracted most attention are (i) control and (ii) anger and hostility.

2.6.2   Control

The issue of control is important in understanding the nature of type A behaviour. The type A individual feels that they are always fighting to maintain control over events, which are often seen to be just beyond their grasp. Faced with these situations, they simply expend more time and effort trying to "get events under control" –and never really feel as if they have succeeded (*Glass & Singer*, 1972). The issue of control, and of being in control, is an important one and may distinguish between the vulnerability of type A's and the resistance of hardy types (*Kobasa*, 1979; *Weinberg et al.*, 1999; *Kobasa and Pucetti*, 1983; *Kobasa et al.*, 1981, 1982). *Kobasa's* hardy types report feeling in control of their work and their lives. Type A behaviour predicts cardiovascular illhealth, while hardiness predicts general good health.

2.6.3   Anger & Hostility

Indices of anger and hostility have been validated in prospective research as predictors of cardiovascular ill health. *Perez et al.* (1999) recently found that *expression of anger* discriminated between coronary patients on the one hand, and non-coronary patients and healthy people on the other. The relationship between type A behaviour and cardiovascular health is potentially moderated by a host of factors such as age, sex, socio-economic and educational status, employment status, medication and the cardiovascular outcome chosen for study (*Powell*, 1987).

2.6.4 Vulnerable Groups

Individual differences are obvious in the stress process affecting appraisal and coping mechanisms, and the stress-health relationship. Several different reviews have identified possible vulnerable groups (see, for example, *Levi*, **1984;** *Davidson and Earnshaw*, **1991**) which includes most workers. *Kasl* (**1992**) has attempted to summarise the different criteria and factors that define vulnerability in the following manner: socio-demography (for example, age and educational status), social status (for example, living alone), behavioural style (type A behaviour), skills and abilities, health status and medical history, and ongoing non-work problems. The recognition of the vulnerability of such groups is not new and, in the United Kingdom, its origins can be traced back to the earliest health and safety legislation as, for example, in the Health & Morals of Apprentices Act of 1802.

2.6.5 Selection

The individual and group differences have been highlighted in relation to the experience and health effects of stress. Such differences may be treated in a number of ways depending as much on moral and legal as on scientific considerations. Excluding particular workers or types of worker from work, which is judged to be stressful, may appear, at first sight, to be scientifically justified, but may not be legally sanctionable under the Equal Opportunities legislation in the EU Member States, or morally acceptable if other approaches are possible.

There appears to be little evidence of trait-like vulnerability to stress beyond that implied for psychological health by a personal or family history of related psychological disorders.

Evidence for the apparent existence of any such traits may simply reflect commonly occurring patterns of *person x environment* interactions. Alternative strategies, focused on the design of jobs and organisation of work are available and more defensible, given current knowledge of the relationship between work hazards and stress.

2.7   SUMMARY INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES – WORK ABILITY & COPING

The experience of stress is partly dependent on the individual's ability to cope with the demands placed on them by their work and on the way in which they subsequently cope with those demands. Related issues with respect to control and support are also significant. Further information is required on the nature, structure and effectiveness of individuals' abilities to meet work demands and to cope with any subsequent stress. The need for more information on coping arises from the need to better understand the concept of work ability or competence. This is nevertheless being flagged in relation to ageing research (e.g., *Griffiths*, *1999a; Ilmarinen & Rantanen, 1999*)

2.8 THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK

Increasingly claims against employers arise not so much as a result of the positive acts of the employer against the employee, but rather for an employer's failure to spot a problem and to address it.

Stress at work is the latest trend to hit the workplace and employers and managers will have to be more aware of its impact and implications. *Ian Moore* **of A&L Goodbody** looks at the effects of stress in the workplace and advises on how to deal with stressed employees.

Being an employer brings with it huge responsibilities; responsibilities and their consequent liabilities which are forever on the increase. Employers are frequently faced with claims and liabilities when it is least expected.

Stress at work - Up until relatively recently, the concept of employers' liability has been almost exclusively characterised by and applied to physical injury. However, in more recent times, attention has been focused upon employers' liability for psychological (or psychiatric) illness caused by stress suffered in the course of their employment.

Workplace stress arises when the demands of a person's job and/or the working environment exceed the person's capacity to meet them. For example, this might be caused by lack of training, poor recruitment, dull repetitive work, poor working environment, job insecurity, poor working relationships, management incompetence or highly demanding tasks. Keeping pace with the demands of the economy has infringed upon the personal time of employees.

Adding to the pressures that workers face are new bosses, computer surveillance of production, fewer health and retirement benefits, and the feeling they have to work longer and harder just to maintain their current economic status. Employees can be faced with sudden change, often without receiving the necessary technological support and training from their employing organisations. Workers at every level are experiencing increased tension and uncertainty and are updating their resumes. In addition, the days when an employee experienced day-to-day interaction with colleagues is long gone; this form of communication is fast becoming obsolete. For instance e-mail is rapidly replacing post; it may offer greater efficiency but the human factor has disappeared and with it often the employee's sense of well-being. Inevitably, this can have a profound negative effect on job performance.

The loss of a job can be devastating, putting unemployed workers at risk for physical illness, marital strain, anxiety, depression and even suicide. Loss of a job affects every part of life, from what time you get up in the morning, to whom you see and what you can afford to do. Until the transition is made to a new position, stress is chronic.

While the pressure of the challenge can be a positive force in the workplace, when demands become excessive they may create stress, which in turn can threaten the employee's physical or psychological well-being.

The effects of stress within the workplace may result in higher than average staff turnover, an increased level of absenteeism, low morale, excessive accident rates and ultimately the possibility of legal action being taken against the employer. International studies have indicated that the cost of occupational stress in Ireland could be as high as 10 % of gross national product around €7.4 million. (*Irish Examiner, Crowley, 2003*).

In Ireland the **Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act, 1989**, obliges employers to identify and safeguard against all risks to health and safety. Controlling workplace stress is no more an option than the control of any other hazard. If an employer fails in its duty of care to employees this may result in a civil action for compensation by the employee but it may also be a breach of the criminal law. The Health and Safety Authority (HSA) has the power to prosecute for breaches of the 1989 Act. However, to date the Health & Safety Authority has not brought any prosecution for injury resulting from occupational stress.

In addition to the 1989 Act, the **Employment Equality Act, 1998** has potential implications for such workplace claims by providing other possible avenues of legal redress for the stressed employee if the stress complained of is caused by discrimination under any of the grounds cited in the Act.

The most common causes of work-related stress are overwork, bullying, harassment or oppressive environment. In effect, if it can be established than an employee is suffering from abnormal stresses and strains of work beyond acceptable levels for an everyday workload, or that a particular employee's susceptibility to stress is being ignored or avoided, an employee is open to a potential action for compensation should injury arise to that employee. This in turn is problematic in that again there is no objective measure of what is an acceptable level.

2.8.1 Irish Caselaw

The position in relation to stress in Ireland is not quite as clear as in the UK. While there have been a considerable number of stress-related claims, the vast bulk of those claims have been

settled. As a result, Irish stress jurisprudence lacks a judgment of the nature of those handed down in the UK in the *Walker* and *Hatton* cases. There have, however, been a number of nervous shock and breach of contract cases that have touched on related issues.

In *Curran v Cadbury Ireland Limited* ([2000] 2 ILRM 343), for example, McMahon J stated that: The duty of the employer towards his employee is not confined to protecting the employee from physical injury only; it also extends to protecting the employee from non-physical injury such as psychiatric illness or the mental illness that might result from negligence or from harassment or bullying in the workplace.

In *Walker v Northumberland County Council* the English courts imposed liability where the plaintiff foreseeably suffered a nervous breakdown because of unreasonably stressful working conditions imposed on him by his employer. There is no reason to suspect that our courts would not follow this line of authority if it came before the courts in this jurisdiction.

In *Sullivan v The Southern Health Board* ([1997] 3 IR 123) the Plaintiff was a medical consultant at Mallow Hospital. When he was first appointed to that post, he shared responsibility for the provision of consultant medical services with a second consultant. The second consultant subsequently retired and was not replaced on a permanent basis. Government cut-backs also resulted in a series of other serious problems arising at the hospital between 1987 and 1991. A report issued by the Irish Hospitals Consultants Association at the time stated that: The service which is offered by the hospital is, despite the best efforts of the staff, both inadequate and sometimes dangerous because of the lack of basic

investigatory facilities and insufficient support staff. This risk is compounded by the completely inadequate number of beds available.

The Plaintiff's claim was based on an allegation of breach of contract. In particular, his contract provided that he had a right to have "reasonable facilities and resources for the proper discharge" of his duties made available to him by the Southern Health Board. He also argued that the Health Board was in breach of an implied contractual obligation to appoint a second medical consultant.

While the Supreme Court did not accept that the suggested implied term formed part of the Plaintiff's employment contract, it did appear to accept the High Court's finding that the Plaintiff might recover damages "for the stress and anxiety caused to him in both his professional and domestic life by the persistent failure of the Board to remedy his legitimate complaints." However, the ability of the Plaintiff to recover damages for those matters was dependant upon and "inextricably bound up with" what the Supreme Court regarded as "his unsustainable claims to damages for the alleged breach of contract in failing to appoint a permanent medical consultant." The case was eventually remitted for retrial to the High Court and was settled before that retrial could take place.

Finally, in the very recent case of *Fletcher v The Commissioners for Public Works* (Unreported, Supreme Court, 21 February 2003), the Supreme Court overturned an award of damages made to an employee suffering from reactive anxiety neurosis as a result of his exposure to asbestos and consequent fear of developing mesothelioma (even though he had

not developed any physical disease and was extremely unlikely to do so). According to the Court, it would be unreasonable to impose liability on employers in such a case.

Saehan Media (Irl) Ltd. V A. Worker. Work-related Stress goes it alone. This 1999 case is a very timely reminder of the new, vigorous approach to work-related stress now being taken by the industrial relations bodies. The employee was the head of security at the employer company. He alleged that, in the course of his employment, he was subjected to bullying, intimidation and harassment. As a result, he suffered the effects of work-related stress. He made a complaint through the appropriate procedure. However, the response of his employer was considered inadequate. A reference of the complaint was made directly to the Labour Court where an investigation was undertaken at the request of the parties. The Court determined that the incidents complained of did not, in themselves, constitute bullying. However, it accepted that the employee was, nevertheless suffering from work-related stress. In doing so, it stated:

"Work-related stress is recognised as a health and safety issue and employers have an obligation to deal with instances of its occurrence which are brought to their attention."

Compensation in the sum of €650 was recommended. What is important in this case is not so much the amount of compensation but that compensation was awarded at all. The Labour Court essentially unshackled work-related stress from the constraints of the actual allegation of bullying and considered its presence as a wrong in itself separate to the issue of bullying. It must be borne in mind that the situation was made worse by the employer's failure to respond.

Allen v. Independent Newspapers (Irl) Ltd, Workplace bullying hits the front page

(UD 641/200)

This 2001 decision is one of the most important cases yet in Ireland on stress and bullying in the workplace. The claimant, Ms. Allen, a high profile journalist, was employed as the crime correspondent of the respondent from August 1996 to September 2000. She alleged before the EAT that she had been subjected to continuous harassment and bullying and that she had been effectively isolated at work. This conduct undermined her confidence and health to such a degree that she could no longer tolerate her working environment and was left with no option but to resign. It was also alleged that the conduct of the respondent had led, not only to her constructive dismissal, but also to illness. In particular, the claimant had suffered serious work-related stress symptoms including sleeplessness, palpitations, nervousness, headaches, poor-appetite, concentration loss and associated difficulties and loss of confidence. As a result, she also claimed that she had been and remained unfit for work following her resignation. Accordingly, Ms. Allen also instituted parallel High Court personal injury proceedings.

She was awarded £70,500 in compensation (equating to 78 weeks gross remuneration) and, in an extremely important decision; this included future financial loss due to the work-related stress injuries.

In May 2001 in Ireland a sales representative settled a work-related stress claim in the High Court for a reputed €220,000. He had claimed that he was forced to retire on grounds of ill health after suffering severe depression caused by overwork.

Judges are putting a high value on stress and Irish employers must therefore accept that mental breakdown resulting from work issues is yet another source for claims.

2.8.2 How can employers reduce their overall exposure to potential claims

Employers should:

Adopt and pursue better recruitment policies to ensure the right people are recruited for the right jobs.

Adopt and apply effective personnel policies to deal with work-related stress and to monitor employees and their reaction to work and the work environment on an ongoing basis. Monitor absence levels, reasons for absence and act on information revealed.

Set out stated objectives on how to deal with work related stress if it does arise, including the involvement of occupational health specialists, leave of absence and health monitoring.

Take a forensic approach to medical examinations and ensure that doctors, counsellors and other advisers have all facts and opinions made available to them so that they can give well-informed and balanced advice and opinions.

Ensure appropriate outplacement or retraining for employees who are found to be unsuited to the nature or demands of the work they are required to do. ·

What can an employer do if he or she thinks an employee is suffering from stress?

The law is still developing, so there is no definitive answer that will help the employer to totally protect himself or herself from litigation. However, if an employer believes that any member of staff is stressed, it would appear that the least an Irish Court would expect is that the employer relieves the employee of his/her duties on full salary (or reduces those duties), while taking the necessary steps to obtain expert assistance from health professionals. It may be the case that some employers are reluctant to relieve/reduce an employee's duties because it may appear that the employee is being suspended. Some employers may also consider it an expensive way of dealing with the problem.

If the employee considers that he or she is being suspended and refuses to take time off, the employer must point out the consequences of their remaining at their own insistence and of working in a potentially problematic environment. The content of such a discussion should be recorded so that the employer can demonstrate that they acted in a reasonable manner if there is a subsequent claim for damages.

Those who think that this is an expensive way to deal with the problem should consider the impact of stress on the employee and the cost implications of facing a liability claim. The cost of prevention in the first place is generally far less than the cost of the cure.

What to look out for

The most common causes of work-related stress and those which the employer should be on notice of are:

1) **Overwork:**

   Employees undertaking more work than they are capable of doing.

2) **Bullying, Harassment or an Oppressive Environment:**

   Employees falling victim to the actions of others in the workplace.

3) **Time Off:**

   Employees who are forced to work longer hours or are unable to take their holiday entitlements because of targets or large work-loads.

4) **Monotony:**

   Employees whose work is monotonous and over which they have no control.

5) **Incentives;**

   Working harder and longer hours for bonuses or attractive commission may induce employees to place themselves under more stress than they can handle.

6) **Pressure:**

   To meet targets, achieve results and make businesses more profitable (including threats of disciplinary action or dismissal for failure to do so) can, and very often will lead to increased work-related stress for which the employer may be held liable.

The principal difficulty with stress-related claims is that stress is very much a subjective ailment, varying from individual to individual. In many cases, employers are concerned that

the symptoms may not or cannot be independently verified and that the effects of stress can be exaggerated or indeed invented. A person's personal life can cause them all sorts of stresses, depending on their lifestyle, how fortunate they may be in life, the people who surround them, their personal habits and their personality. Added to this may be a job to which they were never suited, work-mates with whom they don't get on, normal changes in work such as new technology or younger employees changing the atmosphere and attitudes within the workplace.

2.9 THE EXTENT OF THE PROBLEM

"Stress must be taken seriously" - people will hardly be surprised to learn that work and money are the leading causes of stress in this country. A survey conducted by the Mental Health Association of Ireland in 2001 found that about a third of Irish people said that stress had a negative impact on their health. The symptoms of stress may show up in a tendency to tearfulness, impulsiveness, aggressiveness and irritability without apparent cause, or some other uncharacteristic behaviour. Sufferers may exhibit poor levels of concentration and develop a variety of unexplained illnesses. They may lose interest in aspects of life both at work and outside, and may be weary, lethargic and apathetic. Stress rarely receives the kind of attention it deserves, especially with changes in society contributing to more stressful conditions. Stress is currently cited as the second most common cause of absence from work lasting over three weeks. In a survey of 54,400 users, irishhealth.com found that an equal number of people some 28% of respondents cited the pressures of work and making money as the most stressful aspects of their daily lives. Of course, these are largely related, because work is the way that people make money. Since so much time is spent at work, it is

understandable that a high percentage of stress would be work-related. European studies have found that about a third of people suffer from stress at their jobs. Traditionally family members were a refuge rather than a cause of stress, but 16% of the people surveyed cited family pressures as a source of stress, and 24% cited personal relationships. Many families now have two members working outside the home, which adds considerably to the levels of stress, especially when they come home and share burdens that would have been the province of one partner in earlier years. People spend more time at work than previous generations and they usually live further from their employment. Traveling is facilitated by the availability of cars and other forms of transportation, but many people have to travel to and from work amid unprecedented levels of congestion on our roads. Stress is not necessarily a bad thing at work, provided that it does not act negatively on an individual's health. Work can actually be a relief from stress, by affording a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction as well as providing the social benefits of companionship among work colleagues. This is all part of a broader sense of community. People need to identify the actual cause of their stress, if they are to do something about it. It is pointless merely attributing stress to work in a general and undefined way. There is a real need to determine the actual causes of stress at work, and distinguish whether it is related to long hours, shift work, bullying, or possibly an inability to take holidays.

More workers are leaving their jobs because of job-related stress and psychological hazards in employment are fast replacing the physical hazards, delegates at a Health & Safety Authority conference in Dublin were told in March 2002. While many employees have paid attention to psychical injuries, some are unaware they must also provide protection for their workers from stress, work overload, bullying and trauma.

According to Maurice Quinlan, director of the EAP Institute, many companies do not know they have a legal obligation to protect their employees from this type of harm and of the cost involved if they do not. For instance, a social worker in Britain was awarded compensation of €200,000 after having left the job with a stress-related illness while a pharmaceutical representative in Ireland received €250,000 in compensation after having sued his employer for work overload.

"Employers must recognize that they have a duty of care to their employees to protect them from stress and work overload," Mr. Quinlan said. According to Mr. Quinlan workers can sue their employers if they do not put measures in place to deal with psychological-related illnesses "If your employer overloads you with work, you suffer an injury and come back to work and nothing has changed then you can sue your employer. "The fact that we live in a long-hours culture and stress is an accepted part of employment is not a valid excuse," he added.

In 2003, small businesses in Ireland lost on average €172 million per annum and 3.8 million days were lost through absenteeism, as a report by the Small Firms Association has shown. The report also shows that workers in small companies are less likely to miss work through illness than their counterparts in larger businesses, Patricia Callan, Assistant Director of the Small Firms Association said: "The results show marked differences across sectors and regions, and show that small firms with less than 50 employees, are less likely to have workers absent on sick leave than larger firms." The national average for absenteeism is 3.4%

or 7.8 working days. For larger firms this rises to 4.6% or 10.5 working days. For small firms the average falls to 2.6% or 5.9 working days.

A wide range of costs are associated with absenteeism relating to eg., commitment, turnover, morale, trust, and productivity. Perhaps the most tangible of these is in monetary terms. A study conducted by the Small Firms Association took place throughout Ireland in April 2004; it covered all sectors of Irish Business and the results were as follows:-

"Stress resulting from bullying, heavy workloads, inter personal conflicts, conflicting demands, poor training and recruitment were the major causes of absenteeism, replacing back pain as the most commonly cited problem on medical certs"

"This is a particularly concerning development, as aside from absenteeism, stress can lead to a less productive workforce, faulty decision-making, and ultimately the possibility of legal action being taken against the company for negligence or constructive dismissal".

Ms. Callan said employers should ensure that they are fulfilling their duty of care to their employees by conducting stress risk assessments as part of their review of their Health & Safety Statements, as well as implementing a specific policy on workplace stress. A first step in this assessment may be to purchase **'Work Positive'** from the HSA. (This is a five-step resource pack developed by the HSA to assist organisations to identify stress levels, benchmark their position against other organisations and develop prevention policies). They should educate employees on stress management, while being receptive to the potential causes of stress and the early warning signs of stress.

The increased incidence of stress is not a particularly Irish phenomenon an ILO (International Labour Organisation) Survey from 2000 shows that in the EU overall, 4% of the gross national product goes to treat mentally-ill employees, whilst in the UK, three in ten employees suffer from mental health problems, resulting in an estimated 80m lost working days a year and 14% of NHS in-patient costs and 25% of the cost of medication result from stress-related illnesses in workers.

2.10   CONCLUSION

There is a growing consensus on the definition of stress as a negative psychological state with cognitive and emotional components, and on its effects on the health of both the individual employees and their organisations.

The experience of stress is partly dependent on the individual's ability to cope with the demands placed on them by their work and on the way in which they subsequently cope with those demands, as well as relating to issues of control and support.

There are numerous triggers of stress in the workplace, the most common are – excessive working hours, unrealistic deadlines, inordinate workload, work pressure, fear, uncertainty and change. These will be further illustrated in Chapter 4 Findings, Part 1 and Part 11.

Stress in the workplace is a significant health and safety issue, which cannot be ignored. Stress is not just a workplace issue; it is a national problem that needs to be addressed with great urgency.

CHAPTER 3

Research Methodology

3.0   METHODOLOGY

The research philosophy has adopted the approach of the Phenomenology tradition. This approach emphasizes the importance of multiple measures and observations, each of which may possess different types of error, and the need to use *triangulation* across these multiple sources to try to get a better understanding of real life situations.

The research approach involved the inductive method, in which data was collected and a theory subsequently derived from the data analysis. As the research approach was largely inductive, an initial questionnaire survey followed by semi- structured interviews was utilized.

The research strategy has taken on the Grounded Theory Strategy. It is better to think of it as 'theory building' through a combination of induction and deduction. In grounded theory, data collection starts without the formation of an initial theoretical framework. Constant reference to the data to develop and test theory leads **Hussey & Hussey** *(1997)* to call grounded theory an inductive/deductive approach, theory being grounded in such continual reference to the data. My rationale for adopting the above-mentioned approaches is that we currently have 6 personnel out on long-term illness and reports of work related stress.

Semi Structured Interviews

Work related stress involves a strong negative emotional reaction to work and can significantly alter the behaviour of the person affected, impairing the quality of their life as

well as damaging their health. While the general literature pertaining to stress is extensive (see Chapter 2, Literature Review), in order to identify and assess work-related stress on an organization-specific basis, twelve semi-structured interviews were conducted. As a number of employees were out on long-term illness with reports of work-related stress at the time of conducting this research, these were selected as participants for the semi-structured interviews. In order to avoid any bias, a further six interviews with personnel working in similar environments within the organisation who were not absent during this time were carried out.

The interviews were transcribed verbatim and filed according to various categories identified. The material was typically in the form of paragraphs that were cross-classified into several categories. Each statement was filed and comparisons with the previous statements were made. In addition, notes in respect to the content of the category were kept. As the categories evolved, some disappeared and merged under more general titles. Certain categories became parts of matched pairs or triads in which any given comment would typically be filed in each constituent category. This helped to reveal connections between categories.

Prior to commencing the interviews, the personnel in question had been approached in order to assess the possibility of instead holding a focus group in order to avoid duplication. While at first this had been agreed, upon further reflection this was declined and it was made clear they would rather meet on a one-to-one basis. They had indicated that they would be much more relaxed, honest and open in their answers if the interviews were held on a one-to-one basis. Knowing how important it was to achieve a real understanding and obtain a true picture, their comments were taken on board and the Semi-Structured Interviews were held

individually with participants. To those concerned it was a much more personal touch, giving

them a chance to air their problems and making them feel special.

The face-to-face semi-structured interviews involved 18 open-ended questions, which would

facilitate the identification of stress inducing practices in the workplace, which accounted for

absenteeism. The interviews were conducted over a two-week period and each interview

lasted for at least one hour. From the original 18 questions asked, the focus was narrowed

down to 10 categories, six areas relating to the work context and four relating to work content.

It was important to identify whether the following stress indicators were important, namely

physical, mental, emotional and behavioural, with the questions posed designed to ascertain

this.

Questionnaire

A further source for primary data collection was a questionnaire survey. This is a technique

of data collection in which each person is asked to respond to the same set of questions in a

predetermined order (**deVaus**, *2002*). The data collected from this questionnaire offered a

clearer understanding of the levels of stress currently prevailing within the organisation.

A "Check Your Stress Levels" Questionnaire was sent to the 145 employees of Mahon,

Farrelly & Associates. The return of 130 usable questionnaires represented a response rate of

90 per cent. The employees were made up of 80 males (62 percent) and 50 females (38

percent). The mean age of the employees was 35 years and 45 percent described themselves

as top or senior management. Just over three quarters (75 percent) were at least primary

degree holders, while the remainder worked in marketing-sales, in human resource

management and financial accounting. Most (62 percent) had been in their present position for up to five years, while (33 percent) had been with the organisation for more than ten years. Almost all (96 percent) worked full time.

The questionnaire was divided into two sections. In Section 1 of the questionnaire the participants were asked to respond to a number of questions concerning their stress levels. A series of mainly open-ended questions asked them to indicate the following:

- How their energy and confidence levels were;

- Do they feel emotional or cry easily?

- How do they cope with change?

- How well do they cope with conflict?

- Do they feel apathetic, as it nothing matters?

- How often do they feel irritable?

In section 2 of the questionnaire participants were asked to state whether they were Fee-Earning or Non Fee-Earning staff and the department in which they worked. The logic behind this was to assist in identifying whether there were trends or patterns of stress in certain departments within the firm and whether personnel who worked in a fee-earning environment were experiencing greater levels of stress than those who worked in an non-fee earning environment. Personnel were given two weeks to complete and return the questionnaires. Providing an envelope for the finished questionnaire ensured confidentiality and all completed questionnaires were delivered to a designated mailbag in head office. This process could explain the high response rate of 90 percent (130 usable responses out of 145

questionnaires distributed). To ensure confidentiality and anonymity for employees, identification of respondents was not requested and confidentiality of individual responses was guaranteed.

Methodology Implication

The questionnaire originally was being sent out on Monday March 8th 2004. However, on Wednesday evening 3rd March 2004 one of our Senior Partners died in a tragic home accident. It was referred to as "Death by Misadventure". This no doubt may have had some impact on the findings, which will be discussed further in Chapter 4. A month after the event the survey was eventually distributed to each member of staff.

CHAPTER 4 – PART 1

Presentation of Findings

Semi Structured Interviews

4.1   SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

As was outlined in the Methodology (see Chapter 3) a series of semi-structured interviews were conducted in order to investigate stress-inducing work-place practices.   18 questions were asked to each individual and the following 10 themes were developed from the results. (See Appendix II)   This was further broken down to 6 work context hazards and 4 work content hazards.   This chapter presents the main findings.

Category	Hazards
	Work Context
Organisational culture and function	Poor closed communications, low levels of support for problem-solving and personal development, lack of definition of organisational objectives and goals.
Role in organisation	Role ambiguity, Role Insufficiency, Responsibility for people.
Career Development	Career stagnation and uncertainty, under promotion, and no succession planning in operation.
Decision Making Structure	No participation in decision-making – when decision has been made you are informed what is happening
Interpersonal Relationships at Work	Poor relationships with superiors only.
Home-work Interface	Conflicting demands of work and home, dual career problems.
	Work Content
Work Environment and Facilities	Problems regarding the reliability, suitability and maintenance / repair of the A.C. Facilities.

Task Design	High level of uncertainty and under-use of skills.
Work Pressure / Workload	Performing less well / gives a buzz
Work Schedule	Long and unsociable hours. Mostly 24 x 7

Organisational Culture and Function

The very fact of working within an organisation, as most employees do (Cox *et al.*, 1990), is perceived as a threat to individual freedom, autonomy and identity (Hingley & Cooper, 1986). The research findings indicated that employees' perceptions and descriptions of their organisations suggested that these revolved around three distinct aspects of organisational function and culture: *the organisation as a task environment, as a problem-solving environment and as a development environment* (Cox & Howarth, 1990; Cox & Leiter, 1992). The evidence suggests that the organisation is perceived to be poor in respect to these environments, and is associated with increased levels of stress. The evidence further shows that management styles have a substantial impact on the emotional well-being of workers. This was further supported by the following comments from the interviewees:-

"The management style is very dictorial more like" Hitler" style. They expect people to carry out everyday jobs they area incapable of doing; they also assume people have strengths in all areas of auctioneering and under performers are annihilated instead of being supported."

"For me the management style is fine but sometimes it can be too authoritarian. Too task focussed spring to mind – people are not as important as the task. I have become immune to

the management style over the last 30 years – it is the younger staff and the new recruits I feel

sorry for".

Role in the Organisation

The research evidence states that the 'role in organisation' is a potential stressor and relates

largely to issues of ambiguity and conflict with respect to an individual's role (Kahn *et al.*,

1964; Kahn, 1973; Ingersoll *et al.*, 1999; Jackson & Schuler, 1985).

Role Ambiguity

Role ambiguity occurs when a worker has inadequate information about his or her work role.

The research indicated that the lack of clarity regarding expectations and the general

uncertainty about the scope and responsibilities of their jobs was related to lower job

motivation, job-related stress and ill health. This supports the findings of Kahn et al (1964)

who showed that workers suffering from role ambiguity were more likely to experience lower

job satisfaction, a greater incidence of job-related stress, greater feelings of futility and lower

levels of self confidence.

Role Insufficiency

Role insufficiency referred to the failure of the organisation making full use of the

individual's abilities and training. This insufficiency has been reported to lead to feelings of

stress and is associated with psychological strain and low job satisfaction and organisational commitment and is further supported by Brook (1973) and Bhalla et al (1991).

Responsibility for People

Responsibility for people was identified as a potential source of stress associated with role issues. Wardell et al. (1964) showed that responsibility for people, compared to responsibility for things, was likely to lead to greater risk of coronary heart disease.

Career Development

The lack career development in the organisation is a source of stress, as particular emphasis is placed on the relationship between career development and competence or worth. Marshall (1977) identified two major clusters of potential sources of stress in this area. Firstly, a lack of job security and obsolescence (i.e. fear of redundancy and forced early retirement) and secondly, status incongruity in the form of under or over-promotion, and frustration at having reached a career ceiling. Those interviewed believe that these fears give rise to stress when workers are unable to adapt their expectations to the reality of their situation. This was highlighted in the assertions of one particular interviewee who commented that:-

"The organizations' succession planning processes which are currently in place only work to perpetuate the status quo, limit diversity, and stifle ingenuity and risk-taking".

Decision Making Structure

The research findings indicated a lack of employee participation in aspects of decision-making affecting their work. The organisation operates a non-participative style of decision-making. However, the other aspects of participation such as status also affect health and behaviour. Our experience of low control at work and low decision latitude is associated with our experience of stress, anxiety, depression, apathy as well as exhaustion and low self-esteem. However, it has been argued by Neufeld & Paterson, (1989) that control can also be a double-edged sword: *"the demands implied by the choices involved in controlling situations can themselves be a source of stress"*.

Earlier research has indicated that decision-making structures are important issues in job design and work organisation (Karasek & Theorell, 1990).

Interpersonal Relationships at Work

It has been argued strongly that good relationships amongst workers and members of work groups are essential for both individual and organisational health (Cooper, 1981). However, poor relationships with superiors has been identified from the research findings. Low interpersonal support at work was found to be associated with high anxiety, emotional exhaustion, job tension and low job satisfaction.

The results further indicated that although there is a direct link between the number of hours worked and stress levels, the number of hours worked was, however positively related to the perceived availability of social support.

Home-Work Interface

A significant finding obtained through the analysis of the semi structured interviews indicated that both men and women experience problems with home-work interface. The difficulties faced in resolving conflicts between work and family appeared enhanced when the family in question had young children; again this was particularly so for women workers rather than men.

Furthermore, failure to resolve adequately the conflicting demands between work and family have damaged the support available from spouses, and the family in general.

This was further supported by the following comment from two of the interviewees

"I deal with my home-work interface with great difficulty, but I struggle on. Not an easy task with two young children".

"I handle my home-work interface with enormous difficulty - well I manage as best I can. In fact; I have just lost my second girlfriend to the joys of having to cope with home-work life"

The concept of the work-home interface relates not only to domestic life and the family but also to the broader domain of life outside of work. Research has indicated that problems

relating to the interface between work and the family involve resolving conflicts of demands on time and commitment, and revolve around issues of support.

While elements of these findings are supported by Hingley & Cooper (1986) there appears however to be a lack of recognition of the impact which home-work interface has on male stress levels.

Task Design

There are several different aspects of job content which are hazardous: these include low value of work, the low use of skills, lack of task variety and repetitiveness in work, uncertainty, lack of opportunity to learn, high attentional demands, conflicting demands and insufficient resources (Kale, 1992).

Uncertainty and insufficient resources have been identified as the major causes for concern of the participants interviewed.

Uncertainty

The findings indicated that uncertainty in work, in the form of lack of feedback on performance, is a source of stress particularly when it extended across a long period of time. Such uncertainty was expressed in ways other than lack of performance feedback, for example, uncertainty about the desirable behaviours required (role ambiguity) and uncertainty

about the future (job insecurity and redundancy). Earlier research by Warr (1992) supports these findings.

In relation to the aspect of have insufficient resources, this was strongly confirmed by the following comment from one of the interviewees

"The department was severely under resourced – I was doing the job of four people and had no support, I was stressed out of my tree. I didn't seek extra resources because then I would be admitting that I had failed".

Workload / Work Pressure

Workload was one of the first aspects of work to receive attention (Stewart, 1976), and it has long been clear that both work overload and work underload can be problematic (Jones et al., 1998). French and his colleagues, among others, have made a further distinction between quantitative and qualitative workload (French et al., 1974). Both have been associated with the experience of stress. Quantitative workload refers to the amount of work to be done while qualitative workload refers to the difficulty of that work.

While the comments of each and every participant interviewed concur with the earlier research noted above, there appears to be a lack of acknowledgment that the pressure caused by work overload causes them to perform less well.

Work Schedule

There are two main issues that relate to the effects of work scheduling on health: shift working and long work hours. The findings from the semi-structured interviews relate only to long unsociable hours and control over their work schedule. All participants interviewed had more or less the same comment to make in relation to their work schedule. The following are a few examples –

"Non stop – 6 days a week and Sundays were spent writing text for brochures. These hours are absolutely crazy. The organisation is totally consumed with their goal of making money and the property business in general. They are inclined to forget that their staff are their product and they must being to consider the person behind the task in future."

"Very demanding work schedule, the output per individual in the department is huge, yet the organisation always requires more. Time in lieu for all the extra Saturday and Sunday work is never offered, in order that one may recharge their batteries – result if total burnout by August of each year."

"Auctioneering is a very stressful environment coupled with the long unsociable hours worked. Vendors have become equally more demanding in the 21st Century".

Control over work schedules is an important factor in job design and work organisation. Lack of control over their work schedules has been identified as a source of stress to the workers.

While elements of earlier research support my findings, to date research has been restricted to systematic investigations of performance effects, and little consideration of the implications for occupational, exposure limits of extensions to the working day.

Spurgeon et al. (1997) conclude that the attitudes and motivation of the people concerned, the job requirements, and other aspects of the organisational and cultural climate are likely to influence the level and nature of health and performance outcomes. However, they also suggest that there is currently sufficient evidence to raise concerns about the risks to health and safety of long working hours.

Authors Comments

The responses to the questions received from personnel who worked in Head Office were more or less what was expected, but from personnel who worked in the Branch Offices, their responses were totally different.

CHAPTER 4 – PART 11

Presentation of Findings

Questionnaires

4.2   QUESTIONNAIRES

As was outlined in the Methodology (see Chapter 3) A "Check Your Stress Levels" Questionnaire was sent to the 145 employees of Mahon, Farrelly & Associates in order to investigate their stress levels and to state whether they were fee-earning or non fee-earning staff and the department in which they worked. (*See Appendix III*).

The survey was analysed using SPSS and cross tabulations were made on all major areas. Qualitative information was compiled using the additional comments sheet at the end of the survey. This chapter presents the main findings.

Department	Levels Of Stress	Level of Stress Scored
Residential Sales	0 –20 requires urgent steps to be taken	Level 14
Commercial agency	0 –20 requires urgent steps to be taken	Level 17
Building Surveying & Project Consultancy	0 –20 requires urgent steps to be taken	Level 18
Property Management	0 –20 requires urgent steps to be taken	Level 20
Professional Services	20-25 appears to be managing their stress levels fairly well	Level 22
Investments	20-25 appears to be managing their stress levels fairly well	Level 24
Residential Lettings	20-25 appears to be managing their stress levels fairly well	Level 25
Support Services	26-30 appears to have a low level of stress.	Level 28
Cork Branch Office	26-30 appears to have a low level of stress.	Level 28

Residential Sales Department

This department's areas of expertise are the sale, purchase and acquisition of residential property in the city, rural and / or country areas.

The results of the survey indicated that this department has the highest level of stress in the organisation and four major areas were identified:-

Design of tasks – Excessive workload, infrequent breaks and hectic schedules were reported.

Interpersonal Relationships - Poor relationships with superiors have been identified from the research findings and some participants have suggested management is bullying them.

Management Style – Too task focused, the task is more important than the human element. Lack of recognition and the right to dignity of all were the areas identified.

Changing work patterns – Self regulated work and technological changes.

Commercial Agency Department

This department is responsible for the sale, letting, lease disposal and assignment and / or acquisition of industrial, development, office and retail property. Other professional services are also carried out in the Commercial Agency section, as determined by the client.

The findings indicate this is another department where urgent action is required. Two areas were identified as sources of stress:-

Work roles - unclear roles and too much responsibility for some and too little for others – there appears to be no happy medium.

Management Style – Poor communications and the lack of recognition both in terms feedback and monetary were acknowledged.

Building Surveying & Project Consultancy Department

This department is accountable for giving advice to property owners and occupiers on the condition of buildings, maintenance, improvements, refurbishments and new building projects.

In addition they provide advice on legal and statutory obligations in relation to fire, health and safety that require periodic audits to ensure compliance. They also design and manage projects on new and existing buildings.

The results indicate yet another department where urgent action is required. One major area was identified as the source of stress:-

Support – No feedback on how we are performing in our job, only criticisms when we do something wrong.

Property Management Department

This department is in charge essentially of the financial day-to-day management of individual properties and entire portfolios. Their experience enables them to improve investment performance and operating efficiency for investors as well as owner-occupiers.

The findings indicate yet department where urgent action is required. Two areas were identified as the major sources of stress:-

Training – Lack of training, pour skills need to be developed. It is a matter of sink or swim.

Change - The changing world of work – large scale socio-economic and technological changes.

Professional Services Department

This department is responsible for the following areas:-

Asset Valuations

Valuations for balance sheet purposes, financial statements, mergers and acquisitions, including advice on sales purchases and leasing. They also have in-house valuation specialists for plant and machinery.

Compulsory Purchase Order and Compensation

Handling compensation claims arising from the effect of public works and major changes to infrastructure, both on behalf of the acquiring authorities and of claimants.

Insolvency

A rapid response service in the valuation and disposal of property and plant and machinery.

Landlord and Tenant

Modern leases are complex and professional advice is necessary at the outset, especially when detailing renewals and in dealing with rent reviews.

Ratings

Advice on rating assessments and management of appeals for clients where opportunities for adjustment arise. They have established effective procedures for dealing with appeals promptly so as to minimize the burden to their clients.

The research indicates that this department appears to be managing their stress levels fairly well but the following area was identified as requiring fine tuning:-

Regular feedback and recognition of performance and not just in monetary terms.

Investments Department

This department gives comprehensive advice on acquisitions, disposals, valuations and financing of commercial property investments and development opportunities to private property investors, overseas investors and institutions.

The survey indicates that this is another department who appears to be managing their stress levels fairly well but the following area was identified as requiring modification:-

Clear goals for employees in line with organisation goals.

Residential Lettings Department

This department acts for landlords in the letting of properties throughout the Dublin area.

The findings indicate that this is one more department who appears to be managing their stress levels fairly well but the following area was identified as requiring alteration:-

Consistent and fair management actions.

Support Services Department

This department' services encompasses the following :

H.R., Marketing, Accounting, Mortgage Services, DTP / Printing, Research, Data & Record Management and Secretarial Services

The survey indicates that this department appears to have a low level of stress, hopefully due to their relaxed attitude to life. The following area was identified as requiring some attention:-

Employee input into decision-making and career profession.

Cork Office

This office provides advice on sale, letting, lease disposal and assignment and / or acquisition of industrial, development, office and retail property. Other professional services are also carried out in Cork, as determined by the client.

The research indicates that this department appears to have a low level of stress, optimistically due to their relaxed attitude to life. . The following area was identified as requiring some thought:-

Respect for the dignity of each employee.

Changing Work Patterns

The areas identified in the survey in relation to "The changing World of Work" are as follows:-

Changing Work Patterns
• The increased use of information and communications technology in the workplace • Self regulated work and teamwork • Changes in employment patterns: outsourcing and globalisation • Demands for workers' flexibility in terms of number of skills and unsociable hours.

The constantly evolving patterns and demography of work underline the need to put the management of work-related stress in the wider context of other inter-related problems (e.g. social inequality, discrimination, workplace bullying and harassment) and against the background of an increasingly diverse working population in terms of age, disability, ethnic origin and gender. Only if we look at these issues together, in an integrated way, can we ever achieve a comprehensive and successful strategy for the management of work-related stress. This is one of the challenges for managers, employers and workers.

Implications for Research

The extent to which the untimely and tragic death of our dear friend and colleague has influenced the responses is difficult to ascertain. Yet it is likely that it may have been an influencing factor on the findings.

Logically the measurement of the stress state must be based primarily on self-report measures, which focus on the appraisal process and on the emotional experience of stress. Measures relating to appraisal need to consider the worker's perceptions of the demands on them, their ability to cope with those demands, their needs and the extent to which they are fulfilled by work, the control they have over work and the support they receive in relation to work. It is necessary to go beyond simply asking workers whether particular demands, etc. are present (or absent) in their work environments and measure various dimensions of demand such as frequency, duration and level.

Furthermore, measures need to be used in a way, which allows for the possibility of interactions between perceptions, such as demand with control or demand and control with support.

The importance to the worker of coping with particular combinations and expressions of these work characteristics needs also to be taken into account. Earlier research by Sells (1970) and Cox (1978) support these declarations.

4.3   CONCLUSION

There is a growing consensus on the definition of stress as a negative psychological state with cognitive and emotional components, a psychological state which is both part of and reflects a wider process of interactions between the person and their (work) environment.

The experience of stress is partly dependent on the individual's ability to cope with the demands placed on them by their work, and on the way in which the subsequently cope with those demands and related issues of control and support.

Work-related stress results from the interaction of the individual and the working environment. The individual brings with him or her into the workplace personality, medical history, psychological make-up and coping skills.

The working environment involves:-

- The tasks of the job (content/workload)

- The relationships at work

- The hierarchies and leadership involved

- The training given

- The degree of control

- The changing world of work

- The reward systems in place

Certain working conditions appear to be more stressful to more people than others, regardless of individual factors.

CHAPTER 5

Overall Conclusions

5.0   CONCLUSION

There are a number of different definitions of stress and work-related stress, each emphasising different aspects of the phenomenon. Stress can be broadly defined as the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures/demands placed on them. Work-related stress simply refers to such reactions related to the pressures of the working environment.

Stress is therefore the result of a process, a series of events, which involves the person feeling 'bad' as well as their thinking being focused on the negative.

This experience of stress can be a result of events within an individual's home life, their social life, their working life or from some aspect of their past life. As the above definition explains, there is an individual component to all stress in that the individual interprets events and makes judgments based on his or her own personality, coping style and beliefs. There is also an organisational component, where aspects of the working environment, either technical or social, together expose workers to potential stress reactions.

/

The world of work has changed significantly in the past 20 years and this brings new pressures. To start to understand stress is to first appreciate how people respond to different pressures and more importantly to recognise that it is only when a person feels unable to cope that pressure becomes stress. The right amount of pressure can stimulate us to succeed, and success brings satisfaction. Pressures only become stress when the individual feels unable to cope with the demands placed on them. This perception varies considerably between people and, for each of us, the pressure/stress boundary is constantly shifting.

If the individual feels exposed to a stressful environment and feels unsupported, the stress he or she experiences may become stronger and can lead to health problems, illness, absenteeism and other organisational problems.

Employers have a legal duty to protect the health and safety of all employees and prevent workplace risks. On of the main problems are the different points of view regarding the causes of stress. The employer should be clear that good management leads to healthy workplaces and it is also good business. It is important to know which factors cause stress. Therefore it is imperative that management communicates openly with workers and finds good practical solutions to improve working conditions.

Research continues to show that our satisfaction at work is very much related to how work makes us feel, often to a large extent as how much we get paid, or what our career prospects are. Therefore having a policy to reduce Work-Related Stress is in everyone's interest.

While stress at work will remain a major challenge to occupational health, our ability to understand and manage that challenge is improving. The future looks bright.

CHAPTER 6

Recommendations

6.0   Recommendations For Further Research

While earlier research supports the majority of the findings of this report, there are several distinct areas in which more research is required:

Some relate to the individual, but others relate to the design and management of work and interventions to improve the work environment.

In order to have a greater understanding of the processes or factors underlying Work-Related Stress, a breakdown according to gender, age, fee and non-fee earning staff would be recommended. It was not possible to address any potential differences arising in relation to the above as these lay beyond the scope of this thesis.

More research is required on the nature, structure and effectiveness of individuals' abilities to meet work demands and to cope with any subsequent stress.

6.1 Recommendations for Work Practices

Since stress is currently one of the main risks to health and worker's safety, we need an integrated health promotion strategy, which meets both the workers' needs and those of the organisation. This should implement actions specifically aimed at:-

- Developing a coherent and general prevention policy which deals with how tasks are designed, the role of the worker, interpersonal relationships at work and the management style

- Giving workers the opportunity to participate in the organisation of change and innovation which affect their jobs – communicate, inform, give feedback and educate them on issues of health and safety risks

WORK POSITIVE

Work Positive is a process for managing workplace stress and the first step is to raise awareness of the issues.

Organisations who manage the risks associated with workplace stress can enjoy the benefits of reduced sickness absence, better performance, less frequent and less severe accidents, better relationships with colleagues and clients and lower staff turnover – improving the performance of the organisation.

Work positive is a five-step process to managing the risks associated with the causes of stress.

Step 1:   Raising awareness, gaining and demonstrating commitment

Raising Awareness

In order to gain commitment and involve employees in the process it is important to raise awareness of organisational issues.

Gaining Commitment

It is important to involve the workforce in every step of the process and would advise that a working group is established with representatives from the different functions and department in the organisation.

Demonstrating Commitment

It is important to demonstrate the organisation's commitment to managing these issues and respond, where appropriate, to the risks identified.

Step 2   Benchmarking: assessing the current situation

In order to establish the current position and set targets for improvement it is necessary to identify whether there are any indicators that people are working under pressure. High sickness absence, high turnover of staff and low morale can suggest that people are working under too much pressure.

Step 3   **Identifying the causes and assessing the risks**

Work Positive contains a questionnaire, for distribution to all staff. There is an analysis CS included in the pack to assist in identifying the priority areas.

Step 4   **Avoiding and reducing the risks**

Work Positive provides guidance on how to address the more common organisational causes of stress.

Step 5   **Reviewing the Situation**

Work Positive details how the impact of your efforts can be monitored and reviewed.

Further recommendation would be to train the Management Team with respect to "Interpersonal Skills" at the first available opportunity.

Finally, develop a policy on Workplace Stress and give all employees a handbook titled "Work-Related Stress – a Short Guide as part of their induction process. (See Appendix IV)

CHAPTER 7

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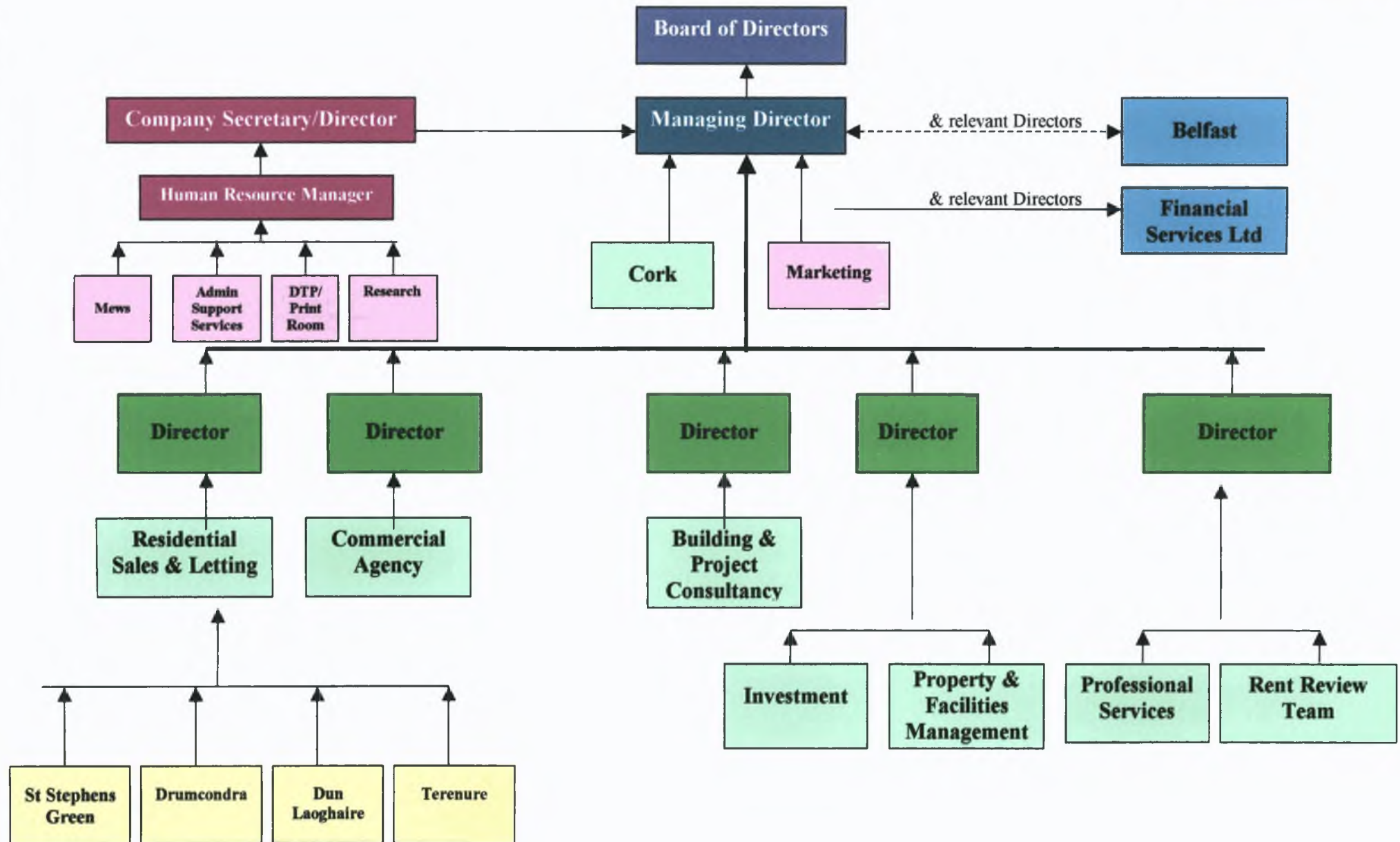
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APPENDIX I

Organisation Chart

Company Organisation Chart

MF & A
MAHON FARRELLY & ASSOCIATES

Board of Directors

Company Secretary/Director → **Managing Director** ⇠ & relevant Directors → **Belfast**

& relevant Directors → **Financial Services Ltd**

Human Resource Manager

| Mews | Admin Support Services | DTP/ Print Room | Research |

Cork **Marketing**

Director **Director** **Director** **Director** **Director**

Residential Sales & Letting

Commercial Agency

Building & Project Consultancy

Investment **Property & Facilities Management**

Professional Services **Rent Review Team**

St Stephens Green **Drumcondra** **Dun Laoghaire** **Terenure**

APPENDIX II

Semi Structured Interview Questions

SEMI STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1.   How would you describe the Organisational Structure?

2.   What is the Ethos of the Organisation?

3.   How do the organisations values differ from your own values?

4.   How does the achievement of your own goals compare to those of the organisations?

5.   How has your work environment changed over the years?

6.   Do you think that pressure at work causes you to perform less well?

7.   How is tasks designed/set out/goals set?

8.   How would you describe the Organisational Culture & Function?

9.   What is your role in the organisation?

10. Does your job involve contact with Customers, Clients and Members of the Pubic?

11. How would you describe your career development?

12. What is the management style in your organisation?

13. How would you describe the decision-making and job control in the organisation?

14. How would you describe your interpersonal relationships at work?

15. How do you balance your home/work interface?

16. How comfortable is your work environment?

17. Generally do you feel that you could talk to someone if you felt you were under too much pressure at work?

18. Describe your work schedule?

APPENDIX III

Questionnaire

MF & A

MAHON FARRELLY & ASSOCIATES

Memo

To:	All Staff
From:	Geraldine Dunleavy-Larkin
Date:	8th March 2004
Re:	*MF& A QUESTIONNAIRE – CHECK YOUR STRESS LEVELS*

In order for me to complete my M.A. in Strategic Human Resource Management, I am required to complete a Thesis. This report must be based on a "Live" Human Resource issue or problem at your workplace; the topic I have chosen is **Work-Related Stress and Long Term Illness.**

As you are all aware, we at Mahon Farrelly & Associates had a serious problem with unauthorised absences; but the absence trend has shifted to long-term illness. We currently have six employees out on long term illness and the time has come for Mahon Farrelly & Associates to ensure a high level of employee involvement into a change process on absenteeism.

I would be obliged if you all, could take some time out of your busy work schedules and study the attached questionnaire, complete and return to me no later than Monday 29th March 2004

I wish to draw your attention to the absolute confidentiality of this questionnaire and individual responses will at no time be identified. Your responses will be collated and analysed at my home and the results will be presented in a PowerPoint Presentation only, to everybody in the company.

Your co-operation in this matter would be greatly appreciated.

Kind regards,

Geraldine

Check your stress levels

1.	How are your energy levels?	
	Low	○
	Moderate	○
	High	○
2.	Do you have trouble falling asleep or staying asleep?	
	Sometimes	○
	Frequently	○
	Rarely	○
3.	How would you rate your level of confidence?	
	Low	○
	Moderate	○
	High	○
4.	How often do you suffer minor ailments?	
	Frequently	○
	Occasionally	○
	Rarely	○
5.	How often do you feel irritable?	
	Rarely	○
	All the time	○
	Sometimes	○

6.	How do you cope with change?	
	Defensively	O
	I look for the advantages	O
	I find a way through	O
7.	Do you have feelings of fear or panic?	
	Often	O
	Rarely	O
	Sometimes	O
8.	Do you feel worried?	
	Rarely	O
	Sometimes	O
	Often	O
9.	How well do you cope with conflict?	
	I seek win-win solutions	O
	I roll with the punches	O
	I avoid it at all costs	O
10.	Do you feel emotional or cry easily?	
	Rarely	O
	Sometimes	O
	Frequently	O
11.	Do you get neck, shoulder or back pain?	
	Frequently	O
	Sometimes	O
	Rarely or never	O

12.	Do you feel apathetic, as if nothing matters?	
	Frequently	O
	Rarely or never	O
	Sometimes	O
13	Fee Earning	O
14	Non-Fee Earning	O
15	DEPARTMENT	
	Residential Sales	O
	Residential Lettings	O
	Commercial Agency	O
	Support Services	O
	Professional Services	O
	Investments	O
	Property Management	O
	DTP	O
	Project & Building Consultancy	O
	Research	O
16	Your Additional Comments	

APPENDIX IV

A Short Guide on WRS

MF & A
MAHON FARRELLY & ASSOCIATES

Work-related
stress

SUPPORT
RELATIONSHIPS
CONTROL
CULTURE
INDIVIDUAL
CHANGE
DEMANDS
TRAINING
ROLE
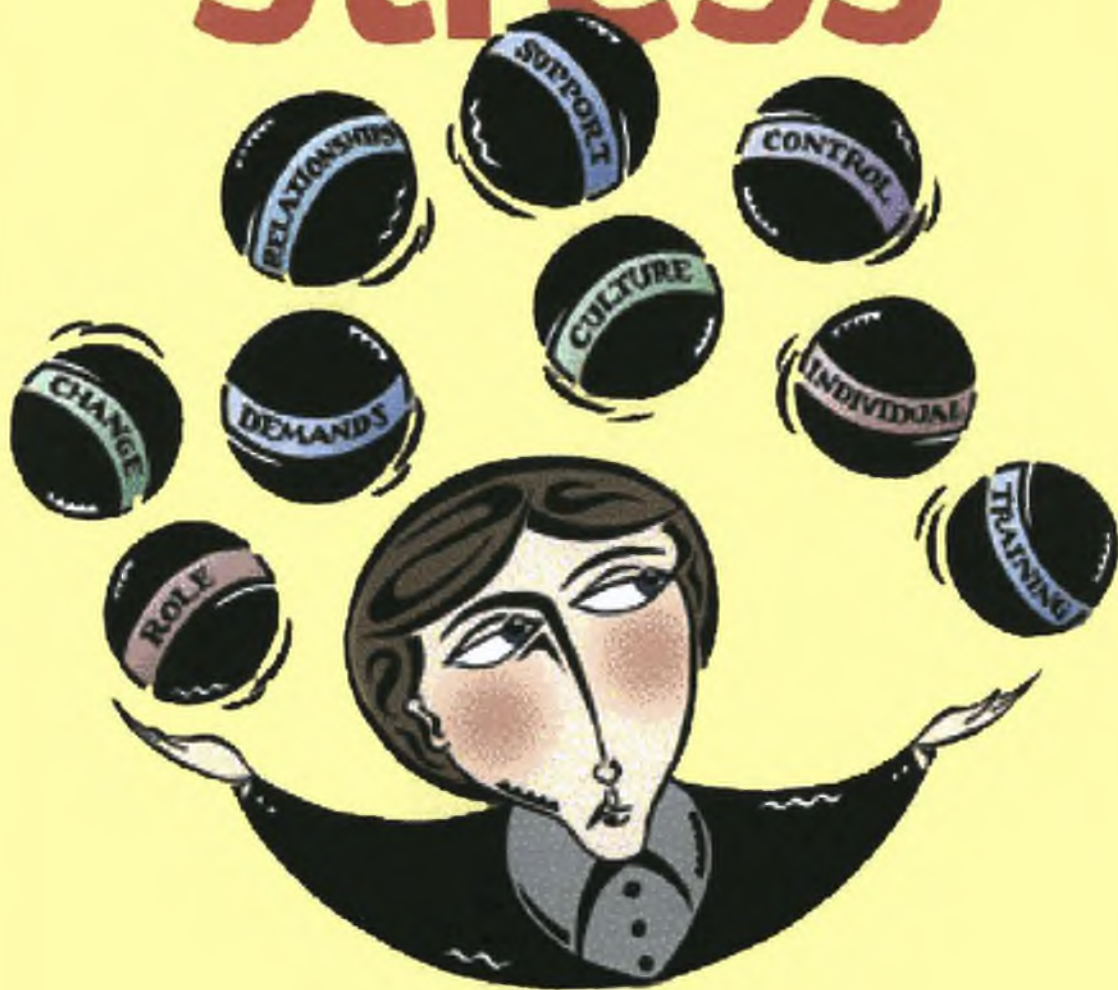
A Short Guide
for Employees

WHAT IS STRESS AT WORK?

IT'S PRESSURE

that makes you feel tense, nervous, anxious or upset. For instance, if your job is dangerous, or if you face many deadlines, you may be under a high degree of stress.

IT'S TENSION

you experience when you're exposed to people or situations that threaten, irritate, or yes – even excite you.
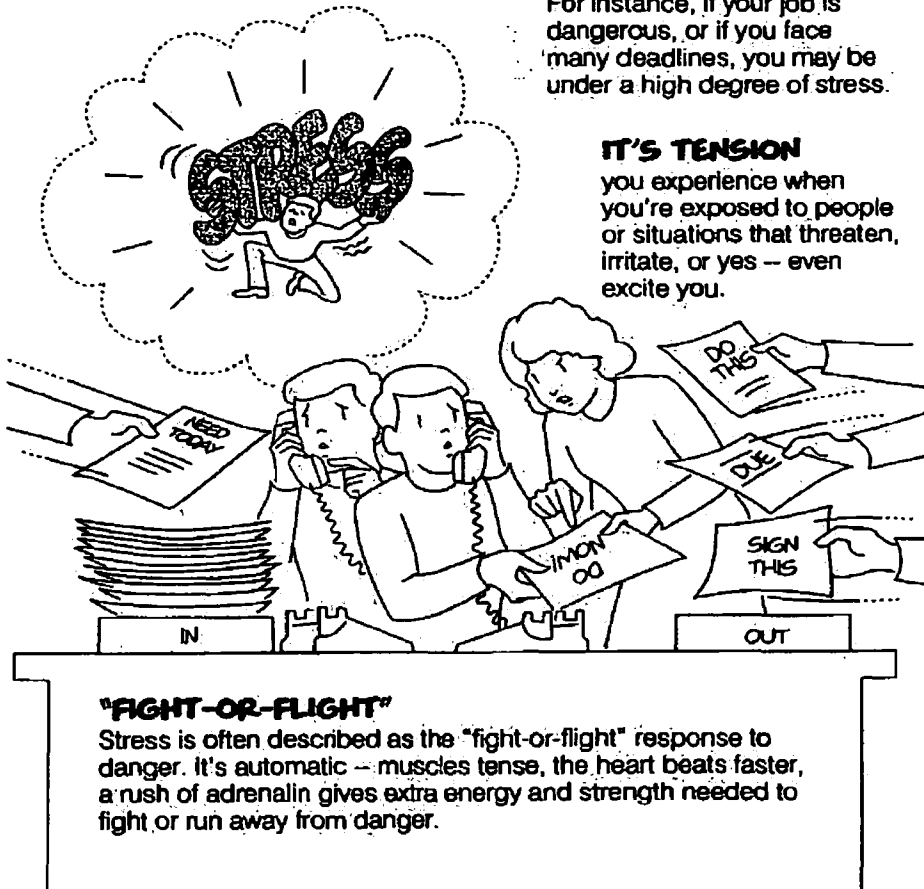
"FIGHT-OR-FLIGHT"

Stress is often described as the "fight-or-flight" response to danger. It's automatic – muscles tense, the heart beats faster, a rush of adrenalin gives extra energy and strength needed to fight or run away from danger.

ALMOST EVERY SITUATION HAS STRESS
— it's a fact of life!

STRESS CAN BE POSITIVE

Some stress is good for you. It can spur you on to solve a difficult problem, or challenge you to go the extra distance to achieve a goal.
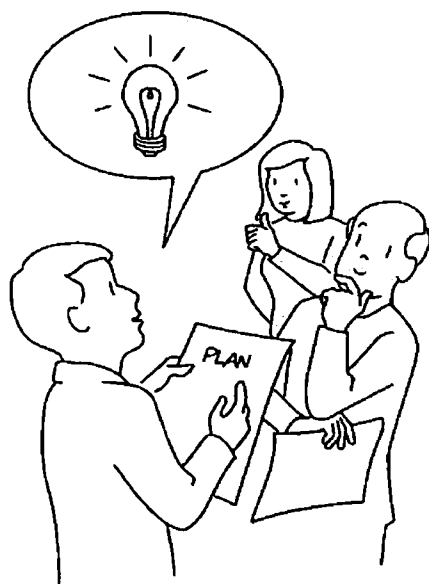
OR, IT CAN BE NEGATIVE

Too much stress can leave you tired, angry, frustrated and depressed. Unrelieved stress can lead to emotional problems and physical illness.
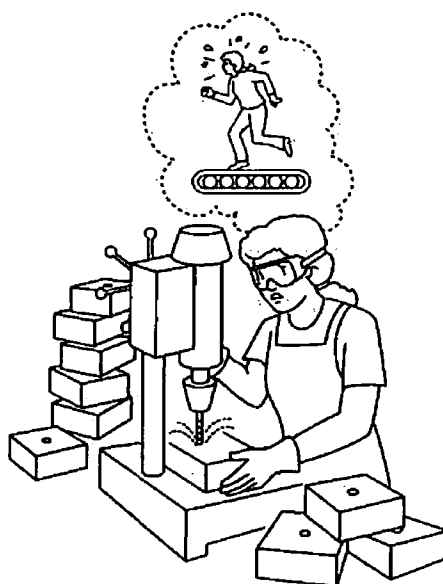
BUT, YOU CAN MANAGE STRESS.

You can control the effects of stress by understanding how stress affects your mind and body.

Follow the simple tips in this booklet to manage the stress in your life!   ➡️

WHO IS AFFECTED BY STRESS AT WORK?

Nearly everybody is to some degree, depending on:

YOUR PERSONALITY

People who by nature are extremely competitive, ambitious or impatient may be especially prone to the effects of stress.

THE KIND OF WORK YOU DO

Some types of jobs and work situations are more stressful than others.

CHANGES IN YOUR LIFE

Divorce, a death in the family, moving house, legal problems -- even happy events such as a marriage or a promotion -- can make you feel more stressed.

OTHER FACTORS

Your age, health, financial situation and satisfaction with life in general all affect your reaction to stress.

THE CAUSES OF STRESS

There are many reasons why people feel stress at work. Some common causes include:

YOUR WORK ENVIRONMENT

Poor lighting, noise, uncomfortable temperatures, long work hours, changing shift patterns and work with hazardous materials can lead to stress.

WORK DEMANDS

Pressure to meet deadlines or production quotas, workloads that are too heavy (or too light), tasks that are too complex (or too simple), having to oversee other people's safety, etc., can create stress.
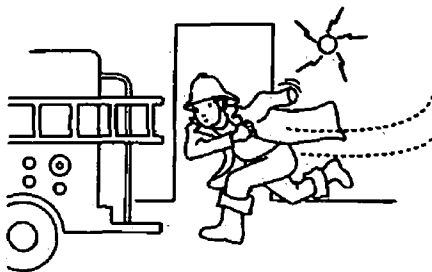
YOUR EXPECTATIONS

Your job or career expectations – in terms of pay, status, job security or promotion -- can cause stress, especially if these expectations are unrealistic.

THE PEOPLE AROUND YOU

Your relationships with your manager or supervisor, colleagues or customers can be a source of strength -- or stress.
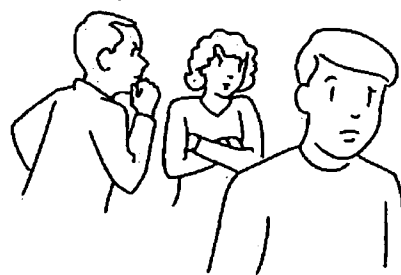
STRESS CAN AFFECT YOUR LIFE AND WORK

By taking steps to relax, you can avoid serious problems that result from too much stress.

HEALTH PROBLEMS

The immediate effects of stress include trembling, sweating, nausea, headaches and difficulty sleeping.

Chronic stress can lead to heart disease, high blood pressure and poor health in general.

ACCIDENTS

Studies show that people under stress are more likely to have accidents caused by errors in judgement. If you are not thinking clearly, or if your mind is on other things, you could be more likely to make mistakes or misjudge situations.

LOSS OF PRODUCTIVITY

Stress affects how well you do your job. Too much stress can rob you of energy and make you feel tired and apathetic. All in all, too much stress makes you less effective at work, and more likely to be ill and to miss valuable work time.

EMOTIONAL PROBLEMS

Stress affects how and what you feel. It can cause a normally good-natured person to become irritable and depressed. It can hurt relationships with others. Unchecked, stress can lead to severe depression and other emotional problems.
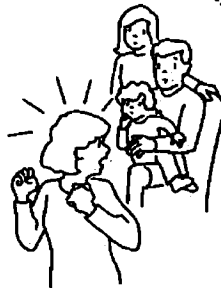
KNOW THE SYMPTOMS OF STRESS

PHYSICAL SIGNS
include:

- fatigue
- tension headaches
- upset stomach
- sleep problems
- backaches
- weight loss
- shortness of breath
- high blood pressure
- muscle tension
- nervousness
- change in appetite
- sweaty palms
- cold hands and feet.

EMOTIONAL SIGNS
include:

- irritability
- hostility
- anxiety
- loss of self-esteem (not feeling good about who you are and what you do)
- feelings of helplessness
- withdrawal from friends and relatives
- inability to appreciate or enjoy life
- loss of concentration.

STRESS CAN ALSO AFFECT PERSONAL BEHAVIOUR,
leading to nail-biting, excessive smoking and/or use of alcohol and other drugs, etc.

Keep in mind that these signs and symptoms may have causes other than stress — check with your doctor to make sure.

BEWARE OF EXHAUSTION

EXHAUSTION IS THE RESULT OF SEVERE CHRONIC STRESS

It can happen when a person pours all of his or her time, energy and enthusiasm into the real or imagined demands of work.
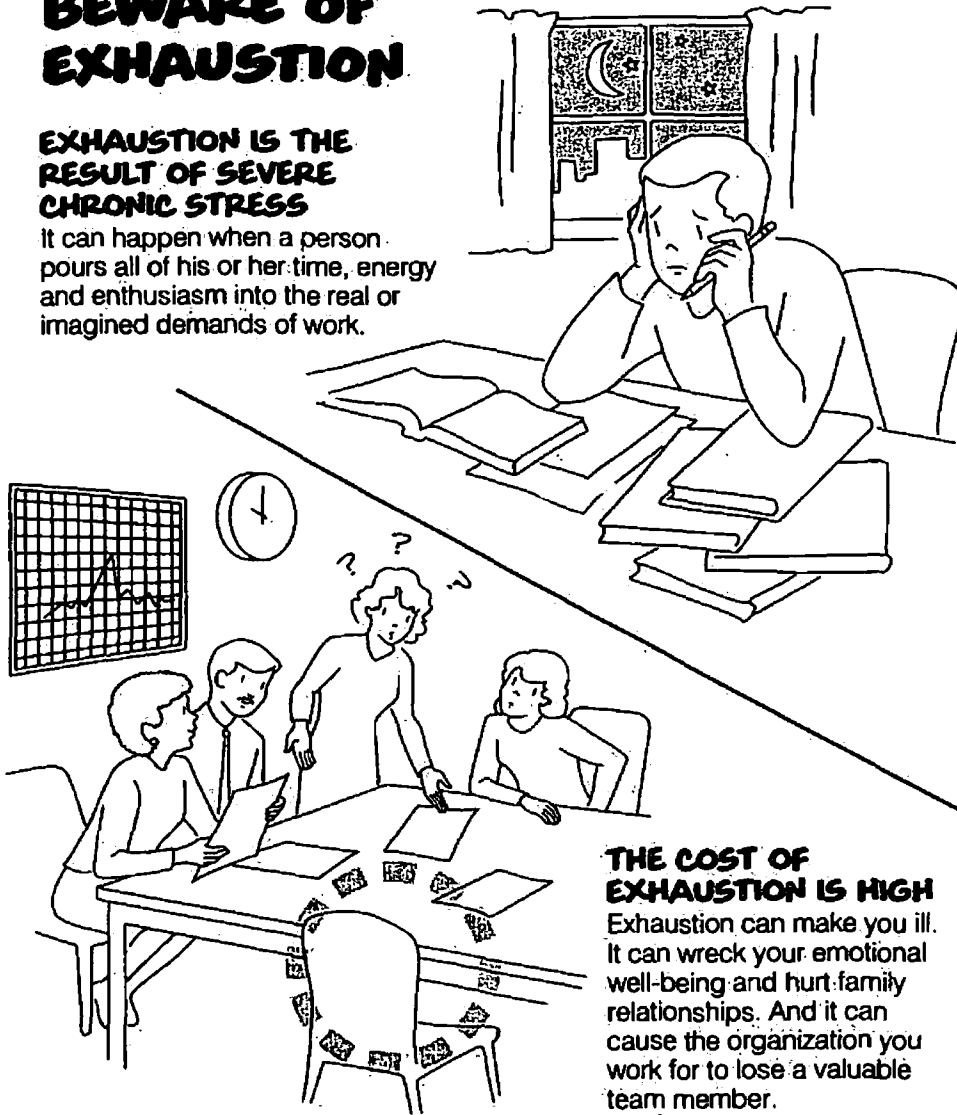
THE COST OF EXHAUSTION IS HIGH

Exhaustion can make you ill. It can wreck your emotional well-being and hurt family relationships. And it can cause the organization you work for to lose a valuable team member.

Fortunately, there are ways to reduce stress and avoid exhaustion.

HOW TO REDUCE STRESS AT WORK

Follow these tips to help you reduce your level of stress.

❶ MAINTAIN GOOD HEALTH HABITS

STAY ACTIVE

Choose an activity you enjoy. Build up to at least 30 minutes of moderate physical activity on 5 days of the week or more. (Check with your doctor first if you have any health problems or are over age 40.)
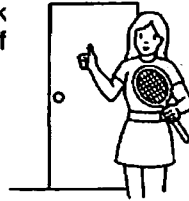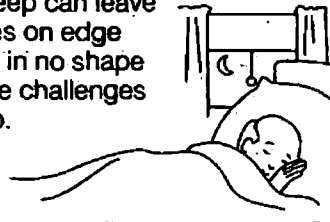
EAT WELL

Eat a balance of foods that includes fresh fruits and vegetables, bread, other cereals and potatoes, milk and dairy products; and meat, fish or alternatives. Don't forget to eat a good breakfast.

GET ENOUGH SLEEP

Lack of sleep can leave your nerves on edge -- and you in no shape to meet the challenges of your job.

DON'T MISUSE ALCOHOL OR OTHER DRUGS

Alcohol and other drugs, such as sleeping pills, only cover up signs of stress and make everyday problems worse.

❷ USE YOUR TIME WISELY

DON'T OVERDO IT

Don't try to do everything all at once. Set goals that are challenging, yet achievable.

MAKE A LIST

Write down everything you must do. Decide which tasks are important and which ones can be done later.

DON'T PUT THINGS OFF

You've decided what you need to do -- now do it! The immediate feeling of accomplishment will make everything else seem easier.

TAKE A BREAK

Don't be afraid to relax for a moment and regain your energy. At lunchtime, try to leave the workplace, take a walk outside, etc.

BE AWARE!

Take a moment now and then to step back and look at yourself and what you're doing. Assess the amount of stress you're feeling -- and take steps to reduce it!

PACE YOURSELF

Work at a steady pace. Try to complete some jobs, rather than having "many balls in the air".

❸ IMPROVE YOUR WORK HABITS

IDENTIFY SOURCES OF STRESS

Write them down. Which ones do you make yourself? Which ones are part of the job? Which are created by other people?

FOLLOW HEALTH AND SAFETY PROCEDURES

Wear proper clothing and equipment, and follow recommended procedures to reduce the risk of injury or ill health.

DISCUSS PROBLEMS

Talk with your boss or colleagues – there may be ways to solve your problems.

MANAGE YOUR TIME

Take a course or read books on time management. Knowing how to use your time effectively can be a good way to reduce stress.

BE POSITIVE

If you think something good will happen, chances are it will. Positive thoughts are more likely to bring positive results.
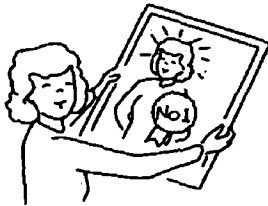
BE REALISTIC

Choose realistic job or career goals! This is especially important for people new to the workplace who want to set the world on fire – and risk exhaustion instead.
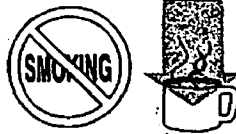
❹ CHANGE PERSONAL HABITS

BE KIND TO YOURSELF
Acknowledge your successes!

STOP SMOKING AND REDUCE CAFFEINE INTAKE
Nicotine and caffeine can actually increase the effects of stress – making a tense situation even more stressful.

TALK ABOUT PROBLEMS
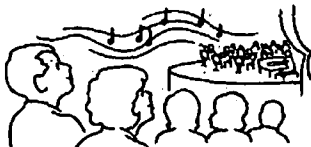Share your thoughts and feelings with someone who knows, understands and will listen to you.

PLAN LEISURE TIME
Set aside time during the day for your personal "re-creation".

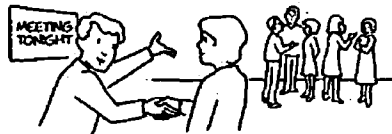## DO THINGS YOU ENJOY
It sounds simple, but it's not easy for many people. Soak in a hot bath, attend a sports event, visit a friend...enjoy yourself!
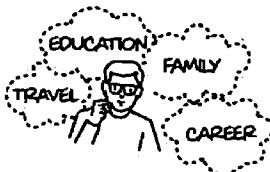
SEEK NEW INTERESTS
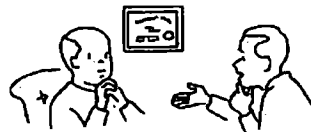Meeting new people and developing new interests are great ways to put some positive challenges in your life.

KNOW WHAT'S IMPORTANT
Take time to find out what is and what's not important in your life.

SEEK PROFESSIONAL HELP
If you've been feeling depressed for a long time, counselling can help put you back on the right track.

⑤ LEARN TO RELAX!

Try these simple exercises to help relieve unhealthy stress!

BREATHING EXERCISE

Find a quiet, comfortable place to sit or lie down. Close your eyes, and begin to take slow, deep, regular breaths. Concentrate on your breathing. Then slowly open your eyes, and stay still for a moment.

Learn this and other breathing exercises to help manage stress better.
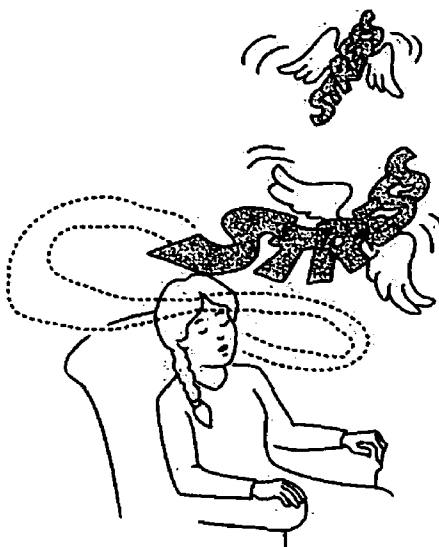
USE YOUR IMAGINATION

Relieve harmful stress by closing your eyes for a few moments and imagining yourself in a calm, peaceful place.

QUICK RELAXATION

A quick way to relieve stress while you're at work is to take a short break and do some light stretching. Or if you're in the middle of a stressful situation, take a few deep breaths.

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

about stress at work by ticking "true" or "false".

① Regular exercise and a balanced diet
have no effect on stress. . . . . .True ☐   False ☐

② Stress is always a bad thing. .True ☐   False ☐

③ It's best to keep your problems and
worries to yourself. . . . . .True ☐   False ☐

④ Symptoms of stress include headaches,
backaches, irritability and anxiety. . . . . .True ☐   False ☐

⑤ Identifying sources of stress can help you deal
better with stress – and improve your work habits. . . . . .True ☐   False ☐

⑥ It's best to set goals that are very difficult to reach. . . . .True ☐   False ☐

⑦ Finding time to relax and enjoy yourself will
help keep stress at bay. . . . . .True ☐   False ☐

⑧ You can't do anything about stress in your life. . . . . . . .True ☐   False ☐

⑨ Putting things off can help reduce stress. . . . . .True ☐   False ☐

⑩ Stress can be caused by your own expectations
as well as the demands of your job. . . . . .True ☐   False ☐

I have read the booklet, "About Stress at Work".

_____   _____

Employee's signature   Date

CHECK YOUR ANSWERS AGAINST THE FOLLOWING PAGES:

1. p.10   2. p.3   3. p.13   4. p.8   5. p.12   6. p.12   7. p.13   8. pp.3, 10   9. p.11   10. p.5