ANGUILLA PUBLIC SERVICE

ADVISORY LEAFLET

MANAGING STRESS IN THE WORKPLACE

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INTRODUCTION

According to Dennis Jaffe we spend approximately 60% of our waking productive lives at work. This being a truth it means that work becomes a significant factor in our stress level. Reducing workplace stress has taken on greater urgency in the current economic climate where there is the need to do more with less. Workplace stress is caused by factors at the organizational, management and individual levels. It can have a negative impact on the health, performance and behavior of employees in the organization. It can cost the organization. Thus, workplace stress needs to be managed effectively.

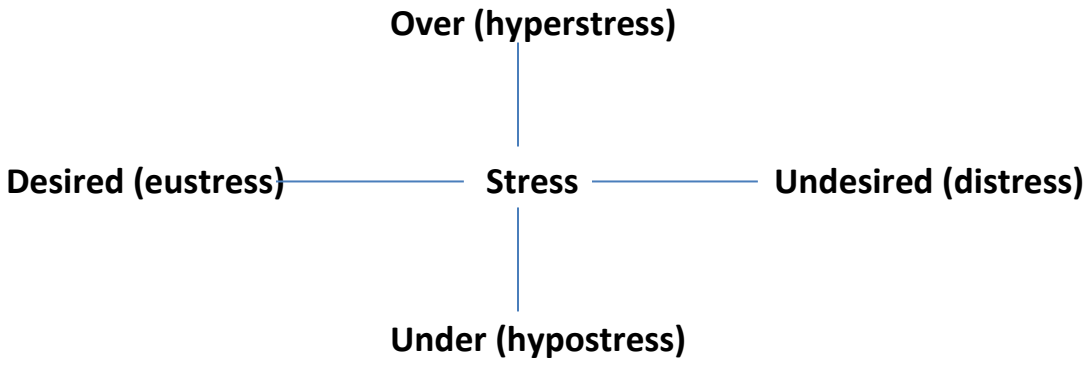
This leaflet has been designed by Public Administration to help the organization, managers and individual officers understand the stress dynamic, identify the causes of workplace stress and build an awareness of how stress can be managed in the workplace. **It is for information only and NOT a substitute for professional diagnosis and treatment.**

DEFINITION AND CONCEPT OF STRESS

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) defines stress as 'the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demands placed on them'.

The word 'stress' is neutral. However, it often has negative connotations and is used as a synonym for overstress. It must be emphasized that some stress can be positive and beneficial and is actually necessary to make us effective in the tasks we set ourselves. **It is the amount of stress that causes problems.**

Model of Stress based on Hans Selye (1956) four dimensions



Over (hyperstress): where there is too high a workload and the demands of the job are greater than the individual officer is likely to manage.

Under (hypostress): where there is too little work to do and this leads to under-stimulation, boredom, depression and possibly lack of motivation

Desired (eustress): when there is something really challenging and motivating to do.

Undesired (distress): that which makes one feel exhausted, irritable and frustrated.

CAUSES OF WORKPLACE STRESS

Workplace stress is caused by factors at the organizational, management and individual levels.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) have defined six areas of work that can have a negative impact on employee health if not properly managed:-

1. **Demands** – includes workloads, work patterns and the work environment.

2. **Control** – how much say the person has in the way they do their work.

3. **Support** – includes the encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided by the organization, line management and colleagues.

4. **Role** – whether people understand their role within the organization and whether the organization ensures that they do not have conflicting roles.

5. **Change** – how organizational change (large or small) is managed and communicated in the organization.

6. **Relationships** – promoting positive working to avoid conflict and dealing with unacceptable behavior.

Diane Chinn, eHow Contributor, listed the following as major causes of workplace stress:-

- lack of clear communication
- conflicting or ambiguous goals
- a centralized and formal organizational structure
- micromanagement by line managers and supervisors
- pressure to work constantly at optimum levels
- peer pressure
- lack of training or promotional opportunities
- the monotonous nature of work.

SIGNS THAT MAY POINT TO A STRESS PROBLEM IN THE ORGANISATION

Employees suffering from work place stress show it in a variety of ways:-

Work performance

- Reduction in output and productivity
- Increase in wastage and error rates
- Poor decision making
- Deterioration in planning and control of work

Staff attitude and behaviour

- Loss of motivation and commitment
- Staff working increasingly long hours but for diminishing returns
- Erratic or poor timekeeping

Relationships at work

- Tension and conflict between colleagues
- Poor relationships with customers
- Increase in industrial relations or disciplinary problems

Staff absences

- Increase in overall sickness absence, in particular frequent short periods of absence.

Workplace stress needs to be managed from the organizational, managerial and individual levels. The employment of strategies for the management of stress at each level, on its own, is likely to be less effective.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRATEGIES FOR MANAGING STRESS

- Review organizational aims, objectives and systems and ensure that they are realistic and meet current changes.

- Make improving communications a priority. Communication channels within the organization need to be examined to make sure they are operating effectively so that those at other levels hear the correct information. Relevant information should be shared with employees to reduce uncertainty. Establish methods for safe, confidential communication with feedback loops. Employees should be able to ask questions and get answers.

- Consult with employees. Give employees opportunities to participate in decisions that affect their jobs.

- Conduct employee appraisals to ensure that realistic objectives are set and expectations are controlled. Give employees meaningful and timely feedback about their performance.

- Examine the organization's reward systems. Recognize employees for their work performance/accomplishments.

- Provide opportunities for job enrichment and career development.

- Provide training opportunities: Induction; Specific Training, Time Management; Assertiveness and Stress Awareness.

- Create a just and safe working environment.

- Establish counselling and advice systems through an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP). Ensure that employees know what support is available and how and when to access it.

MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES FOR MANAGING STRESS

It is clear that the way the organization is managed or the leadership is perceived plays a large part in the stress felt by staff. Managers can prevent (or conversely cause) stress by the way they behave towards employees. However, it is in a manager's interest to keep stress levels in the workplace to a minimum. Those that manage individuals need to understand the causes and symptoms of stress and the strategies that can be employed to the benefit of the organization and that individual.

Line managers play a vital role in identifying and managing stress within the organization. They are likely to see the problems that cause stress first hand and will often be the first point of contact when an individual is feeling stressed.

- Present relevant information to keep staff informed especially during periods of organizational uncertainty and change by.
- Promote open discussion where staff should be able to ask questions and get answers.
- Use conflict management strategies, the most appropriate or a mixture, depending on the circumstances.
- Help individuals set realistic goals and make suggestions for doing the same thing differently.
- Ensure that employees have the resources and skills they need and offer opportunities for learning and development.
- Recognize employee and team accomplishments.
- Treat employees with respect.
- Help to cultivate a friendly social climate by providing opportunities for social interaction among staff and establishing a zero-tolerance policy for harassment.

Remember - When the work place is stressful, ultimately both the organization and the employees are hurt.

PERSONAL/INDIVIDUAL STRATEGIES FOR MANAGING STRESS

Stress is specific to each individual. What one officer might find stressful is not necessarily stressful for another. In addition, several officers in the same stressful situation may respond quite differently. The individual is important in stress management. Therefore, individuals need to recognize and analyse for themselves the signs and causes of stress at work. Understanding one's own personal sense of stress is a necessary part of the process that will enable coping mechanisms to develop.

- Improve time management skills by organizing your day, creating a balanced schedule, not overcommitting yourself, leaving home earlier in the morning and planning regular breaks. Reduce meeting time – set time limits, plan an agenda and stick to it. You will feel less overwhelmed.
- Improve task management by prioritizing tasks, breaking projects into small steps, delegating responsibility and being willing to compromise.
- Improve emotional intelligence -the ability to manage and use your emotions in positive and constructive ways. Communicate with others in ways that draw people to you, overcome differences, repair wounded feelings and defuse tension and stress.
- Break bad habits, negative thoughts and behavior, which add to your stress at work: resist perfectionism; clean up your act; flip your negative thinking and do not try to control the uncontrollable, particularly the behaviour of other people.
- Identify things that are working well, celebrate successes and meet challenges with humour. Laugh often!
- Keep things in perspective. Find ways to balance work and family life. Take care of yourself- eat healthy, keep fit and sleep enough.
- Speak to your manager or someone else you feel comfortable talking to in your organization if you are feeling stressed at work. In some situations, simply sharing your thoughts and feelings with someone you trust can help reduce stress. If it is work-related, your line manager has a duty to take reasonable steps to try to resolve the problem.

Remember – Showing signs of stress does not mean that you are a weak person who cannot cope. It means that you are human like everyone else!

Systems can be put in place for regular surveys of the situation and managers can focus on the positive rather than the negative effects of stress. The individual role in monitoring his/her stress levels need to be seen as part of the process.

JOB STRESS SCALE

The following Job Stress Scale has been taken from 'Releasing your potential: A guide to developing a successful career within Welsh Public Services', Public Service Management Wales. This Job Stress Scale can be used to determine the extent to which your job satisfies and gives you opportunity for expression and achievement. Complete the scale by ticking those items which apply to you.

1. I find that on the whole my work is varied and interesting. ☐
2. My department/office is adequately staffed. ☐
3. If changes in work methods or equipment are under consideration I am always consulted. ☐
4. Generally my work load is not too heavy. ☐
5. We have a recognized procedure to follow if I have a complaint. ☐
6. Generally my working conditions are good with few difficulties over noise, heat levels or vibrations. ☐
7. I understand and agree with my job description. ☐
8. Any good work that I do is recognized by my employer. ☐
9. I am properly rewarded for the work that I do. ☐
10. Most of the time I have a clear understanding of what is expected of me in my work. ☐
11. I have found that I have opportunities to go on learning in my job. ☐
12. I have been trained adequately for the work that I do. ☐
13. I find that I can generally complete the work in the time allocated. ☐
14. I do not find that there is too much pressure to get my work done. ☐

☐

15. I am rarely asked to make decisions above and beyond the level of my responsibility. ☐

16. I am satisfied with the amount of responsibility that goes with my job. ☐

17. I feel that my job makes good use of my skills and competencies. ☐

18. I am not asked to do things in my job that are beyond my level of competence. ☐

19. I feel that I have enough control over the decisions that are made in my job. ☐

20. I find that I have sufficient support for my ideas about how to do things in my job. ☐

SCORING

Count the number of ticks. ☐

16+	By and large your job is satisfying and gives you an opportunity for expression and achievement
10 to 15	There are many things in your job that could be improved. A continuous lack of opportunity and blocking may be sources of stress that could lead to frustration and substantial dissatisfaction with your job.
≤10	Your job is potentially a great source of stress. You need to urgently consider changing yourself or your job.

STRESS AUDIT

The following test has been devised by **CARY COOPER**, Pro Vice Chancellor (External Relations) and Professor of Organizational Psychology and Health at Lancaster University. He is author of over 80 books, a frequent contributor to the national and international press and is widely regarded as Europe's leading stress management expert. The test is designed to help people discover whether they are trapped in work dominated lives and suffering from stress. For each question answer frequently (3), sometimes (2), rarely (1) or never (0).

1. Do you find it difficult to relax and go to sleep at night because you are thinking about work?
2. Do you wake up early in the morning thinking about what has to be done during the day?
3. Are you one of the last to leave the office?
4. Do you contact your colleagues outside working hours to discuss work?
5. Do you take work home in the evenings?
6. Do you take work home at the weekends?
7. Do you miss lunch during the working week?
8. Do you give your home telephone number to work related contacts?
9. Are you impatient with your spouse, partner or family because you are distracted by work?
10. Are you annoyed by domestic activities (eg having to take children to school) which take you away from work?
11. Do you find you are only just recovering from the working week by Sunday?
12. Do you find it difficult to relax during the first few days of a holiday?
13. Are you eager to go back to work after a holiday?

14. When travelling to and from work do you fail to remember the journey because you are absorbed in your work? ☐

15. Do you find you discuss work in the most social situations (eg dinner parties)? ☐

16. Is physical exercise the activity of last resort? ☐

17. Do you find that you are really not listening to people but thinking about what you need to do next in your job? ☐

18. Do you feel that you are constantly under pressure and in a rush? ☐

19. Do you get impatient with work colleagues who do not take work as seriously as you? ☐

20. Do you need to have your achievements and successes recognized by others? ☐

TOTAL ☐

HOW DID YOU SCORE

0-25
Excellent. You have a high degree of self-esteem and identity and have a healthy control over your work life.

25-40
Fair. Your life is moderately work dominated but be careful. Look at the questions to which you have answered frequently. Do you have an impatient personality? Is work spilling into your home life? Modify your behavior accordingly.

40-50
Poor. You have a work-dominated life and are displaying behavior which can damage your relationships outside of your job. Be more assertive and control the time boundaries between home and work. Maintain a proper diet and recuperate with regular exercise. Break the circle of stress before it causes more serious problems.

Make managing stress at work your choice today!

We welcome your feedback, comments and suggestions.

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…..We are listening!