

Employee Wellbeing and Stress Management

A Person Centred Approach

Ruth L Randall



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EMPLOYEE WELLBEING AND STRESS MANAGEMENT

A PERSON CENTRED APPROACH

Employee Wellbeing and Stress Management: A Person Centred Approach

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CONTENTS

	Preface	7
1	Why Do We Need To Make Employee Wellbeing a Priority?	8
1.1	Employee Wellbeing Facts and Figures	8
1.2	Other Factors to Consider	8
1.3	The Links Between Wellbeing and Engagement	9
1.4	Stress in the Workplace	10
1.5	HSE Management Standards	10
1.6	Personal Stress	11



The advertisement features a black header with the CMO Inspired Conference logo on the left, which consists of a green speech bubble containing the letters 'CMO'. To the right of the logo, the text reads 'INSPIRED CONFERENCE' in large white letters, followed by '25 OCTOBER | DE VERE BEAUMONT ESTATE | OLD WINDSOR UK' in smaller white letters. Below the header is a photograph of a large, white, classical-style building with a fountain in the foreground. At the bottom of the advertisement is a collage of four images: a panel discussion on a stage, a woman speaking into a microphone, a large audience seated in a hall, and a man presenting at a podium. Below the collage, the text 'Join Over 100 Chief Marketing Officers & Digital Innovators' is written in green.

2	Understanding Stress	12
2.1	Stress Awareness	12
2.2	Types of Stress	12
2.3	How We Experience Stress	13
2.4	Exercise: Noticing Stress	15
2.5	Causes of Personal Stress	15
2.6	Exercise: Identifying Types of Stress	16
2.7	Causes of Stress at Work	16
2.8	Exercise: Looking at Your Workplace	17
3	Symptoms and Effects of Stress	18
3.1	Symptoms	18
3.2	Exercise: Get to Know Your Physical and Emotional State	19
3.3	Signs of Stress in Others	20
4	The Impact of Unmanaged Stress	21
4.1	Stress in the Workplace	21
4.2	Case Study: Carl	21
4.3	Exercise: Reviewing the Case Study	22
4.4	The Impact of Stress in the Workplace	23
4.5	The Wider Impact of Stress (The Ripple Effect)	23
4.6	Case Study: Steven	24
4.7	The Importance Stress Management and Resilience	25
5	A Person Centred Approach	26
5.1	A Person Centred Approach to Employee Wellbeing	26
5.2	Why Starting With The Workplace Isn't the Answer	26
5.3	Overview of The Person Centred Wellbeing Model	27
5.4	The Person Centred Wellbeing Model	27
6	The Unique Person	28
6.1	People as Individuals	28
6.2	Exercise: Understanding Values	30
7	Life and Social Factors	32
7.1	Different Perspectives	32
7.2	Knowing Your Employees and Colleagues	32
7.3	Life and Social Factors to Consider	32
7.4	Case Study: Cathy	36

8	Job Role and Professional Development	38
8.1	Job Specific Stress	38
8.2	Aspects of Job Related Stress	38
8.3	Case Study: Joanna	40
9	The Workplace	42
9.1	The Importance of Environment	42
9.2	Case Study: A Remote Team	45
9.3	Exercise: Review Your Work Environment	46
10	Managing Stress in the Workplace	47
10.1	Make a Commitment	47
10.2	The Business Case	47
10.3	Finding Out What's Really Going On	48
10.4	Stress Assessment Survey	48
10.5	Next Steps	51
11	Stress Management Strategies	52
11.1	The HSE Management Standards	52
11.2	Person Centred Strategies	53
12	Personal Stress Management Techniques	56
12.1	Personal Development	56
12.2	Mindfulness	56
12.3	Positive Thinking	57
12.4	Keep Things In Perspective	58
12.5	Practice Self-Care	58
13	Resources for Employee Wellbeing and Stress Management	60

PREFACE

Introduction

Employee wellbeing and stress management strategies are vital to the health and productivity of your employees. Stress and stress-related illnesses are the most common cause of sickness absence in the UK. This suggests that current employee wellbeing strategies are not sufficient to tackle the problem. The Person Centred Approach looks beyond the workplace, and takes a holistic view of the employee and their world. This book helps to develop an understanding of stress, its causes, signs and symptoms, as well as the impact it can have on people personally and professionally. It also looks at how this affects businesses practically and financially and explores strategies to address the problem of stress.

Profile of Author Ruth L Randall

Ruth L Randall is a Qualified Life Coach and Employee Wellbeing Consultant. Ruth supports people with their self-awareness and personal development to build confidence and self-esteem, to have healthy relationships and to manage stress. Through the Person Centred Wellbeing Project, Ruth works with organisations to address the problem of stress in the workplace.

Profile of The Person Centred Wellbeing Project

The Person Centred Wellbeing Project works with organisations to enable them to understand the causes of stress for their employees, and to create strategies to reduce the problems of both personal stress and work related stress. The approach looks at employees as individuals and enables them to identify and manage stress, before taking an overview of the workplace and work-related stress. This holistic approach creates effective ways to manage the impact of stress on productivity and employee health. For more information about the Person Centred Wellbeing Project please visit www.personcentredwellbeing.com

1 WHY DO WE NEED TO MAKE EMPLOYEE WELLBEING A PRIORITY?

1.1 EMPLOYEE WELLBEING FACTS AND FIGURES

There are several reasons why the wellbeing of employees must be a priority, and particularly mental health and wellbeing.

- The Mental Health Foundation have identified that if current trends continue, by 2030 depression will be the leading illness globally.
- The Health and Safety Executive record the total number of cases of work related stress, depression or anxiety in 2015/16 as 488,000 cases. The total number of working days lost due to these conditions in the same period was 11.7 million days.
- In 2015/16 stress accounted for 37% of all work related ill health cases and 45% of all working days lost due to ill health. (HSE)
- Mental health problems and stress are a major cause of presenteeism which affects work performance and productivity.
- Research by the CIPD shows the yearly cost of sickness absence for UK organisations is now in the region of £29 billion.

Those are just the facts and figures, but what is the real impact of stress in your workplace? How aware is your organisation of the true state of the mental health and emotional wellbeing of its employees?

1.2 OTHER FACTORS TO CONSIDER

In addition to the statistics above, consider the physical problems which may have been caused by people finding unhealthy ways to manage their stress, such as excessive smoking or drinking, unhealthy eating habits or other addictive behaviours. These can lead to further health problems, debt, and may have social implications too. All of which are possible when people are unable to find healthier and more effective ways of managing stress.

Add to the cost of lost working days the other aspects such as time off for medical appointments, implementing sickness policies through meetings and administration, and the potential costs continue to rise.

Terms of sickness policies also mean that some employees go to work when unwell, rather than lose pay by staying at home. This has meant an increase in presenteeism, employees being at work but far less productive than would be expected.

Some factors to bear in mind when considering addressing employee wellbeing –

- The cost of sickness absence due to burnout, stress related illness, and other health problems
- Increase in workplace accidents
- High employee turnover causing increased costs in recruitment and training
- Reduced productivity
- Poor customer service
- Damage to organisational reputation
- Negative impact of stress and disengagement on the company culture
- Difficulty attracting new talent
- Costs of implementing Sickness Policies and Return to Work strategies
- The impact of presenteeism (employees being at work but underperforming due to ill health)

1.3 THE LINKS BETWEEN WELLBEING AND ENGAGEMENT

Wellbeing sustains engagement, and engagement sustains productivity. Several studies show that less than half of our workforce are actively engaged at work.

Think of the size of your workforce for a moment, then imagine that less than half of those employees are actually motivated and fully engaged in their work. What are the others doing? Going through the motions of every day at work? Growing increasingly more negative towards their employers, their job and their colleagues? Feeling unhappy and demoralised, stressed and overwhelmed, or just disinterested? How productive is your business going to be in this scenario?

Engaged employees are not necessarily healthy, and there is a balance to be struck between the two. Employees who are engaged and driven to perform may be doing so to the detriment of their health. If engaged and high achieving employees fail to balance this with their wellbeing, they may become burnt-out. The result of this is not only a negative impact on their health, but on the organisation.

The workplace culture is important too. Even the most engaged, positive and emotionally healthy employees will struggle in a negative atmosphere of disengaged colleagues.

1.4 STRESS IN THE WORKPLACE

It's worth considering that people in different job roles and sectors will have varying experiences of stress and also how they are supported by their employers. For example, the workplace stress experienced by someone working on a customer service desk of a large retailer dealing with unhappy or even angry customers, will be totally different to the experience of a high-level executive at the same organisation. Interestingly, the impact on their wellbeing may be the same.

Remember that we spend around one-third of our lives at work, and it's clear how stress and negativity can take up a large part of our energy and result in overwhelm and burnout.

1.5 HSE MANAGEMENT STANDARDS

The Health and Safety Executive have set Management Standards for work related stress, which define the characteristics of an organisation where the risks from work related stress are being effectively managed.

The Management Standards cover six areas relating to health and wellbeing, and the primary sources of stress at work. These are:

- Demands – this includes issues such as workload, work patterns and the work environment.
- Control – how much say the person has in the way they do their work.
- Support – this includes the encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided by the organisation, line management and colleagues.
- Relationships – this includes promoting positive working to avoid conflict and dealing with unacceptable behaviour.
- Role – whether people understand their role within the organisation and whether the organisation ensures that they do not have conflicting roles.
- Change – how organisational change (large or small) is managed and communicated in the organisation.

It is not just the workplace that is affected by poor stress management. Stress experienced at work soon spreads beyond the workplace and impacts the employee's life, often in negative ways such as relationship problems, debt, unhealthy addictive behaviours, and other social challenges. This becomes an unhealthy cycle.

1.6 PERSONAL STRESS

The other side of this is that personal issues and stress unrelated to the workplace will have a huge impact on how your employees show up for work every day. No matter how much people try to ‘leave their problems at home’, their health, wellbeing and performance will most likely be affected in some way.

Even an employee who succeeds in absorbing themselves in their work as a distraction from stress in their home life, could still be suffering the physical and emotional effects of stress. A failure to address it is likely to cause further problems long term.

With this in mind, it’s not enough to simply manage stress in the workplace. Any strategies to address wellbeing and stress must look at the employee as an individual as well.

In the following chapters we will look more at stress, what causes it, how to recognise it, how to address it and how to create a culture that supports the wellbeing of all employees.

Some chapters also include exercises to help you to recognise the signs, symptoms and impact of stress in yourself, in others, and in your workplace.

2 UNDERSTANDING STRESS

2.1 STRESS AWARENESS

It's important to realise that everyone experiences stress in a different way, and the triggers for stress will vary from one person to another. To be able to manage stress in the workplace and support employees with managing their own wellbeing, it's essential to increase awareness and to understand:

- Types of stress
- Causes of stress
- Symptoms of stress
- Signs of stress in others
- The impact of stress in the workplace
- The wider impact of stress

2.2 TYPES OF STRESS

Dr Karl Albrecht defines four types of stress in his 1979 book, *Stress and the Manager*. We will first look at those, and then consider how these fit with the three main ways that we experience stress in the next section.

Albrecht's four types of stress are:

1. Time stress.
2. Anticipatory stress.
3. Situational stress.
4. Encounter stress.

2.2.1 TIME STRESS

This is the type of stress we experience when we are struggling to get things done and don't feel as though we have enough time for the task. Situations such as being late for an appointment, having an unachievable 'to-do list', or trying to meet a deadline. Alongside this we might experience a fear of failing at our task or goal, or being overwhelmed by the expectations set.

2.2.2 ANTICIPATORY STRESS

Stress of this kind is experienced when we feel anxious about something which may happen, or a possible outcome. This could be a specific event, such as giving a speech or having a job interview, but often it comes from a general feeling of uncertainty or worry about the future.

2.2.3 SITUATIONAL STRESS

This type of stress usually results from a situation or event where you feel you have no control. For example being in a threatening situation, an argument, an accident or emergency. It also relates to other situations where we experience fear or feel we have no control, such as being told you are being made redundant. It could be experienced by missing the last train home or losing your wallet, or by receiving bad news.

2.2.4 ENCOUNTER STRESS

You might experience encounter stress when you have to interact with specific individuals or groups of people that you find challenging. This could be difficult customers, or people with high emotional needs who may drain your energy.

With these four types of stress in mind, let's consider the three main ways in which we experience stress.

2.3 HOW WE EXPERIENCE STRESS

There are three main ways in which we experience stress. These are:

1. Acute Stress
2. Episodic Stress
3. Chronic Stress

2.3.1 ACUTE STRESS

Acute stress is the most common type of stress. It's your body's immediate reaction to something it finds challenging or threatening, and it triggers your fight-or-flight response. This could be anything from losing your keys to having a car accident. Most of us experience this type of stress quite often, but provided it's manageable then it isn't harmful. This is also the type of thrill related stress you would experience from riding a rollercoaster.

2.3.2 EPISODIC STRESS

Frequently experiencing acute stress is called episodic stress. You might recognise this in someone who always seems to be having some kind of a crisis or always says they are stressed. Often people who move from one experience of acute stress to another will be irritable, anxious or have a negative mindset from frequently being in that heightened state.

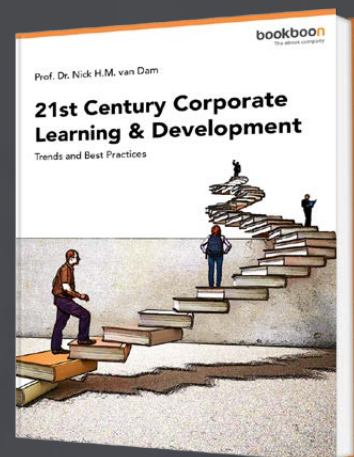
2.3.3 CHRONIC STRESS

If acute stress and its associated symptoms continue for a prolonged period or increases in intensity, it can become chronic stress. Chronic stress can be extremely detrimental to health and wellbeing and often results in burnout or serious health problems.

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2.4 EXERCISE: NOTICING STRESS

Exercise: Noticing Stress

For one full day notice how many instances of stress you experience and make a record of them. Note what triggered the stress, the intensity (low, medium or high), any physical impact and how long it took to recover each time.

If you can, continue this for a whole week including work days and days off.

The purpose of this exercise is simply to notice, and increase your awareness. We'll look at ways of managing stress later. This exercise could be used as part of a stress awareness training workshop.

2.5 CAUSES OF PERSONAL STRESS

In the previous section and the exercise above we briefly looked at causes of stress (stressors), but let's explore that in more detail. The following are all examples of some of the causes of personal stress (non-work related).

- Life changes (moving home, divorce, redundancy, bereavement, new baby)
- Study pressures
- Health problems
- Relationship difficulties
- Money problems and debt
- Upheaval at home (building work, family members moving in or out)
- Taking on too much, over-committing yourself
- Job hunting
- Fertility problems
- Managing family and caring responsibilities around work
- Childcare problems
- Lack of social life or leisure opportunities
- Problems being experienced by close family members (children doing exams, partner having issues at work, parent's health problems)
- A general feeling of lack of control
- Trying to live up to the expectations of others
- Distressing or disturbing world events
- Stress caused by positive events (planning a wedding, party or family holiday)
- Conflicts between work and family responsibilities
- Taking on stress of others
- Difficulties or pressure at work affecting home life
- Unexpected incidents or accidents
- Fatigue due to long working hours or commute

How many of those potential triggers do you notice in your own life? Do you experience stress as a result of any of these possible triggers, or do you feel able to manage them? Remember that everyone's personal experience of stress, and tolerance of stress, will be different. Whether you are responsible for employees, or working in a team alongside colleagues, it's worth bearing in mind that any number of these situations could be going on for them outside of work.

2.6 EXERCISE: IDENTIFYING TYPES OF STRESS

Exercise: Identifying Types of Stress

From the list above, and your own list in the first exercise, identify the type of stress for each possible cause, using Albrecht's Four Types of Stress. Think about the impact of each situation. Some may involve more than one type. For example, money problems and debt could be situational stress when your debit card is declined in a store, and anticipatory stress worrying about being able to pay next months bills.

This is another exercise that could be used as part of a stress awareness training workshop.

We often don't realise how much stress we are exposed to on a daily basis until we take the time to examine it in this way. A reasonable amount of stress is normal and manageable, it only becomes problematic when it becomes episodic stress or chronic stress. Awareness of our usual level of stress and our tolerance of it is an important part of being able to manage stress.

2.7 CAUSES OF STRESS AT WORK

Some possible causes of workplace stress are:

- High volume workload
- Relationships with colleagues
- Pressure to compete in the workplace
- Fear of failure
- Lack of autonomy
- Bullying from colleagues, customers or management
- Inequality in the workplace
- Unrealistic expectations
- Lack of team support
- Unexpected outcomes
- Fear of success
- Worrying about capability or skill level

- Lack of confidence in certain areas of your role, (example: giving presentations.)
- Pressure to continue in a stressful but high paying role due to financial commitments.
- Taking on too much or not delegating effectively
- Disengagement (self or colleagues)
- Poor company culture
- Lack of job satisfaction or fulfilment
- High risk job roles
- Worry about future job security
- Lack of support from management
- Unrealistic time pressures
- Job-specific challenges (example: handling difficult customers, working with challenging teenagers)

2.8 EXERCISE: LOOKING AT YOUR WORKPLACE

Exercise: Looking at Your Workplace

Looking at your organisation objectively, how many of the above possible stressors do you recognise as being present as potential risks in your workplace?

How many of these causes of stress (or others not included) do you experience yourself at work?

Consider the differences in specific job roles or environments within your organisation and how the potential causes of stress may vary. Carrying out stress surveys and assessments within your organisation is a useful way to monitor stress and identify the concerns of your employees.

Some of these potential stressors are unavoidable, but we can learn how to manage them and reduce the risk of some of the symptoms of stress.

3 SYMPTOMS AND EFFECTS OF STRESS

3.1 SYMPTOMS

Short term or long term exposure to stress can cause a number of physical and emotional symptoms, including:

- Interrupted sleep pattern or insomnia
- Irritability, moodiness, frustration
- Extreme tiredness or fatigue.
- Anxiety
- Headaches
- Muscular pain and tension (particularly back and neck)
- Stomach upsets
- Increased blood pressure
- Difficulty concentrating
- Chest pains
- Changes in appetite (overeating or loss of appetite)
- Skin conditions
- Worsening of any existing conditions
- Low immunity causing susceptibility to common illnesses
- Fertility problems
- Dental problems from teeth grinding or jaw clenching (Bruxism)
- Recurring minor illnesses
- Over-sensitive or tearful
- Lack of motivation
- Withdrawing socially
- Losing self-confidence

One or more of these symptoms may be present in someone experiencing prolonged exposure to stress or short term severe stress. It is important to understand that any of these symptoms may also be indicators of other health conditions. They are also very individual, so in someone who is usually shy and introverted this would be their usual personality, but for someone who is usually extroverted and sociable to suddenly withdraw from all socialising, this would be unusual behaviour.

The purpose of this list is to be aware of your own health and wellbeing, and to notice when you are experiencing changes to your wellbeing due to stress. Your colleagues and team members may be experiencing any of these health issues due to stress, and whilst it is not up to us to diagnose employees health conditions, a supportive and open company culture will encourage employees to seek help when needed.

3.2 EXERCISE: GET TO KNOW YOUR PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL STATE

Exercise: Get to Know Your Physical and Emotional State

Practising awareness of your usual physical and emotional state will help you to quickly notice changes.

Be aware of your usual state of health. Even if you have an ongoing medical condition or disability that prevents you from being in peak physical health, think of what is your usual state.

What are your usual personality traits?

Next time you feel stressed, notice the changes in your emotional state or physical health. Even if you don't feel stressed, take time to monitor your wellbeing regularly and watch out for any changes. Get the support you need either practically, physically or emotionally.

3.3 SIGNS OF STRESS IN OTHERS

Within a team, it may be possible to notice some signs of stress in your team members or colleagues. Some things to be aware of:

- Tiredness
- Irritability
- Less motivation than usual
- Negativity
- Lack of focus or concentration
- Acting 'out of character'
- Forgetfulness
- Failure to complete usual tasks
- Less interaction with colleagues
- Lost interest in social activities
- Signs of the physical symptoms of stress
- Less tolerant of noise
- Restlessness
- Low energy

Increasing awareness of stress, making support available, and encouraging employees to seek support when needed, will help reduce the impact of stress in the workplace.

4 THE IMPACT OF UNMANAGED STRESS

4.1 STRESS IN THE WORKPLACE

If you think about the figures relating to stress and disengagement in the workplace that we looked at in the first chapter, it's clear that there are likely to be a considerable number of employees either disengaged or experiencing stress symptoms at any time. With this in mind, it's no wonder that productivity is lower, the work atmosphere becomes negative and unhealthy, and customer service standards begin to drop.

The following case study shows how, in a generally quite positive workplace, just one employee with chronic stress can have a large impact.

4.2 CASE STUDY: CARL

Case Study: Carl

Carl was a member of a social care team. He was quite new to the post and although he was experienced and skilled at his role, he found it difficult to fit in with the team. The other team members had been there for several years and Carl felt that they were quite inflexible and 'set in their ways'. Carl found that his ideas and suggestions were dismissed, his opinions not heard, and after a while he lost enthusiasm for his job.

Outside of work Carl had other problems. His father was very ill and lived several hours drive away from Carl, so he was making the trip to visit him every weekend, and getting home late on a Sunday evening. The tiredness and stress from this made it harder for him to manage what he felt was a difficult work environment.

Carl began to dread going to work, he was exhausted, anxious about his father, and had often had a very emotional weekend visiting his parents. He continued to do his job to the best of his ability, but completely disconnected himself from his colleagues, and began to resent them and the job. He could see changes that would improve the ways of working, but found things were too rigid, and this frustrated him.

The team began to see Carl as being argumentative, as he often challenged their way of doing things. This made him unpopular. Before the team meeting each morning Carl would either sit apart from the team, or be slumped in his chair not joining in conversations, as he simply didn't have the energy or enthusiasm to be part of the team. He still continued to fulfil his duties.

Carl became a regular topic of conversation among his colleagues. Either they were concerned and wondering what was wrong with him, or they were annoyed by his attitude and lack of interest. Team members who had to spend any time working with Carl came away feeling drained and negative, and began to lose their enthusiasm for completing their own tasks. The atmosphere in the workplace became tense and Carl's low mood and lack of enthusiasm started to reflect on other members of the team.

Carl's manager didn't work with him directly and as he was still completing all aspects of his job role, she only became aware of the problem when other team members began to complain to her about him, and she noticed the atmosphere in the workplace had changed.

When Carl's manager called him into the office, he was relieved. He was offered support under the employee assistance program. He took some time off work, diagnosed with chronic stress and depression by his GP. The work atmosphere improved in his absence although his colleagues were put under more pressure due to having to take up his workload.

When Carl returned to work his personal circumstances had greatly improved, his mental health was better, and his father had made a full recovery. However, after only a month back in the work environment he again began to struggle with the culture, and felt that he wasn't being heard or valued within the team. He lost interest in his job and his standard of work dropped.

A few months later Carl left for an identical role in a different organisation. This time he felt listened to, valued, was given more responsibility and autonomy. He continues to succeed in this role.

Carl's stress was a combination of work related issues and personal issues. Not only did this affect his health but it also had a negative impact on the team.

4.3 EXERCISE: REVIEWING THE CASE STUDY

Exercise: Reviewing the Case Study

Looking back at the causes of stress in this chapter, what would you say were the main stressors for Carl, both personally and at work?

What were the specific signs of stress that you might notice if you worked with Carl?

What was the impact on the business when Carl was present and when he was absent?

Do you think this situation could have been managed more effectively in the workplace?

4.4 THE IMPACT OF STRESS IN THE WORKPLACE

It only takes one person with chronic stress to have a big impact on the workplace. If there are a number of employees, perhaps not with chronic stress, but experiencing stress on an unhealthy level or being involved in stressful jobs, the impact will obviously be larger. The result of having one or more employees struggling to manage stress may be:

- Disputes within the team
- Poor performance
- More accidents at work
- Increase in complaints and grievances
- Damage to company reputation
- More customer complaints
- Increased sickness absence
- Lack of cohesion in teams

All of these issues contribute to the challenges and mentioned in the first chapter, and are potentially costly and damaging to the organisation.

4.5 THE WIDER IMPACT OF STRESS (THE RIPPLE EFFECT)

There is also a wider impact which reaches beyond the organisation. This could be considered as part of your organisation's Corporate Social Responsibilities as stress does not just affect your employees, but has a far reaching 'ripple effect' into the lives and wellbeing of others.

If we look back over the signs and symptoms of stress from the previous section, it's clear that these would have an impact on people's lives. The following case study relates to Steven, who is experiencing stress at work.

4.6 CASE STUDY: STEVEN

Case Study: Steven

Steven is a manager in a large retail company. Along with two other managers he is responsible for a team of sixty people in retail operations.

There is a high turnover of staff which limits the number of employees trained in all aspects of their role, this is a problem when setting staff rotas. Before Christmas, one of the busiest times of the retail calendar, policy prevents staff from taking annual leave. This causes resentment in the team, as they are already under pressure from the increased workload, and as only a small number of staff can do certain tasks they experience additional pressure and lack of variety. Sickness absence during this time is another problem.

Systems and equipment put under pressure by the extra workload break down more often than usual, causing delays.



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Steven finds a large part of his day is spent managing staff dissatisfaction. He also has targets to meet, which is difficult with the training limitations and some staff on sick leave. The workplace is hectic and noisy. Steven is stressed, his energy and tolerance levels are low.

When Steven goes home he struggles to interact with his family. His children are often in bed when he gets home, but even if they are awake, he doesn't have the energy for them and is dismissive. Steven worries that he's not a good father. His children wonder if they've done something wrong.

Steven's wife is upset by his lack of interest in the children. She tries to talk to him about it and they end up arguing. In fact they argue a lot more than they used to. Steven is unable to switch off from work and has trouble sleeping. He stays up late watching television alone. His relationship with his wife is suffering.

Steven no longer socialises with their friends as he is never 'in the mood' for it. As they mostly socialise as a couple, Steven's wife finds herself excluded from the social circle. She feels isolated and depressed. She is trying to prepare for a family Christmas but is secretly dreading it as Steven has been so difficult to be around recently.

Although Steven has always been quite physically healthy, he has noticed that he always seems to have a cold, his neck and shoulders ache and he is constantly taking painkillers. He has started smoking again despite giving up a few years ago, as this is the only thing that helps him to relax.

Steven is looking forward to having some time off work over Christmas, although he doesn't plan to do much as he feels so tired and unwell.

Unlike Carl in the earlier case study, all of Steven's stress is work-related. The ripple effect from this stress starts to spread into his home life, his relationships, social life, and health. There is the potential for this to have far wider implications for Steven's relationships, lifestyle and health if it continues.

4.7 THE IMPORTANCE STRESS MANAGEMENT AND RESILIENCE

In cases such as Steven's, the situations that initially cause the stress may be beyond his control. In fact that lack of control can be a cause of stress in itself. He is unable to train new staff quickly enough, he has no control over staff being off sick, he can't prevent systems and equipment failure.

If we find ourselves in situations where external circumstances which we cannot change are the main cause of stress, our only way of managing them may be to build resilience and develop personal strategies for managing stress. We will cover this later in the book.

5 A PERSON CENTRED APPROACH

In therapy, The Person-Centred Approach is developed from the work of the psychologist Dr. Carl Rogers (1902–1987). This approach moved away from directive approaches to therapy and towards a theory that trusted in people's tendency to fulfil their potential.

In Health and Social Care, the term Person Centred refers to an approach to care planning which focuses first on the individual, and requires services and environments to adapt to meet their needs.

It is this second definition that provides the theory behind a Person Centred Approach to employee wellbeing and engagement, as this approach enables employers to create the best environment and circumstances for a healthy and productive team.

5.1 A PERSON CENTRED APPROACH TO EMPLOYEE WELLBEING

A Person Centred Approach to employee wellbeing focuses first on the employee and then expands to include the person's lifestyle and environment, to the employee's job role and work environment.

Expanding outwards from the employee's own unique combination of values, beliefs, life experiences, preferences and personality traits, as this will have an impact on how he relates to the people, circumstances and situations around him, which themselves will be a unique combination.

5.2 WHY STARTING WITH THE WORKPLACE ISN'T THE ANSWER

Whilst starting by creating a healthy physical environment at work and a positive culture is definitely a step in the right direction, much more can be achieved by taking an 'inside out' approach beginning with the employee.

Often businesses invest in creating a pleasing work space or have strategies and policies in place that support the wellbeing infrastructure, but this cannot be fully effective without first viewing employees as individuals and understanding how this impacts on their experience at work.

We will look at an overview of the person centred approach here and cover it in more detail in the following chapters.

5.3 OVERVIEW OF THE PERSON CENTRED WELLBEING MODEL

The graphic below shows the person centred approach to wellbeing. This tool is the basis for the Person Centred Approach and can be used to understand how stress affects individual employees, and the create solutions. It focuses on the following factors that contribute to an individual's experience personally and at work:

- The Unique Person
- Life and Social Factors
- Job Role and Professional Development
- The Workplace

It looks first at individual and their own unique set of traits, beliefs and values. The next level considers not only the lifestyle and environment of that person, but how they relate to it through their beliefs and traits. If two people found themselves in the same situation, each could have a very different experience based upon their values and personality.

The third level begins to look more at the person as an employee, and at their job role. Again this is more about how the individual relates to their role, responsibilities and other job factors such as security, through their own unique set of traits, beliefs and values. The outer section of the model considers the wider work environment and culture, and how the individual experiences these factors.

5.4 THE PERSON CENTRED WELLBEING MODEL



6 THE UNIQUE PERSON

In this chapter we will look at the employee as an individual, and how that relates to their experience of life and work.

6.1 PEOPLE AS INDIVIDUALS

Each individual's perception of themselves and of the world is based on several factors, some of the main ones being:

- Core values
- Beliefs
- Life experiences
- Personality Traits
- Personal preferences

6.1.1 CORE VALUES

Our values are basically the things which we believe are important. When we live in alignment to our values we are generally happy with life, but when we come across a situation which doesn't fit with our values, this can be a cause of anxiety and dissatisfaction. Clarifying your values is an important first step toward developing resilience. The more your life is aligned with your values, the lower your stress level.

Incongruence of values and actions of lifestyle can cause stress and internal conflict. This can often be the case with a job role that requires people to work in a way that doesn't fit with their values.

The mix of values that we have are unique for everyone and we tend to have very strong feeling and opinions about them. Disagreements and conflict in the workplace often occurs as a result of a clash of values between employees, with each being unable to understand the other's perspective. It can be huge source of frustration to find that someone has no regard at all for something you consider to be vitally important.

6.1.2 BELIEFS

By the time we reach adulthood we have developed a range of beliefs which we consider to be true. These may be beliefs we have learned from our parents, beliefs that we have gained through life experiences, or simply assumptions we have made.

People often develop limiting beliefs about themselves, and these can result in a lack of confidence or low self-esteem. This can result in a negative mindset and lack of motivation. Limiting beliefs are one of the main causes of people being held back in life.

When we find ourselves in situations which challenge our beliefs this can cause confusion and stress. Part of developing self-awareness is about exploring our beliefs, but also learning a tolerance of other people's firmly held beliefs, even if we consider them to be false or unhelpful.

6.1.3 LIFE EXPERIENCES

Our experiences throughout life shape who we become. Memories of unpleasant experiences may cause us to avoid certain situations, types of people or places. This may also prevent us from taking risks, or trying new things.

Positive experiences and good memories encourage us to more of those experiences, and increase motivation. Our experiences also help to shape our beliefs, whether these are limiting or empowering.

As employees, our previous life experiences will greatly affect how we are in the workplace. For example, our previous experiences of failure may hold us back, or the opposite may be true and we might take unnecessary risks if we have had little experience of failure in our lives.

Previous experiences with people can cause stress and anxiety when we are put in situations which remind us of a particular person or event. One example of this is when people who have grown up with a strict and domineering parent find it difficult to work for a manager with similar traits.

6.1.4 PERSONALITY TRAITS

Our personality traits will also have developed over time, and can be shaped by our experiences and our environment throughout life. Whilst certain personality types will be more suited to particular job roles than others, there are many other factors to consider too. Also our personality has an effect on how we adapt to pressure, change, and stressful situations.

A mixture of personalities helps to create a diverse team, but it can also be the a source of conflict as personalities clash.

6.1.5 PERSONAL PREFERENCES

As individuals, we all have different likes and dislikes. This could be as simple as the types of food we like to eat, the environment we like to live in, or the type of leisure activities we enjoy. It's true to say that you can't please everyone, and this is one reason that events or team-building days organised for employees cause as much anxiety for some as they are fun for others.

Two employees in identical jobs roles may have a completely different view of what they enjoy about the role. For example, in a job that has both a practical and an administrative side, one employee may really enjoy keeping the admin up to date, whilst the other dreads it and would rather only have to do the practical aspect of their role.

6.2 EXERCISE: UNDERSTANDING VALUES

Exercise: Understanding Values

How well do you know your values? Understanding our values is a good starting point for developing strategies to manage stress, and also understanding the source of conflict in the workplace.

A knowledge of values can also be used to allocate responsibilities to employees who would be most likely to be engaged with certain tasks. Use the list below to identify your own core values.

Start by selecting twenty that you strongly hold. From this selection identify the five that you hold most strongly. These are likely to be your core values. Some of our values may change as our lives and priorities change, and some may feel more important than others at certain times. However, your core values are less likely to change.

Accountability	Decisiveness	Generosity	Obedience	Sensitivity
Accuracy	Dependability	Goodness	Openness	Serenity
Achievement	Determination	Grace	Order	Service
Acknowledgement	Diligence	Growth	Originality	Simplicity
Adventure	Discipline	Happiness	Participation	Soundness
Aesthetics	Discretion	Hard	Partnership	Speed
Altruism	Diversity	Work	Peace	Spirituality
Ambition	Effectiveness	Harmony	Perfection	Spontaneity
Assertiveness	Efficiency	Health	Performance	Stability
Balance	Elegance	Helpfulness	Personal Growth	Strength
Beauty	Empathy	Honesty	Positivity	Structure
Belonging	Empowerment	Honour	Practicality	Success
Boldness	Enjoyment	Humility	Preparedness	Support
Carefulness	Enthusiasm	Humour	Professionalism	Teamwork
Challenge	Equality	Independence	Quality	Thankfulness
Collaboration	Excellence	Ingenuity	Recognition	Thoroughness
Commitment	Excitement	Inquisitiveness	Reliability	Thoughtfulness
Community	Expertise	Integrity	Resourcefulness	Tolerance
Compassion	Exploration	Intelligence	Respect	Tradition
Competitiveness	Expressiveness	Joy	Restraint	Trust
Connection	Fairness	Justice	Risk-Taking	Truthfulness
Consistency	Faith	Leadership	Safety	Understanding
Contentment	Fame	Learning	Security	Uniqueness
Contribution	Fidelity	Legacy	Self-actualization	Unity
Control	Fitness	Love	Self-control	Usefulness
Cooperation	Focus	Loyalty	Self-expression	Vitality
Courtesy	Freedom	Merit	Selflessness	
Creativity	Fun	Motivation	Self-reliance	
Curiosity		Nurturing		

Knowing our values and understanding the impact it can have when we aren't living or working according to our values, is a vital stage of developing self-awareness.

Being able to see when disagreements with others are caused by a conflict in values creates understanding and tolerance within teams and helps create a positive work environment.

Both self-awareness and a positive work environment help to build resilience and enable employees to manage stress.

7 LIFE AND SOCIAL FACTORS

The second aspect of a Person Centred Approach is to consider the lifestyle and social environment of the employee, how they relate to this, and how it impacts them at work.

7.1 DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES

Each individual will experience life, circumstances and events in a different way. This depends on their unique traits as we looked at in the previous chapter. This is why two people could be at the same event, doing the same activity, and have a completely different experience of it. This is also why two equally qualified and experienced employees will approach a task in a different way, and one will most likely be more effective than the other.

7.2 KNOWING YOUR EMPLOYEES AND COLLEAGUES

As employers or as colleagues, it's unlikely we would know everything about the lives of our employees or co-workers. In the case study of Carl, even though his was a very open and supportive workplace where people shared a lot with each, Carl didn't feel as though he really fit in with the team, so few of his colleagues knew what was going on in his life.

Of course we don't have to share everything, but when creating strategies for employee wellbeing and stress management, it's important to recognise the significance of events and experiences outside of work.

7.3 LIFE AND SOCIAL FACTORS TO CONSIDER

There are of course numerous things happening in a person's life at any time, and we know that how we experience life and events is directly related to our values, beliefs and personality. Our unique perspective enables us to deal with external events either in a positive or negative way. Some events do obviously have a negative impact on our lives, and this is where building resilience and a positive mindset can help us to cope with them.

Life factors to consider in terms of stress management and employee wellbeing include:

- Home environment
- Family
- Community
- Social Circumstances
- Physical Health
- World Events

7.3.1 HOME ENVIRONMENT

A person's home environment can be a huge source of stress. If the home environment is unhealthy, there are issues in relationships, or a lack of security in a person's home life, this will all have an impact. The degree to which this affects someone depends on their resilience, personality and values, as we know from the previous chapter.

If someone has 'security' as a strong core value, then uncertainty about a potential house move or problems paying the mortgage will have a particularly strong impact on them.

A person with 'fairness' as a strong value might feel stressed and frustrated if they feel that they take are forced to take on far more responsibility at home than the rest of their family members. The situation may have arisen initially because there was a difference in values. This could lead to resentment, family arguments and even relationship problems. It could also lead to more stress as they put too much pressure on themselves trying to get everything done.

7.3.2 FAMILY

The person in the previous example might be experiencing family problems due to a clash in values. Small issue can often become bigger problems when our reactions to the initial problem causes us more stress.

Stress can be caused not only by family disagreements, but by a lack of family connection and support. People often experience ongoing stress from trying to manage negative behaviour of family members, or from caring for relatives with ill health.

In the earlier example of Carl, a contributing factor to his stress was disagreements within the family, but the fact that his father was seriously ill and he was worried about his health, and also finding it difficult to be far away from his parents at a difficult time. In trying to manage this he became exhausted from the travelling, he didn't sleep well and this had the wider impact on his health and his work performance.

7.3.3 COMMUNITY

Humans are social creatures, and whilst being comfortable with spending time alone is important, it's in our nature to be part of a community. We have a need for a sense of belonging.

This community might be:

- Extended family
- A church or religious community
- Social groups and friends
- A sports team or club
- Other parents at a school
- A college or evening class
- The local community

Belonging to these communities helps us to build resilience to stress and contribute to our overall wellbeing. Without a sense of community or belonging, people are more likely to feel isolated and have difficulty managing stress when it occurs.

However, these communities can also contribute to stress in the same way as family or work situations when there is conflict. A person's status and level of control within those communities can also be a factor.

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7.3.4 SOCIAL CIRCUMSTANCES

Our social circumstances can determine our sense of self worth and self-esteem, and can also contribute to stress when we feel trapped in undesirable social circumstances. It may not be specific situations that cause a problem in this area. Social stress often comes from how we perceive our status in the world in comparison to others.

This could include factors such as:

- Where we live
- Financial circumstances
- Social issues relating to race, religion or gender
- Immigration Status
- Relationships with peers
- Job or employment status
- Level of Education

7.3.5 PHYSICAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Stress and anxiety can be caused by problems with our physical health, both directly or indirectly. For example someone who has a physical health condition that also affects their emotional wellbeing may find themselves less able to manage stress and be less emotionally healthy than someone with a physical condition that has no medical affect on their mental health.

However, when we remember that as individuals we all have very different, personalities, values and beliefs, it's easy to see how physical ailments can have a profound effect on someone's mental health and capacity to manage day to day stress. People with physical conditions and disabilities benefit from developing a positive and resilient mindset to enable them to cope with the challenges of their physical health.

This can be difficult, especially when we consider that there will be all the other personal and social factors involved.

Even tiredness or low energy from living with a long term physical condition can impact on the overall wellbeing of someone who is positive and resilient. It's not surprising that the two highest causes of sickness absence are stress and muscular-skeletal problems, as each one contributes to the other.

7.3.6 WORLD EVENTS

Sometimes events and circumstances far outside of our immediate world can be the cause of stress and anxiety. Often this is because they challenge our sense of safety and security, or conflict with our sense of fairness, and what is ‘right and wrong’.

Examples of this could be:

- Elections and referendums
- War or civil unrest in other countries
- The collapse of financial markets
- Natural disasters
- Famine or poverty in other countries
- Issues with health or education systems

Events and situations such as these may make us afraid or anxious, or simply challenge our values. If we have strong views then it can also cause conflict with our peers, family and colleagues. The media reporting on world events, and how we relate to it, also plays a part in how we are affected.

7.4 CASE STUDY: CATHY

Cathy’s situation is an example of how someone’s unique personality traits, and their life and social factors can cause them stress that has a strong impact on the work environment.

Case Study: Cathy

Cathy is a care worker and she has a two year old son. Her workplace have a good standard of support in place for employees including monthly supervision meetings, regular team forums, and an Employee Assistance program that includes access to free counselling. Cathy has been in care work for 12 years and has been in her current role for 4 years. She enjoys her job and likes her colleagues.

Cathy finds parenthood hard, especially as her son doesn’t sleep well and she rarely gets more than 4 hours sleep. The childcare that enables Cathy to work her shifts is shared between her partner, her parents and a childminder. Recently her and her partner have separated although they still share a home as neither can afford to move. The atmosphere at home is difficult, they are not getting on well and often disagree about parenting.

Their son’s behaviour can be challenging at times and Cathy finds his behaviour hard to manage when she is so tired from work and lack of sleep. Cathy is worried that when her partner finds somewhere else to live she will struggle financially.

Cathy smokes and finds that the only way she feels able to relax after work is with a few glasses of wine. She feels anxious when her partner is home. Cathy finds looking after her son exhausting when she comes home from work, and also the lack of sleep makes her less tolerant. She enjoys going to work as it gives her a break from her home life.

Cathy has started to make mistakes at work and several times her colleagues have needed to bring issues to the attention of her manager. She has been reminded of her responsibilities and offered support from the Employee Assistance program, but Cathy doesn't feel that she needs counselling. She tells her manager that she's just tired and makes more effort at work. Cathy is worried about making more mistakes and letting her colleagues down. This anxiety causes her to check everything she does several times, which means her work takes longer to complete and jobs are unfinished.

Cathy's manager has set her clear performance objectives, and Cathy is focused on meeting each one and wants to please her manager. Focusing on these objectives is taking so much of Cathy's energy that she is neglecting other aspects of her role.

Cathy's case is a clear example of how life and social factors are affecting her work performance and her mental and physical health. The HSE Management Standards were being well met by Cathy's employer, so stress in the workplace was not the issue, although Cathy did become stressed about her work role once she realised that she was making mistakes.

Cathy is at risk from stress related illness and although measures in the workplace will help monitor her performance, she needs to get some support to manage her personal issues.

8 JOB ROLE AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

8.1 JOB SPECIFIC STRESS

There are some jobs that come up in most UK surveys as being the most stressful. These are:

- Prison Officer
- Police Officer
- Social Worker
- Teacher
- Paramedic/Ambulance Driver
- Nurse
- Doctor
- Firefighter

Employees responsible for high value clients or large teams may consider their role to be stressful, but it's equally possible that an employee would thrive in this type of role, and feel that a job with less responsibility wouldn't be challenging enough for them. As before, this can be linked to personality traits, beliefs and values.

Roles that involve risk to personal safety or that involve dealing with challenging people or difficult customers also carry a high level of job related stress.

8.2 ASPECTS OF JOB RELATED STRESS

Some factors to consider in this area when thinking about stress management are:

- Role and responsibilities
- Opportunities for development
- Job role clarity
- Job security

8.2.1 ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES

When looking at work related stress it's worth considering that certain roles are more likely to cause stress. In those situations the level of stress experienced by an employee will depend largely on their personality and resilience, and their suitability for the role. Employers in these situations need to have a strong infrastructure to manage stress and support employees.

If employees feel they have a lack of control over their role and responsibilities this can cause anxiety, so where possible, employees benefit from being given a level of autonomy and flexibility in their role.

An employee's level of job satisfaction is another contributing factor to mental wellbeing at work.

8.2.2 OPPORTUNITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT

Job satisfaction is something very individual. Some people need a role that feels challenging and demanding in order to feel satisfied and not become bored or lose motivation. Others can achieve job satisfaction by seeing a task completed and done well.

For some, job satisfaction will come from being able to help others, but it's interesting to note that the job roles identified as the most stressful in the UK are all professions that involve helping people. In those cases it's likely that the stress comes from other factors such as the nature of the job, the element of risk, or pressure from cuts in staffing and budgets.

Employers who provide staff with opportunities to learn and develop their skills and progress within the company if they wish to, are likely to have a more engaged and productive workforce.

8.2.3 JOB ROLE CLARITY

A lack of job role clarity is a common cause of stress in the workplace. This is often an issue for teams and especially with remote workers who may feel disconnected from the team. Employees may be clear on their job description, but clarity about the role or the goals of the team and organisation can be more difficult, as the parameters are often changing and evolving with the business and the needs of customers.

Employees need to know what's expected of them by their employer, and the overall goals of the organisation and their team. Team members will perform better if they are clear on which aspects of their role are most important to the overall goal, and how their specific contribution fits into the bigger picture. Job role clarity can help to reduce stress by giving employees a greater sense of control.

Good communication between managers and teams, and regular reviews of goals and progress will help reduce stress by providing clarity. Employees benefit from being able to see the importance of their job role and how this contributes to the overall result.

8.2.4 JOB SECURITY

Whilst a job for a lifetime is a thing of the past, people still value job security. Not only for financial reasons, although this features highly, but the prospect of applying for jobs and starting again in a new company can be daunting.

In times when budget and staff cuts are commonplace, the uncertainty and lack of control can be extremely demoralising and stressful. A more resilient team member may be able to manage the uncertainty during times of change, but when employees are afraid of redundancy or restructuring, and the impact this could have on their lives, a strong stress management strategy is vital.

The following case study relates to a team in the midst of organisational change.

8.3 CASE STUDY: JOANNA

Case Study: Joanna

Joanna is responsible for a team of 15 people in a healthcare setting where she has worked for 10 years. Part of her role is allocating responsibilities to team members on a daily basis. The team are all qualified and capable of fulfilling their roles and none of the tasks that Joanna allocates are outside of their skills or experience. It is generally a positive, open and friendly workplace.

There have been considerable cuts in funding and staff recently, which has meant that members of the team are being given additional responsibilities to make up the shortfall in staffing. A few months ago there were redundancies although they didn't include Joanna's team. There is uncertainty over possible further redundancies, cuts in funding and resources, and the way this has been managed by the organisation. As a result of this the staff are becoming quite negative, feeling anxious and stressed and this is affecting the atmosphere of the work environment. Joanna herself feels uncertain about her role, although financially this wouldn't be much of an issue, she does really enjoy her job.

Now when Joanna allocates daily responsibilities, she is finding that her team are already in a negative mindset, having shared their concerns, opinions and anxieties with each other before they start work. Staff are now clinging to what they consider to be 'their' tasks and areas, resistant to taking on different responsibilities, and far less flexible than they once were.

Staff openly disagree with Joanna's allocation of work, and will challenge her on it as a group. Joanna often feels she has to remind the staff that things have changed and they need to be flexible. The staff will usually do as they are asked but often not to the best of their ability, and the discontentment will spread as they continue to discuss it amongst themselves for the rest of the day.

Joanna feels frustrated as she has, and still is, proud of her team and how they work, but is struggling with how they openly challenge her decisions. She understands that this comes from their frustration and lack of control, and their uncertainty about the future. Joanna prefers not to ask her manager to support her with this as she knows she should be able to handle the team herself, so the manager assumes that everything is fine.

Joanna feels isolated at work, stressed and demoralised. She knows that further cuts are inevitable and worries not just about job security, but how the workplace will be as a result of more cuts. Joanna has always considered herself to be good at 'leaving work at work', but now she finds her sleep is disturbed by worrying about work the next morning. Joanna has also started smoking again recently. This has caused some conflict with her husband who has strong opinions against smoking.

9 THE WORKPLACE

9.1 THE IMPORTANCE OF ENVIRONMENT

When creating stress management strategies, employers often begin by looking at the workplace, and particularly the physical work environment. Whilst this is an important aspect, it is not enough on its own to provide an effective way of managing stress. When considering the workplace in relation to stress, there are other factors to consider in addition to the actual physical environment. A strategy should include:

- Physical environment
- Co-workers and relationships
- HR and Management
- Organisational Values
- Customers/Clients
- Company Culture

9.1.1 PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

The physical work environment has an impact on employee's wellbeing emotionally and physically. Workspace design can impact the way that employees sit, stand or move during their working hours. Equipment and furniture to support backs and encourage healthy movement during the day will reduce physical strain and the risk of muscular-skeletal problems. Muscular-skeletal problems are the second highest cause of sickness absence after stress, and as both are linked it makes sense that addressing the physical space is important.

People benefit from natural daylight in the workplace, especially during winter when employees are likely to be arriving and leaving work in darkness. Opportunities to be outside during the day, especially with green spaces or even by bringing plants into the workspace, also benefit wellbeing.

However, paying attention only to the physical space won't make a difference if other areas of stress management are not adequately considered.

9.1.2 CO-WORKERS AND RELATIONSHIPS

Workplace dynamics can have a profound effect on stress in the workplace. In the case studies of Carl and Joanna, we saw how teams can behave when under threat or when facing a shared problem. Cliques and subcultures are common in workplaces and can be unhealthy both for those inside or outside of the group. Employees used to being part of a closed social group will struggle when organisational change threatens their environment, and can often become set in their ways and inflexible. Those outside of a tight group may feel excluded, unsupported or even bullied.

A workplace will benefit from a diverse mix of personalities, but unhealthy relationships and disagreements between colleagues unable to see the other's perspective can be a common cause of workplace stress.

9.1.3 HR AND MANAGEMENT

The ability of HR departments, leaders and managers on all levels to be able to work together towards the common goal of managing stress in the workplace is essential.

Policies and strategies created will only be effective if implemented throughout the organisation. Managers must be aware of their own behaviour, and how it can impact the team in a positive or negative way. Self awareness and an understanding of their own values, will help managers to relate to their teams more effectively.

Managers are often the bridge between HR and employees, which itself can be a source of stress.

Line managers are often the first to notice the signs of stress in their teams and should be given specific training in identifying and understanding stress, and how to support employees.

9.1.4 ORGANISATIONAL VALUES

A company's mission statement and core values are often displayed proudly on the workplace wall. The problems begin when the reality of the organisation doesn't meet those values for employees on a day to day basis.

When an organisation presents core values and asks that employees live by them in the carrying out of their duties and their service to customers this is quite reasonable. But when employees feel that the organisational values are not being applied either by the business or their managers, resentment and conflict will damage the work environment and culture.

As before, open communication between the organisation and its employees is essential to ensure small issues do not become bigger cultural problems.

When an employee's personal values do not fit with the organisational values, they are likely to become dissatisfied and this could not only affect their wellbeing, but the general work atmosphere as demoralisation spreads.

9.1.5 CUSTOMERS AND CLIENTS

As we saw in the previous chapter, the jobs usually considered to be most stressful are the ones that involve direct contact with members of the public, often in difficult or dangerous situations. Working with people in a distressed state is clearly going to have an impact on the employee. This applies on different levels, from the emergency services working with people in danger, teachers working with a challenging class, or customer service staff dealing with irate and dissatisfied customers.

Employees in customer facing roles of some kind are the most likely to be absent from work with stress related issues, and particular attention needs to be given to the needs of these employees when creating stress management plans.



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9.1.6 COMPANY CULTURE

A positive company culture helps to create a healthy work environment. As humans we have a need for connection, and to feel valued and important. A culture that encourages its employees to innovate, develop and has clear, open communication, will empower employees to achieve.

However, as we've seen in the case studies, a culture can be fragile and easily damaged by small issues. Often the overall organisational culture may appear to be positive, but within specific teams there are problems. It's also not unusual for a small team within an organisation where the culture is unhealthy to form a close bond and create their own positive and productive culture.

Organisational culture is something to be monitored and reviewed regularly.

9.2 CASE STUDY: A REMOTE TEAM

Case Study: A Remote Team

A team working with young adults were moved from their main company premises to a small community based project. They had a limited amount of space in shared premises, and the building was in need of redecoration.

As they became established in their new setting, gradually involvement from the senior managers in the organisation was reduced and the team were given full responsibility for their project. They had full control, within the expectations and standards of the organisation, to run their setting in the way that worked best for their clients, and had autonomy over planning and activities, and the daily running of their site.

The culture at the central workplace was unhealthy, employees there said they did not feel valued, job roles seemed to be constantly changing, and they were stressed and demoralised.

The remote team however were focused on working together towards their common goals, supported each other, and were able to have a flexible approach to their work. Communication was open and all members of the team felt valued and heard.

In the case of this remote team they were able to create their own positive and healthy culture once they were removed from the existing culture of the main workplace. It's interesting to note that with this team, the physical environment was far from ideal. Their mindset, positive culture and role clarity enabled them to achieve a high level of employee and customer satisfaction.

9.3 EXERCISE: REVIEW YOUR WORK ENVIRONMENT

Exercise: Review Your Work Environment

Using the information covered in this chapter and looking at your workplace objectively, create a checklist of the features you consider to be important in supporting wellbeing and reducing stress.

Begin with the physical environment and continue with other aspects of the workplace.

How does your workplace measure up?

What steps could you take to make improvements?

10 MANAGING STRESS IN THE WORKPLACE

Once we have a clear understanding of the factors that contribute to stress in the workplace, we can create strategies to reduce and manage the impact of stress at work.

10.1 MAKE A COMMITMENT

The address employee wellbeing an organisation must first make a clear commitment to identifying issues and implementing necessary changes. Commitment needs to be made throughout the organisation, from departments with overall responsibility for employee wellbeing, through all line managers, to employees. If employee wellbeing is not addressed, the costs associated with work related stress will increase, as will the potential for lower standards of customer service and damaged reputation. Appropriate time and budget allowances need to be made, and appropriate resources and external support need to be researched and sourced.

10.2 THE BUSINESS CASE

The business case for addressing stress in the workplace and employee wellbeing goes beyond the obvious problem of sickness absence costs. The actual cost to the organisation is dependent on several factors, some of which were mentioned at the beginning of this book.

Consider the real costs of stress and ill-health of your employees, including:

- The cost of sickness absence
- Hiring temporary replacement staff or additional hours for existing staff to replace absent employees
- Costs of recruitment and training new employees
- Losses due to poor customer service
- Potential costs of damaged reputation
- Costs of time and administration to implement Sickness Policies and Return to Work strategies
- Losses due to reduced productivity
- The wider implications of stress and disengagement on the culture and future performance
- Increased costs from risks insufficiently managed

The potential costs may be higher than you thought.

10.3 FINDING OUT WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON

The only way to really know the current state in relation to stress is to ask. Communication really is key. Too often companies have implemented changes which they believed would make a huge difference to the motivation and wellbeing of their staff, only to be confused and disappointed when they didn't see the expected results. Find out what people are really thinking and feeling, and start from there. The annual employee satisfaction survey is no longer enough.

Carry out a Stress Analysis, starting with an Employee Stress Assessment. There are examples of questionnaires available from the Health and Safety Executive and other organisations. The following survey is the one used in the Person Centred Wellbeing initiative, as this covers stress outside of the workplace as well as job related stress, and gives a much clear, bigger picture perspective.

10.4 STRESS ASSESSMENT SURVEY

This is the stress assessment used by the Person Centred Wellbeing Project. It combines the questions recommended by the HSE with questions to establish an individual's level of personal stress.

		Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
	Section 1: Stress at Work (HSE Stress Management Standards)					
1	I am clear what is expected of me at work					
2	I can decide when to take a break					
3	Different groups or responsibilities at work demand things from me that are hard to combine					
4	I know how to go about getting my job done					
5	I am subject to personal harassment in the form of unkind words or behaviour					
6	I have unachievable deadlines					
7	If work gets difficult, my colleagues will help me					
8	I am given supportive feedback on the work I do					
9	I have to work very intensively					
10	I have a say in my own work speed					
11	I am clear on what my duties and responsibilities are					
12	I have to neglect some tasks because I have too much to do					

		Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
13	I am clear about the goals and objectives for my department					
14	There is friction or anger between my colleagues					
15	I have a choice in deciding how I do my work					
16	I am able to take sufficient breaks					
17	I understand how my work fits in to the overall aim of the organisation					
18	I am pressured to work long hours					
19	I have a choice in deciding what I do at work					
20	I have to work very fast to get everything done					
21	I am subject to bullying at work					
22	I have unrealistic time pressures					
23	I can rely on my line manager to help me out with a work problem					
24	I get help and support I need from colleagues					
25	I have some say over the way I work					
26	I have sufficient opportunities to question managers about change at work					
27	I receive the respect at work I deserve from my colleagues					
28	Staff are always consulted about change at work					
29	I can talk to my line manager about something that has upset or annoyed me at work					
30	My working time can be flexible					
31	My colleagues are willing to listen to my work related problems					
32	When changes are made at work, I am clear how they will work out in practice					
33	I am supported through emotionally demanding work					
34	Relationships at work are strained					
35	My line manager encourages me at work					
	Section 2: Personal Stress					
1	There aren't enough hours in the day to do all the things that I feel I must do					
2	I do most tasks myself to ensure they are done properly					
3	I underestimate how long it takes to do things					

		Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
4	I take on too many responsibilities because I don't like to say no					
5	I feel guilty if I relax or do nothing					
6	I find myself thinking about problems or things I should be doing, even when I am supposed to be relaxing					
7	I have a tendency to rush around					
8	I feel irritated or frustrated if I have to queue, or wait for things or people					
9	I worry about other people's problems as well as my own					
10	I can be critical of others or find fault with things					
11	My self confidence/self esteem is lower than I would like it to be					
12	I feel tired even after what seems to be a good night's sleep					
13	My appetite has changed, I want to binge or I've lost my appetite					
14	I find it difficult to concentrate and I can be forgetful					
15	I find it difficult to make decisions, my judgement can be clouded or I worry about making the wrong decision					
16	I've lost interest in other people, I distance myself					
17	I feel as though my life is out of my control					
18	I'm lacking in motivation					
19	I expect the worse possible outcome in situations					
20	I find that I smoke or drink more than I used to					
21	I feel angry or lose my temper					
22	I worry about other people's expectations					
23	I suffer with minor to moderate health issues like colds, headaches, muscular problems					
24	I feel low, tearful or hopeless					
25	I find it hard to get to sleep because my mind is busy					
26	I feel nervous, on edge or easily startled ('jumpy')					
27	I worry about what people think of me					
28	I take on responsibility for other people's happiness or wellbeing					
29	I get restless, fidgety or find it hard to settle					

		Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
30	I overreact or say things 'in the moment' which I regret later					
31	I worry about not having enough money or security					
32	I worry about world events					
33	I find myself dwelling on the past					
34	I feel jealous of or resentful towards other people					
35	I have more responsibilities or pressures in my life than I feel able to manage					

The results of a survey such as this can be analysed to identify areas of risk, potential trigger points for stress, to plan organisational development as well as creating stress management strategies.

10.5 NEXT STEPS

Once you have commitment across the organisation, have assessed and presented the business case for addressing employee wellbeing, and have analysed the results of stress assessments, you can begin to create effective strategies to improve wellbeing and manage stress in the workplace.

11 STRESS MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

Using the HSE Management Standards and the Person Centred Approach together can help to create an effective strategy to manage the impact of stress on the workplace.

11.1 THE HSE MANAGEMENT STANDARDS

Use the Management Standards to review your workplace.

11.1.1 DEMANDS

Are employees able to cope with the demands of their role? By reviewing roles and skills on a regular basis you can ensure that employees continue to be well-matched to their job role, and any potential issues can be quickly noticed and rectified. Good communication between employer and employee, and opportunities for employees to have a voice are essential. Enable employees to see that their concerns are heard and addressed.

11.1.2 CONTROL

Employees benefit from having some control over their role and responsibilities, being empowered to make decisions and given opportunities to use their initiative.

Allow employees to have a say in the format of their working day. People are more productive and less stress when they feel they have an element of control. Again, open communication channels are essential.

11.1.3 SUPPORT

Ensure that policies and procedures enable employees to get support when needed, whether this is practical support with their job role, or support with their health and wellbeing. Offer training for managers and staff so that the team as a whole are able to support each other and understand how and where they can access support.

11.1.4 RELATIONSHIPS

Work with employees to create a culture where relationships are healthy and employees are not subjected to unacceptable behaviours. Policies, procedures must make it as easy as possible for employees to report or feedback on unacceptable behaviour such as bullying or discrimination, and for managers to take action. Training and development that encourages healthy workplace relationships should be offered to managers and staff, and support should be easily available and accessible for employees who have experienced negative workplace relationships.

11.1.5 ROLE

Do employees understand their role and responsibilities, and how their role contributes to the business and the goals of the organisation? Clarity around job roles and systems for review and performance management, clear expectations, as well as effective open communication, will help reduce stress caused by a lack of understanding of roles and responsibilities.

11.1.6 CHANGE

We have seen in the case studies that organisational change can be extremely stressful for employees, and how the uncertainty can have a wider effect on other elements of the workplace, which in turn are causes of stress. Clear communication, employee involvement in decision making where possible, and opportunities to express concerns are all essential to helping employees cope with change. Before any change is implemented, ensure that systems are in place to support employee's emotional wellbeing and reduce stress.

11.2 PERSON CENTRED STRATEGIES

Use a Person Centred Approach to build strategies that support employee wellbeing. Unlike the HSE Management Standards, the Person Centred Approach will begin with the employees, rather than the workplace.

11.2.1 EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

An effective Employee Assistance Program ensures that support is available to employees both at work and outside of the workplace. The services should be provided by external professionals rather than senior staff or HR department employees. Some suggestions:

- Access to life coaching to build self-awareness and resilience as a pre-emptive measure
- Counselling
- Stress Check-in Clinics to enable employees to tackle stress as it occurs and before it becomes a problem

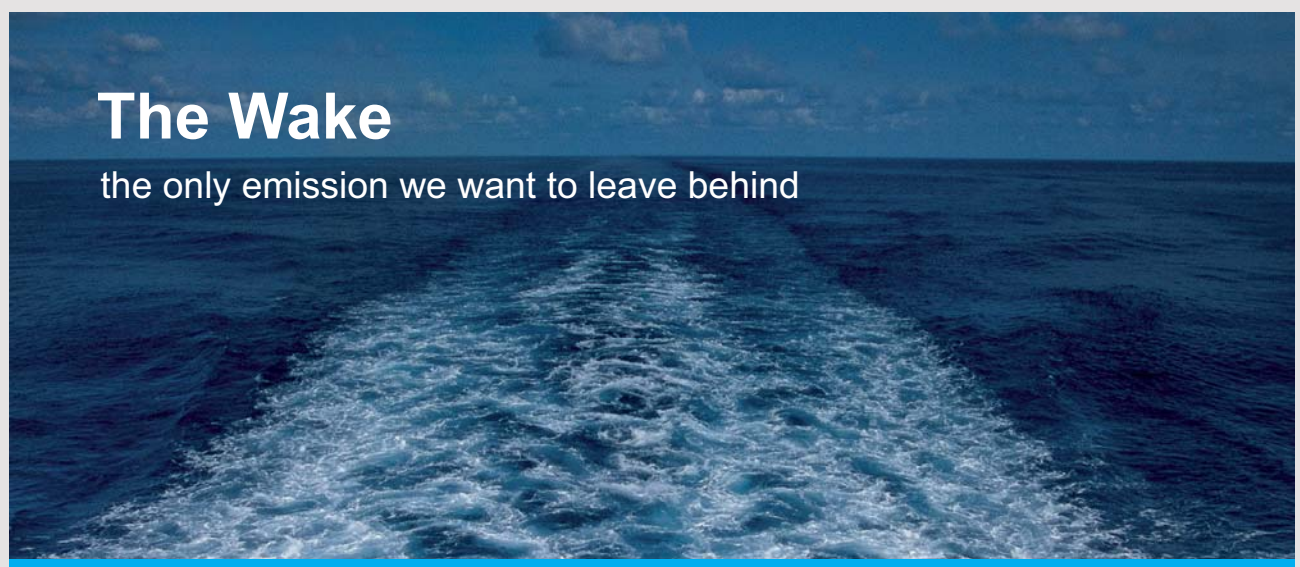
11.2.2 WELLBEING CHAMPIONS

Appoint and train Wellbeing Champions who can assist employees with accessing the support available to them, and to encourage employee's participation in health and wellbeing training and services.

11.2.3 INFORMATION

Provide employees with information about health and wellbeing, especially stress management. This could include:

- Invite experts from a range of wellbeing professions to present talks to employees
- Hold staff wellbeing days where employees can experience wellbeing services from local providers, and negotiate discounts if possible
- Provide easily accessible resources to encourage employees to take responsibility for their wellbeing



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11.2.4 PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

Include personal development as a key element of employee training. Empower employees to manage stress by increasing self-awareness and understanding. Working together on personal development helps teams to bond, to understand each other better, and to be able to support each other.

11.2.5 COMMUNICATION

Assess employee wellbeing on a regular basis. An annual employee satisfaction survey is simply not enough. Ask employees about stress, at home and at work using a survey such as the one in this book, and have systems in place to analyse the results and take action. Use employee forums to allow staff opportunities to express concerns, and feel heard and valued. Encourage managers and teams to provide support for each other will stress and wellbeing.

11.2.6 TRAINING

Train managers and HR staff to understand stress, it's signs and symptoms, and how they can enable employees to access the professional services or training that they might need. Support managers to have difficult conversations with employees, particularly relating to stress and wellbeing.

Train employees to recognise the signs of stress in themselves and colleagues, and equip them with the knowledge of how to get support.

12 PERSONAL STRESS MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES

The following are some tools and resources to manage personal stress. All employees can be encouraged to take responsibility for their wellbeing and stress management, and these methods can all help towards coping with stress when it occurs.

12.1 PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

Working on our personal development is an ongoing learning process which enables us to understand ourselves, our values and beliefs, and how we relate to others. This might be through working with a Life Coach, attending workshops and trainings, or reading personal development books, it all helps us to feel more in control of our lives and to be more resilient to stress.

12.2 MINDFULNESS

Mindfulness is about being present in the moment and focusing awareness on thoughts, feelings and physical sensations. By achieving this calm and focused mental state we can feel more in control of our reactions and responses to situations, and are able to make positive and more useful choices than when we react from a place of stress or anxiety.

Mindfulness can become a daily practice for emotional and physical wellbeing, or can just be used as a tool to help manage stress when it occurs.

12.2.1 MINDFULNESS EXERCISE

Exercise: Simple Mindfulness Practice for Stress

When a situation feels stressful, try this simple mindfulness exercise to help you take control of your thoughts, feelings and reactions.

Stop and focus only on yourself. Notice your breathing, is it fast or slow? Deep or shallow? Slowly breathe in and out, being aware of every breath as you do so.

As your breathing slows, start to notice the other physical sensations in your body. How do your muscles feel? Are they tense or relaxed? With your breathing, gradually relax the tense muscles in your body. Become aware of the sensations throughout your body. Release the tension from your body as you breathe.

What are you feeling right now? Anxious, angry, upset? Notice your feelings and accept them as you become aware of them.

Notice your thoughts. Whatever the situation that is happening around you, what are you thinking? Don't judge your thoughts, simply be aware of them and accept them as your automatic reaction.

Now that you are aware of these thoughts, you can make wiser choices about your reactions that would have a healthier and more positive outcome for you. Breathe yourself back into awareness of your surroundings, feeling more in control.

12.3 POSITIVE THINKING

Learning techniques for positive thinking help to change perspective and see the bigger picture in a situation.

12.3.1 GRATITUDE

Daily gratitude practices can help to keep things in perspective. You could either make a daily list of things for which you are grateful today, or write a gratitude journal, or incorporate gratitude into daily meditation.

12.3.2 MIND YOUR LANGUAGE

Become more aware of the language you use and the way you speak about yourself and situations. Using negative language can become a habit and your mind will absorb those messages on a subconscious level. Practice noticing the language that you use and make the effort to use more positive language whenever you can.

12.3.3 USE AFFIRMATIONS

Just as your subconscious absorbs negative language, it hears and responds to positive language too. Affirmations can help to improve confidence and self-belief. If you enjoy using affirmations, practice these daily or whenever you need an extra boost to handle a difficult situation.

12.4 KEEP THINGS IN PERSPECTIVE

In difficult or stressful situations, or if we feel overwhelmed, we often catastrophize, and see only the potential negative outcomes. Get into the habit of keeping things in perspective to help you feel more in control. When faced with challenging situations allow yourself to take one step at a time so that the task doesn't seem so overwhelming.

12.5 PRACTICE SELF-CARE

When we are tired or unwell, we are far less resilient to stress and less able to handle stressful situations in a positive way. Make self-care a priority and look after your physical wellbeing as well as your emotional wellbeing.

12.5.1 EAT WELL

When stressed or when life is busy we can develop unhealthy eating habits. Educate yourself about the best foods for your body and eat in a healthy way. Notice how your mood affects your eating habits, and also how your diet affects your mood.

12.5.2 FIND EXERCISE THAT YOU ENJOY

Our bodies need exercise and our daily routines often become cluttered for us to fit in enough exercise. The key to maintaining any kind of exercise routine is that you enjoy it. If you really don't like going to the gym then it's unlikely you will keep up a regular program, and it can be counterproductive as you begin to feel guilty that you haven't been attending the gym sessions, and this can cause a negative spiral. So find an exercise that would do not just because it's good for you, but because you actually enjoy it.

As well as being important to our physical health, exercise helps to release our 'happiness chemicals' into our body, so assists with positive thinking and resilience to stress.

12.5.3 GET ENOUGH SLEEP

We know that a lack of sleep contributes to stress, but it's also physically harmful as well. Get into a healthy sleep routine, finding ways to relax before you go to bed, and making sure you get enough hours of sleep.

12.5.4 GET OUTSIDE

There are numerous health benefits to being outside. Not only the fresh air and exercise you would get from a walk, but being amongst nature is known to be beneficial to health.

12.6 SURROUND YOURSELF WITH POSITIVE PEOPLE

Being around people who have a negative mindset can be demanding, draining and unhealthy. Where possible, spend your time with people who have a more positive and healthy outlook. Of course, that isn't always possible, and this is where working on your own personal development and resilience is important.

12.7 GET SUPPORT WHEN YOU NEED IT

Self-awareness and personal development are great ways to build resilience and to cope with stress and change, but sometimes you need help. Get to know yourself well, recognise when you are struggling with something, and get help when you need it.

13 RESOURCES FOR EMPLOYEE WELLBEING AND STRESS MANAGEMENT

For consultancy and support with stress management in the workplace, training and personal development for employees, please visit www.personcentredwellbeing.com

For Life Coaching and Personal Development please visit www.ruthrandallcoaching.com

