Emerging approaches to workplace stress

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Stress

- Identified as an epidemic by NIOSH

- One of the 10 leading causes of workplace death (NIOSH)

- Estimated to cost CANADIAN economy $16 billion/year (maybe up to $33 billion)
One firm’s experience

- 8500 employees
- Absenteeism rate is 10-12 days/year per employee (estimated that at least 40% is stress-related)
- LTD claims increased 90% in last year
- Health benefit claims from $4.8 million to $6.4 million
- Main costs are drugs for cardiovascular conditions (e.g., beta blockers) and anti-depressants.
Effects of work stress

- Psychological – affect (depression) & cognition (cognitive failures)
- Physical – minor symptoms, CHD, immune suppression
- Behavioral – substance use, lifestyle factors, family factors
- Organizational – absenteeism, presenteeism, turnover, job performance, safety, interpersonal relations
Sources

- TRADITIONAL (NIOSH)
  - Work Load and Pace
  - Role Stressors
  - Career Issues
  - Work Scheduling
  - Interpersonal
  - Job Content
  - Control
  - Work-Family Balance

- NEW (HANDBOOK)
  - Cyber-stressors
  - Terrorism
  - Change
  - Workplace Violence
  - Leadership
  - Industrial Relations
  - Disasters
How Do We Deal With Workplace Stress?

Some Models
The US Model: Public Health (NIOSH)

- Stressor $\rightarrow$ Stress $\rightarrow$ Strain
- Primary Prevention
- Secondary Prevention
- Tertiary Prevention
- Stress as a compensable condition in some jurisdictions
- “We are not aware of any epidemic in the course of human history that has been eliminated through treatment”
The UK Model: Stress as a Hazard (HSE)

- Control/eliminate the hazard at source
- Protect individuals from exposure - reduce the effects of exposure (PPE)
- Provide care for the injured
- Stress as a compensable condition

- All are needed – which is most effective?
The Canadian Model ?
Common features

- **FOCUS**
  - Emphasis on prevention (hazard recognition and control)
  - Need to Understand stress and how to deal with it in organizations

- **IMPLIED**
  - Need for regular assessment – benchmarks/standards
  - Need for training for organizational members
  - Need for professional education in work stress
  - Need for evaluation
Beyond Stress: Toward Healthy Organizations

Lack of stress ≠ health
YOU CANNOT UNDERSTAND HEALTH BY STUDYING SICKNESS.

You do not get healthy, happy employees by focusing on stressors in the workplace.
Some examples of a positive focus:

- **Gallup studies** – employee engagement is linked to productivity, customer loyalty, firm profitability, turnover and safety

- **VanKatwyk, Spector, Fox & Kelloway** New focus in job attitudes – affect and arousal – we don’t want satisfied employees, we want employees that are motivated, energized, excited.

- **Barling, Kelloway & Francis** - Employees that LOVE their jobs (COMMITMENT TO ORGANIZATION; PASSION FOR THE WORK; CLOSE RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE PEOPLE)
How do we get there?
A MODEL OF HEALTHY WORK

Healthy Workplace

Transformational leadership

The Social Environment

Job Challenge

Control
How do the elements exert their effects?

Elements of a healthy workplace

- Job Challenge
- Control
- Social Environment
- Transformational Leadership

I love my job!

Positive outcomes

Commitment

- Mental wellness
- Physical well-being
- Productivity
- Lower absence
- Lower LTD use
- Employee retention
- Service quality

Passion

Intimacy
Thank you!