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STRESS

Stress wears down relationships. Organisation is accomplished through relationships. So what are the consequences of stress?

Changes, both desired and undesired, trigger many different reactions. All major changes can be trying and overwhelming. We can experience transitions as exciting and challenging or frightening and threatening. Major changes can be a source of joy and sorrow, anger and feelings of guilt.

Stress, changes and elevated levels of anxiety go hand-in-hand. Stress means strain. Stress helps us mobilise both physical and emotional forces to counteract the demands that arise in a threatening situation. A reasonable amount of stress helps channel energy and is often a positive factor, both for the individual and the business.

STRESS HAS PHYSICAL EFFECTS...

In stressful situations the body mobilises hormones and adrenaline, which are then secreted into the blood. This causes breathing, muscular strength, heart rate and the ability to concentrate being re-adjusted for a fight or flight response. The stress reactions begin automatically, regardless of whether the initiating factor is real or imagined. If you feed your nervous system with thoughts of dangers and threats, the body and the psyche react as if you are exposed to a definite physical threat.

...AND HAS INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL ORIGINS

Factors that induce stress are called stressors, and there are both external and internal stressors. The

inner stressors are the most common and originate in you not living up to the ideals and demands you place on yourself at work or in your private life. Or that your most important needs or values are not being satisfied. Uncertainty born of thoughts, ideas and suggestions that you have not fully understood can have the same effect.

External stressors may be a "hopeless boss", poor information, rumours or a poor working environment. The most powerful stressor of all is The Unknown. The Unknown can conceal a danger and is viewed as a threat to your situation.

The exercise "The Psychological Contract" presented in **EXERCISES** is a way of encouraging reflection. It can also serve as an eye-opener and a way of initiating a dialogue between manager and employee about what your invisible contract looks like. Remember that this must always be done on the individual's own terms.

STRESS IS TIRING AND DISRUPTIVE

Long-term stress relationships can cause problems since they consume energy, create frustration and drain our mental batteries. Stress research shows that too many changes in a brief period can lead to physical or mental illnesses. Stress wears down both out physical and mental well-being.

Stress is tiring. If a tired organism does not have the chance to recover naturally through sleep, relaxation and rest, there will eventually be a risk to life and health, and diminished physical and mental capacity. More and more diseases are

Change and stress often go hand-in-hand.

Hormones and adrenaline are mobilized regardless if the situation is real or imagined.

Stress could come from own demands or external factors.

Wears down physical and mental wellbeing – need time to recover.

*Empowerment and feeling in control
reduces stress.*

considered to be the result of long-term stress or stress-related.

SUPPORTING AND LEADING

As a leader you will be tested through organisational and personal stress in conjunction with changes. Key questions you need to ask are:

- How can I as a leader create a sense of security?
- How can I as a leader help my employees to better understand the unknown?
- How can I as a leader adjust my employees' workloads?
- How can I as a leader create self-determination and co-creativity in the transition process?

Stress research also shows that self control has a stress-reducing effect. Ask yourself:

- How can you as a leader create an open, supportive climate in the work team?
- What type of support do the people in my team need?
- What types of defence and defence mechanisms can I see in the people in my team?

DANGEROUS STRESS

Dangerous stress in working life is caused by a combination of major trials at work and low control of the situation.

- Not having enough time to do a good job.
- Not knowing what to do or who should do what.
- Not receiving feedback on a job well done.
- Not having the chance to make complaints to the boss.

- Being responsible for something over which you have no control.
- Having objectives that differ from those of the boss.
- Not being proud of what you have accomplished.
- Being responsible for other people who do not live up to their responsibilities.
- Not being allowed to demonstrate what you know.

To reduce stress and harm in conjunction with changes we need to create situations where people are empowered and in control of their own situation. Feeling the existence of social support and predictability in the transition process is important. Most people want to know that their actions have purpose and context.

Research shows that people place more demands on themselves as a result of the many organisational changes in working life, escalating profitability demands and constant employee performance evaluations.

Today's businesses have become less tolerant of less effective employees and managers and demand competence development. They have also become more rigorous in their recruitment processes, which also exerts more pressure on employees.

MANAGERS NEED TO BE MORE AWARE

There must be greater awareness, particularly among managers, that many people identify strongly with what they do and how they perform. People with high performance-based self-esteem

over-adapt to the system and can end up in a state of emotional crisis due to exaggerated demands. A person who constantly subjects himself or herself to extreme demands does not know his or her limit, which increases the risk of mental illness, exhaustion and burn-out. We can ask ourselves what our performance culture is like at our workplace – is it healthy and can we change it? Managers need to become better at identifying the type of people whose lives are built on performance.

High performing people run a higher risk of burnout.

Lined writing area for notes.

ISSUES FOR REFLECTION

1. How do you prevent, repair and handle stress at your workplace?
2. What stress reactions can you see today among your employees?
3. Reflect on the following questions/statements:
 - a. Does someone you know feel that you work too much?
 - b. Do you give yourself enough time to recover after periods of hard work?
 - c. "Stress is the spice of life or the kiss of death"

