Work Organization, Psychosocial Factors, & Occupational Stress

Psychosocial Factors

Work Organization:
How work is organized, supervised, and carried out

Subjective Perceptions of the Work Organization
Definitions (Hagberg et al., 1995)

✓ WORK ORGANIZATION:
  - an "objective" characteristic of the work environment, and depends on many factors, including management style, type of product or service, characteristics of the workforce, level and type of technology, and market conditions

✓ PSYCHOSOCIAL WORK FACTORS:
  - "perceived" characteristics of the work environment that have an emotional connotation for workers and managers, and that can result in stress and strain

Factors Influencing Psychosocial Issues

Psychosocial work factors

ILO (1986): interactions between and among work environment, job content, organizational conditions and workers’ capacities, needs, culture, personal extra-job considerations that may, through perceptions and experience, influence health, work performance and job satisfaction
Psychosocial work factors

✓ **Job demands:**
  - Quantitative workload
  - Variance in workload
  - Work pressure
  - Cognitive demands
  - Emotional demands

Psychosocial work factors

✓ **Job content:**
  - Repetitiveness
  - Utilization and development of skills
  - Challenge
Psychosocial work factors

✓ Job control:
  - Task/instrumental control
  - Decision/organizational control
  - Control over physical environment
  - Resource control
  - Control over work pace: machine-pacing

Psychosocial work factors

Enough job control?
### Psychosocial work factors

**Social interactions:**
- Social support from supervisor and colleagues
- Supervisor complaints, praise, monitoring
- Dealing with (difficult) clients/customers

**Role factors**
- Role ambiguity
- Role conflict

**Job future and career issues:**
- Job future ambiguity
- Fear of job loss

**Technology issues:**
- Computer-related problems
- Electronic performance monitoring

**Organizational and management factors:**
- Participation
- Management style
Consequences

For the worker:

- higher risk of accident
- increased family or social problems
- stigmatization and discrimination
- deteriorating health
- physical or psychological illness
- pain, distress, disability and death

For the enterprise or organization:

- poor morale
- increased absenteeism, turnover
- reduced productivity
- reduced profits or services
- higher costs
- reduced competitiveness
The Impact of Psychosocial Problems at Work

- Increased absenteeism
- Increased turnover
- Loss of skills
- Loss of tacit knowledge
- Declining morale
- Increased costs
- Declining profits or ability to provide services
- Declining capacity
- Increased health problems in the community with reduced labour pool and diminished access to resources
- Insurance costs
- Retirement funds
- Safety and health
- Medical assistance
- Counselling

What is stress?

✓ Job stress can be defined as the harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when the requirements of the job do not match the capabilities, resources, or needs of the worker. Job stress can lead to poor health and even injury (NIOSH).
What stresses you out?

What aspect of work have been shown to be problems?

- Lack of control and/or autonomy
- High demands such as workload
- High job pressure
What aspect of work have been shown to be problems? (cont).

- Work schedule
- Inadequate skills and training
- Lack of task variety; monotony

What aspect of work have been shown to be problems? (cont).

- Poor supervisory relationships
- Fear for job security
- No opportunity for job advancement
- Technology failures and problems
- Poor working conditions – ergonomics and safety
Risks for work-related stress and health: How bad can stress be???

Some research findings:

- High job demands may result in 7 times higher risk for emotional exhaustion (Houtman et al, 1989)
- Low job control may result in 2 times higher risk for cardiovascular mortality (Bosma et al, 1997)
- Low co-worker support may result in 2 times higher risk for back, neck and shoulder problems (Ariens et al, 2001; Hoogendoorn e.a., 2000)

Consequences of work-related stress

On the workers: When workers experience work-related stress this may lead to a variety of emotional, behavioural, and physiological reactions

**Emotional** reactions are for example:
- fear,
- irritation,
- anger, and
- diminished motivation
Consequences of work-related stress

On the workers:

**Behavioural** reactions may include:
- decreasing productivity,
- increasing smoking,
- increasing drug use and/or alcohol consumption,
- making errors, and
- reporting sick

**Physiological reactions** are:
- increasing heart rate,
- increasing blood pressure,
- increasing muscle tension,
- transpiration,
- increased adrenaline production and secretion,
- superficial breathing at higher frequencies.
Consequences of work-related stress

*On the company:*

- increased absenteeism,
- tardiness,
- high personnel turnover,
- impaired performance and productivity,
- increased unsafe working practices and accident rates, and
- increased complaints from clients/customers.

**Williams’ Scale (1994): “Managing pressure for peak performance: the positive approach to stress”**

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<tr>
<td>Minimal Low Pressure</td>
<td>Comfort Zone</td>
<td>Stretch Zone</td>
<td>Over-stretched</td>
<td>Panic zone</td>
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<td>People become boredom, lethargic</td>
<td>There is some stimulation and challenge</td>
<td>People are being stretched and challenged: Learning from experiences, growing and enjoying increased self-confidence and self-esteem. Person feels stimulated, energized, confident</td>
<td>Coping mechanisms begin to break down and performance deteriorates Signs of strain</td>
<td>Person cannot take anymore and is at risk of serious illness Strain becomes pathological</td>
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Demand-Control Model of Stress (Karasek)

- **Decision Latitude**
  - High Control
  - Low Control

- **Job Demands**
  - Low
  - High

- **Low Strain Jobs**
  - Passive Jobs
  - Active Jobs

- **High Strain Jobs**

NIOSH model of job stress

- **Stressful Job Conditions**
  - Individual and Situational Factors

- **Risk of Injury and Illness**
The Balance Theory

(Smith & Carayon, 1989)

Task:
Content, control, pace, workload

Technology/tools:
Computers, hand tools, manufacturing, software

Organization:
Procedures, policies, organizational culture, training, career development, work schedule, role conflict and ambiguity, participation, social support, job security
The Balance Theory
(Smith & Carayon, 1989)

Environment:
Physical: Noise, air quality, HVAC, layout
Social: support, friendliness
Individual:
Personality, physical health status, skills and abilities, intelligence, prior exposure and learning, motives, goals, needs

Balancing the job factors for psychosocial improvement

- There is a need for ‘system’ balance. The ‘overall’ job situation should be positive
- Should not focus on any single element of the system
- All aspects of jobs cannot be optimized
- Cannot always eliminate ‘bad’ aspects of jobs
- Use positive aspects to compensate for negative
STRESS PREVENTION

Potential Strategies to reduce workplace stressors

- Redesign the task
- Redesign the work environment
- Establish flexible work schedules
- Encourage participative management
- Include the employee in career development
- Analyze work roles and establish goal
- Provide social support and feedback

What can be done for psychosocial improvement of work?

- Enhance job content and meaning:
  - Multiple tasks
  - Teamwork
  - Task decision making
  - Increased job control
  - Opportunity for socialization
  - Opportunity for skill use
What can be done for psychosocial improvement of work? (cont.)

- Develop an organizational support processes:
  - Training supervisors and employees
  - Positive supervision
  - Involvement of employees in how work is done
  - Workload assessment; reducing work pressure
  - Physical ergonomic improvements

What can be done for psychosocial improvement of work? (cont.)

- Promote career development:
  - Skill development through training
  - Pay for knowledge
Personal Psychosocial Improvement

- Build up physical capacity through exercise
- Develop positive habits for eating, sleeping, alcohol use
- Eliminate bad habits such as smoking, weight gain
- Reduce symptoms of stress through meditation, relaxation, imagery
- Reduce symptoms of stress through mood enhancing medications
- Learn how to ‘chill out’

NIOSH model of stress reduction

Organizational Change + Stress Management = Healthy Workplace

Reduced stress, stronger, more productive workers, profitable and competitive organizations