Stress management in the workplace

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Workplace Stress
Stress by definition – World Health Organisation (WHO)

Work-related stress is the response people may have when presented with work demands and pressures that are not matched to their knowledge and abilities and which challenge their ability to cope.
Positive Vs Negative Stress – Not all stress is bad!

Eustress, or positive stress has the following characteristics:

— Motivates and focuses energy
— Is short-term
— Is perceived as within out coping abilities
— Feels exciting
— Improves performance.
Positive Vs Negative Stress

In contrast, distress, or negative stress, has the following characteristics:

— Causes anxiety or concern
— Can be short or long-term
— Is perceived as outside of our coping abilities
— Feels unpleasant
— Decreases performance
— Can lead to mental and physical problems.
Stress levels

Optimal performance
- Focused
- Energised
- Emotional balance

Low
- Calm
- Impaired attention
- Bored

High
- Distress
- Fatigue
- Exhaustion
- Breakdown
- Burnout

Eustress (Positive stress)
Where to start?

Businesses should treat stress no differently to any other risk:

— Risk assessment – conduct an assessment of the stressors currently impacting your organisation and consider the following:

— Demands - Includes issues such as workload, work patterns and the work environment
— Control - How much say do our people have over the way they work?
— Support - Includes encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided by the organisation, line management and colleagues
— Relationships - Includes promoting positive working to avoid conflict and dealing with unacceptable behaviour
— Role - Do people understand their role within the organisation and does the organisation ensure roles are not conflicting?
— Change - How is organisational change (large and small) managed and communicated?
Look at existing controls and what more needs to be done

- Demands – do we regularly talk about stress (time off sick), do our people know what it is and what resources they have available to them...
- Control – Are we getting feedback from our people over the way they work, team meetings, surveys, flexible working
- Support – Not just our employees but our line managers, do they have the tools to know how to deal with stress?
- Relationships – Are we encouraging team bonding's sessions, do our people have alternative options available to them i.e. HR Business Partners, EAP’s etc.?
- Roles – Are peoples roles clearly defined not conflicting with other roles in the organisation?
- Change – Are we communicating change within the business, are we monitoring the effects of change?
Record and monitor

— Record the findings of the risk assessment and what you're currently doing to manage the risk
— Identify other controls to assist you in managing the risk
— Train your people on how to deal with stress, individually and as managers
— Monitor your controls and the effectiveness, through regular conversations with teams and line managers.
Management Buy-In

— Consult with senior management in the early stages of the risk assessment process
— Propose a business case, look at ill health and sickness records, understand how the business is suffering as a result of stress
— Keep them engaged through regular consultation
— Have them lead on stress management, i.e. talks, monitoring it in their business areas, seminars and promoting open dialogue on the topic – it’s OK, not to be OK…
Spotting the signs of stress in yourself

Individuals respond to stress differently, common signs you may experience are:

- Feeling negative
- Being indecisive
- Feeling isolated
- Feeling nervous
- Being unable to concentrate.
Spotting the signs of stress in your team

If you are seeing these signs within your team, it’s important to take action, as it may be a sign of stress, signs may include:

— Arguments
— Higher turnover of team members
— Reports of stress
— Increased sickness absence
— A decrease in performance
— Increased complaints and grievances.
Spotting the signs of stress in a team member

A change in the way someone acts, can be a sign of stress, for example they may:

- Take more time off
- Arrive for work later
- Be more twitchy or nervous.

Changes in the way someone thinks or feels can also be a sign of stress, for example:

- Mood swings
- Being withdrawn
- Loss of motivation, commitment and confidence
- Increased emotional reactions – being more tearful, sensitive or aggressive.
Support mechanisms

It’s important to have strong support mechanisms in place to help our people to deal with stress, we have to remove the stigma associated with it, what we MUST do:

— Talk openly about the topic – as we would with any other risk
— Train management on the importance and how to deal with stress
— Provide tools for people to use to manage stress, forums, guidance, EAP’s, counsellors and HR functions etc.
— Promote the use of the tools
— Monitor ill-health and sickness records.
Summary

— Not all stress is bad, but it’s important to recognise the difference between the two
— Assess it as you would any other risk in your business
— Record and monitor the stressors and the controls
— Management buy-in is key to your success
— Understand and recognise the signs of stress
— Have effective support mechanisms in place.
Thank you!