Reducing exposure to stress at work

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How should you do this?

- Putting in place control measures – controlling for what might go wrong
- What they might be – physical and psychosocial
- How they work for you - example
- HSA standards - what do we seek?
- HSA role - how do we do this?
- Employer obligations – what are they re stress?

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Environment; it matters

Control Measures

- Environment should be reasonable
  - Safe
  - Healthy

- That means one would feel it's fine for a loved one, relative, best friend, brother, sister to work in

- 2005 Act outlines aspects of this, noise, heat, light… but some are not outlined and should still be met.

- Remember; Productive employees are satisfied, at ease, relaxed, feel 'minded' and 'respected'.

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Psychosocial – Communication/behaviour

- How we relate to our environment…….and to each other is social and also psychological

- Involves OTHERS.

- '**What** we say and what we do,

- **…………how** we do it and how we say it

- The unconscious suctioning of each of us into our 'institutions', roles, positions, 'keeping up appearances'

- The roles we take up ………and drop influences how we communicate

- How we believe others' *perceive* us, impacts how we speak to them

- ***Manners and methods matter***

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Control measures to avoid distress

- To the distress or the **latent, potential distress** being an individual forced into a group, an organisation, a team, brings about
- Human behaviour at work is necessarily ring fenced by 'systems'
- We are all governed by unconscious processes fitting in to conscious rules/roles
- And to conscious processes telling us 'the way it should/has to/must be'
- The resulting organisational dynamics can ….spin out of our control or be managed by each of us
- To prevent stress becoming distressing, we should have 3 things – physically safe place, socially safe relating patterns (positive communications backed by policies) and psychologically safe and supportive methods (HR/EAT/Manager role)

Remember workplaces are made up of *real people*

- Understanding the complex nature of people will help us improve the psychological reality of the workplace. We can all be a little bit….

  - Hysterics
  - Obsessives
  - Psychotics
  - Depressives
  - Neurotics
  - Borderline
  - ADHD

- Complex and unpredictable individuals in the simple, controlled environment of the workplace

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Behaviour has to be primed

- We are hard wired to avoid pain, seek pleasure.
    - Our methods are not scientific; we change with the wind.
- We don't want to hurt each other……..
    - unless we have to*/have no other choice**
- We will cover up and hide our 'bad' deeds, behind the deeds of others*
    - If we(or others) get away with it/it's accepted
- Self awareness; understanding what WE each do, in context at work - habits
- Differences matter; how do we view 'otherness'
    - New workers
    - Older workers
    - Different cultures

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Research tells us…

- High job Stress - related to effort reward imbalance (BMJ 2002)
    - Effects on cardiovascular health Finland (800 plus) men and women
- Nurses stress effects patients care – Burnout and leadership
    - Burnout is : emotional exhaustion, self efficacy and cynicism
- Expectations influence whether stressful situations will result in strain
- Our own psychological reaction also mediates the relationship between stress 'out there' and strain 'in here'
- Innovation – trying to alter the work situation is a coping mechanism. If this is allowed, it can work well. If it's blocked, individuals cannot adapt. Adaptation is a positive experience
- Three main areas to cause stress-strain: Overwork, procedural problems, relationship

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How this might work for all at work

- People find it more stressful when issues are avoided. Thus train managers/supervisor to address.

- How people react can be improved; have support and assistance for employees to help them cope

- Training and development initiatives

- Adaptation – allow some flexibility at work

- Relationship – address conflict where it occurs, promote a conflict-reduction culture, not an avoidance one

- Leaders and how they behave; role modelling

- Have simple, clear policies and use them, consistently

- Sense of fairness, effort-reward can reduce, once it goes same direction for all.

HSA Role

- Technical-legal – ultimately a crude instrument. A sieve trying to hold soup.
- Applying TL structure onto the human story results in loss - hold onto the 'big pieces'.

- However, we apply principles – Duty of Care of employer,

  - duty of employee,

  - safe behaviour,

  - acceptable/reasonable,

  - predictable, foreseeable

- We inspect but mainly give advice, phone, email, writing
- We steer parties in terms of rights/breaches
- Steer in terms of the psychological story, different truths and moving on.

Work should be challenging, not damaging

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