

in equilibrium

**Managers Managing Well-being
Resources**

CONTENTS

	Page
Managing Well-being Formula	3
The CUSP Framework™	6
Work Pressure Profiling Tool	19
Stress and the risk management process flowchart	28
Individual stress risk assessment forms	29
Individual stress risk assessment guidance notes	35

The Managing Well-being Formula (MWF)

This is a stress risk management formula that takes into account the different factors or variables that influence individual vulnerability (risk to well-being e.g. stress). The formula is:

$$V = W + E + M + C$$

Where:

V is: Vulnerability (risk to well-being)

W is: Work pressures, e.g. demands

E is: Employee (individual) characteristics, e.g. personality, behaviour, preferences.

M is: Manager characteristics, e.g. perceived management style, competencies

C is: Circumstances, e.g. significant life events (non-work).

MWF Model Assumptions

The model makes the following assumptions:

- All of the factors influencing vulnerability at work can be encompassed by four variables
- The risk related to each variable can be expressed in a score or value.
- A manager may be able to estimate a value for a variable, according to a set of 'rules' or guidelines, and their own judgement.
- Because, different factors can have a cumulative effect on vulnerability, the scores associated with the different variables can be added together to give an overall score.
- If the overall score is higher than a certain 'threshold' then risk is deemed to be high and 'harm' is likely to occur e.g. stress-related illness. This works the other way i.e. if stress-related illness has occurred then the vulnerability score must already be above the threshold, which has implications for working out values for other variables.

- The model can be used both proactively and reactively to manage risks.
- To prevent stress, a manager can take proactive steps to minimise risk associated with each variable (NB. Managers have more control of some variables than others, so can never eliminate risk only seek to manage it effectively).
- Where a manager becomes aware that an employee is already vulnerable, the manager can take steps (agree an action plan with the employee) to reduce risk (in those areas over which s/he has control), to minimise the risk of long-term harm to well-being.
- All of W, E, M, and C are constantly changing (not static), so 'risk' is never exactly the same 2 days running.
- Any one of the variables may have a disproportionately large impact on vulnerability if severe, e.g. high C: death of a partner.
- If the value of one variable goes up, then risk could be managed by actively taking steps to reduce (the impact of) risk associated with other variables. Again, the manager can't eliminate risk, but can adopt good risk management strategies.

MWF: Implications for stress risk management:

W: Become more aware of work pressures

Managers should be aware of 'work pressures' in their working area and take action where practicable to minimise risk. Managers should monitor these pressures on a regular basis and encourage open communication on sources of pressure within the working environment. It may not be possible to remove pressures from the working environment, but it may be possible to manage those pressures more effectively.

E: Know your people and take account of their preferences

Managers should work at understanding individual characteristics of employees. A manager can't necessarily change characteristics, but may be able to make adjustments and adaptations to minimise risk (lesson: know your staff!). Managers should be aware of an individual's preferences, and where possible design roles/jobs so that employees can spend more of their time on tasks they enjoy. Where an employee behaves in ways that increase their own vulnerability, the manager should consider training and development opportunities that could modify problem behaviours and address weaknesses.

M: Be self-aware and find out how those you manage perceive you

Managers should be more aware of their own characteristics and behaviours and how they impact on the employee. They should improve their awareness of how they are perceived by those they manage, and how their own characteristics and behaviours can increase risk, e.g. their own reactions under pressure. Where a manager discovers that their reactions / behaviours are having a negative impact on well-being they should immediately take steps to manage/regulate/change these behaviours and/or seek support as appropriate e.g. coaching, mentoring, training.

C: Raise your awareness of the employee's circumstances and make allowances when appropriate

Managers should be aware that an employee's circumstances can have a major impact on vulnerability and should make allowances when they do. Managers cannot control an employee's circumstances, but may be able to be flexible and make adjustments in order to reduce their impact. Managers should be aware of all possible support options, so that they can refer the employee appropriately. Wherever possible, managers should take a long-term, big-picture view of stress risk i.e. it may be better to be flexible and/or make adjustments now to avoid long-term stress absence/illness later.

It helps (the manager) to be aware of the circumstances of the employee. If this is not possible, then it is better to know there are 'issues' than not knowing. Not knowing even that there are 'issues' (ignorance of circumstances) is the worst position, as the manager can't take the circumstances into account when managing risk.

Of course, a manager cannot, nor should they, force disclosure. With regard to this, a manager should:

- Think about what is likely to lead to more disclosure and open communication generally (it isn't all down to the employee!)
- Invest 'now' in improving trust and relationships to gain benefit of disclosure later
- Remember that communication from employees related to their circumstances doesn't happen by accident

Stress Prevention

A good working climate is one where stress is largely prevented. While we cannot, in all likelihood, eliminate all stress, much of it could be prevented. In this section we introduce a critically important framework called 'CUSP™' that you can use both to prevent stress and reduce the risk when stress has occurred.

A key aim here is to build an atmosphere and team environment which de-stigmatises stress. Stress is simply a reaction people have to excessive pressures or demands. We all have excessive pressures or demands sometimes, so such a stigma is pointless and damaging. Unless people feel able to be open about what is causing them stress, you'll find it difficult to make headway in tackling it in any meaningful way.

The CUSP™ framework

This is a very simple framework that works equally as well in terms of prevention of stress as it does in helping someone who is not coping. In other words you can use CUSP™ proactively and reactively. Here, we will be mainly looking at using CUSP™ proactively to prevent stress.

This framework can be applied to any situation where pressure is present. What it does is get you thinking about your options in a structured way. There are always options, because the experience of stress is individual and depends largely on perceptions. If you can change or influence someone's perceptions, the way they think about a situation, then the stress can be prevented or reduced.

CUSP™ stands for:

- **C**ontrol
- **U**ncertainty
- **S**upport
- **P**ressure

Control

We have known about the links between stress and control for many years now. Indeed, psychologists have based whole models of stress around the concept of control. If we feel that we don't have any control in our working environment, this can be very stressful, especially when combined with high pressures or demands. Indeed high demands + low control can accurately be described as a perfect recipe for stress. If we also feel unsupported at the same time this recipe is even more of a risk. We have to be careful when considering this. We are dealing with subjective perceptions, with the way people see things and feel about things, not just with 'objective' reality.

There are major implications here because, as managers, we can influence both perceptions of control and enable actual control. Thus we have the capacity to influence stress levels positively or negatively. In fact, the negative side of this is worrying. It suggests that if we are ignorant of the importance of control or do or say things that lessen perceptions of control then we may be damaging people. We may inadvertently be causing them severe stress and increasing the risk of depression. We may also be causing damage to their immune system, increasing the risk of colds and flu, and in the long term, of cancer and heart disease. See below for some tips on enabling control for your staff.

Uncertainty

Feelings of uncertainty are also strongly associated with stress. In recent years, our working environments and cultures have changed markedly into ones where there is a lot of uncertainty. This is one reason for increases in stress levels across all sectors. The pace of change has increased and is still increasing, none more so than in our workplaces. High uncertainty is associated with feelings of insecurity and anxiety, causing us to feel stressed. In periods of rapid organizational change, feelings of uncertainty increase and control decreases, a double whammy in terms of stress. This makes organizational change a high risk factor for stress-related injury and illness. The most important factor in minimizing/maximizing the risk is communication. See below for ideas on 'uncertainty reducers'.

Support

Probably the most robust result in all of Social Psychology is that support acts as a buffer against stress. What this means is that if we have the right kind of support, we can cope with more pressures or demands without suffering from stress. Put another way, the more pressure there is the more important support becomes. Research appears to show also that in terms of our social networks, if we have good supportive networks at work and away from work, such support actually boosts our wellbeing whether or not we're under pressure.

As managers, you are in a unique position where support is concerned because you can provide both social and practical support to your people. However, you must be careful not to make assumptions about what support people need. If we offer people the wrong kind of support or offer it in the wrong way we can end up causing stress rather than preventing or reducing it. As you work through the actions discussed on this course you will get some useful tips to help you support people appropriately and effectively.

Pressure

If you can identify, then tackle, the specific sources of pressure (stressors) in your team's working environment, you reduce substantially the potential for stress-related illness amongst your staff team. No two working environments are the same, so all are

likely to have their own specific stressors apart from the more general, organizational sources of pressure.

It is important to acknowledge that there will be sources of pressure outside of your (and your team members') control. In terms of minimizing stress risk it is important to identify and target what you do have some influence over.

There are overlaps with the 'C, U, and S,' but this part of the framework is about thinking about what specifically could cause stress in your area, and what you could do to address those potential causes.

Summary of CUSP™

Research and experience then tells us that if you can:

- Enable increased perception of control;
- Reduce uncertainty, and the associated anxiety and insecurity;
- Provide support, especially in highly pressurised or stressful situations;
- Tackle sources of pressure (stressors) in your work area...

then you will minimize the risk of stress-related illness and increase wellbeing and performance at work.

Practical hints and tips for **C**, **U**, **S** and **P** can be found below.

(C) Control Enablers

Enabling control is not about abdicating responsibility. It is not about adopting an 'anything goes' mentality. You are a manager. You still have to take tough decisions, and still have to manage poor performance. So enabling control is about encouraging people to take responsibility for their own performance while being clear about what is expected of them.

1. **Delegation.** In stress terms, delegation is a critical management skill because it enables control. It says 'I trust you to get this done without me always looking over your shoulder.' Good delegation will also reduce the pressure on you, as you won't have to micromanage. Ask yourself, and encourage others to ask you, difficult questions about letting go of control. Enabling control is not easy for many managers. It may make you feel very uncomfortable and vulnerable to start with, but stick with it and it will pay great dividends.
2. **Enable control over the physical environment** e.g. the look of the office, the use of plants, make workstations more attractive etc. This can have several benefits in addition to boosting perceptions of control:
 - More relaxed surroundings
 - Improved mood
 - Better air quality e.g. through use of plants
 - Improved overall working environment
 - New environment may contain 'anchors' to positive emotions and attitudes
3. **Offer as much flexibility as you can over working arrangements.** If staff can make choices that reflect their needs or lifestyle, this will reduce the risk in various ways:
 - Reduces stress risk attached to non-work pressures
 - Addresses commuting stressors
 - Enhances sense of control

4. **Encourage people to be assertive with you** (not passive, not aggressive), and be prepared to accept constructive criticism of you and your management style. View it as an opportunity to adapt your style to suit each individual. If people see that you respond well to assertive communication and to constructive criticism, they will feel as if they have more control. You will also stand a better chance of finding out how you cause them stress. The more you know about how they feel, the less the risk because you can respond more quickly thus reducing the risk of stress-related illness.
5. **Involve people in decision making** both at the individual level and at the team level. As a rule give as much control to your team members over decisions as you possibly can, and if you cannot involve people in the decision making process, explain clearly and unambiguously why that is the case (because that will reduce uncertainty). Explain the decisions you have taken.
6. **Consult and involve people on decisions about workload.** People often feel that they are overloaded because of the perception that it is not within their control. In fact, if people feel they have some control, they generally work harder, achieve more, and are more satisfied with the outcome.
7. **Encourage staff to develop their own 'microroutines'**, which work for them e.g. taking short breaks every 45 mins and a longer break every 90. Breaks are important, especially if people are under pressure. We all need recovery time to manage stress effectively. So encourage people to take control over this important aspect of their working life. People rarely abuse this. On the contrary, they value being trusted in this way, while manager-controlled breaks can be resented and a cause of dissatisfaction
8. **Change will inevitably have an impact on perceptions of control**, so take care to assess any risks to your team associated with the change and take special care to communicate clearly about what is happening as often as possible.
9. **Taking people for granted undermines their sense of control.** Try very hard not to do it, and encourage people within your team not to do it either.
10. **The opposite of enabling control is an aggressive style of management.** Bullying, aggressive styles of management take control away from people. It makes them fearful and causes them severe stress with very negative consequences for their health and wellbeing. If you receive any feedback that you are perceived as 'aggressive', take that feedback seriously and try sensitively to find out what has led to that perception. Talk it over with a mentor or someone at HR. You may need to consider some additional training or one-to-one coaching to improve your interpersonal skills. Again, try not to regard such perceptions as a personal attack. Rather, they are an opportunity to change your style and become a better manager.

(U) Uncertainty Reducers

As uncertainty increases so do feelings of anxiety and insecurity. This increases the risk of stress. Approaches that reduce uncertainty and ambiguity reduce the risk substantially. Many of these approaches involve communication and decision making. Reducing uncertainty is particularly important in times of organizational change when the risk of stress is high.

1. **Communicate!** Especially during times of organizational change, effective communication is vital to manage the risk of stress. In risk assessment terms, change is a hazard that has the potential to cause very real and lasting harm. The risk is high. Without effective communication people fill in the gaps, usually with nightmare scenarios. This leads to them ruminating constantly about what might happen, putting them in chronic 'fight-flight' (stress). This can be very damaging to mental and/or physical health. Bear in mind that in change situations you are the main information resource, sometimes the only reliable source. In stress terms, what is known is always better than what is unknown. Even when the news is bad, real eventualities can be planned for and alternative strategies generated. This not only reduces uncertainty, but also increases a sense of control.
2. **Be open, approachable and welcoming with your staff.** If staff perceive you in this way they are much more likely to share their worst fears with you. If you don't know what these fears are, it will be very difficult to address and challenge those fears. In addition, the more they know you as a human being, warts and all, the better you will know them. So give of yourself, invest in relationships. In terms of stress prevention, it's the best investment you can make.
3. **Avoid being secretive.** You may not think that you are secretive, rather that you are protecting your staff e.g. 'What they don't know they won't worry about'. Unfortunately, if you are perceived as secretive, this may cause stress because staff may develop nightmare scenarios, or believe you are deliberately withholding information from them. 'Protecting' people in this way usually backfires horribly.
4. **Be clear about roles, tasks and priorities.** Uncertainty and ambiguity about your role can be a major stressor. This is especially the case if you aren't sure what the role really is or who you're answerable to. Clarifying these issues reduces 'role ambiguity', potentially a major stressor. Also, working with your team on clarifying what the priorities are and what's really important can help by reducing stress associated with 'role conflict'. Role conflict occurs when people feel they have conflicting demands and priorities. Again it is clear that good communication is a critically important factor in minimizing the uncertainty associated with these 'role' stressors.
5. **Don't assume people will know why...** Assumptions that staff will work out why something has been done in a particular way are very dangerous. It may be obvious to you, it probably won't be to them. Never make assumptions about what people

know. For example, you could use process checks. Here, you check out and clarify where people are and if they are with you (i.e. understand what to do and what you want). Make sure you give time for this to happen so that people have the same understanding that you have. Use the process check as an opportunity to ask questions. Ask whether you're going too fast or too slow.

6. **Be careful about behaviours that may be ambiguous.** If team members interpret your behaviour as confusing in any way, the risk of stress increases. In addition, your behaviour may be interpreted as aggressive. If that is the case, you are less likely to find out if people are not coping because they will be afraid of the consequences if they raise their fears.
7. **Give as much clear information as possible.** If you can, make sure information comes directly from you in person. Share information in a timely manner, especially if the information is related to changes that will affect your staff. Think very carefully about withholding information. Is it really necessary to withhold? Are you withholding information because of negative assumptions that may not be correct? Of course some information must remain confidential, but if information cannot be shared, don't keep quiet, make sure that people understand why.
8. **Use emails sparingly and with great care.** Emails can cause a great deal of stress. They can appear curt, even rude, and are very often ambiguous. They have no emotional content, and you cannot query something or ask for justification. Because of overload, they can also add to the pressure, increasing feelings of lack of control and inability to cope. Email is a vastly overrated form of human communication. None of us can probably avoid using it, but don't be a lazy manager, go and speak to people whenever you can, and if you can't, pick up a phone. Use email less, speak to people more!
9. **Give people regular feedback.** People need to know how they are doing and what you think. If you don't tell them they will make assumptions and those assumptions may not be positive, causing them stress. So give constructive feedback. This reduces uncertainty and reduces the risk of stress.
10. **Try not to give people mixed messages.** This sounds easy but isn't. Work life is very complicated. For example, sometimes managers would like their staff to be innovative, to show initiative, but not to make any mistakes. Mixed messages like this increase levels of ambiguity, so try to avoid them. Better still, encourage people to let you know when you're giving mixed messages. That way you will be able to clarify what you really mean.

Change and uncertainty

Organizational change significantly increases pressure on people because it causes high levels of uncertainty, and staff can feel they have very little control over what is happening to them. That makes change a special case where stress is concerned.

We recommend that managers should always take steps to minimize the risk of stress posed by change by seeking to increase control, reduce uncertainty, and by providing appropriate support. See all the specific hints and tips in this section.

(S) Providing Support

As previously stated, probably the most robust result in all of Social Psychology is that support acts as a buffer against stress. As with the other elements of CUSP™, support is important from a proactive and reactive point of view.

If people feel supported generally, that will help prevent stress. It doesn't necessarily mean that people will use support structures, but the fact that they are there and people know that they are there quite simply helps from a stress point of view. Likewise if your team members feel supported by you and perceive you as being supportive, it doesn't necessarily mean they will always come to you for support. The important thing is that they feel supported.

1. **Encourage staff to come to you if they need to talk anything through.** Make sure staff know when they can come to see you. If you can't have a totally "open door" policy, find a way to let staff know when your door (metaphorical or real) is open and when you would rather not be disturbed. Avoid being so booked up with meetings and other appointments that you are never available to your staff.
2. **Meet with your staff on a one-to-one basis.** We talk more about the importance of one-to-ones for identifying stress later. Providing a regular confidential "space" for staff to talk through work issues with you is also a key mechanism for ensuring that staff feel supported by you. One-to-ones are also an important way for you to understand what other support your staff members need.
3. **Listen.** If staff want to talk about things, listening to what they have to say is key to providing support (in fact, it may be more important than helping them practically). If you dismiss people's concerns or don't take the time to understand what they are saying, they will not feel supported and you are unlikely to know what other support you should be providing.
4. **Give practical support and advice where appropriate.** Helping staff understand things, advising them and providing them with coaching or mentoring will all build their sense of being supported by you. Beware stepping in and providing advice when it is not needed or doing things for staff that they could learn by doing themselves, as this can reduce perceived control (see above).
5. **Hold regular team meetings.** Use team meetings as a way of ensuring two-way communication between you and your staff and between team members. Make sure that team meetings are interesting and involve input from all those present. Don't be afraid of discussing sources of pressure openly at team meetings.

Such discussions will help in a number of ways. Firstly, members of your team and will feel listened to. Secondly, you will gain an appreciation of how pressured people are feeling. Thirdly, you will become clearer about potential causes of stress for your team.

6. **Encourage your staff to support one another.** Fostering a supportive team atmosphere is key to ensuring that your staff feel supported, not just by you, but by their peers. Set an example of respect and good treatment and help your staff to follow it. Help resolve any conflicts that arise between team members in a sensitive, fair and supportive way.
7. **Give staff the opportunity to ask questions.** Whether in team meetings, one-to-ones, informally or by other means, make sure that staff have a chance to ask you questions.
8. **Avoid blame.** Everyone makes mistakes. If anything goes wrong, look first to remedy any problems and then for learning points. Don't look to allocate blame. This does not mean avoiding managing poor performance. If one member of your team is performing poorly, that will be stressful for the rest of the team, so the poor performer must be helped to improve their performance.
9. **Ensure that staff get the training and development they need to do their job well.** This may be about you or other colleagues providing on-the-job development or about more formal training and development activities. Either way, you need to understand what the development needs of your staff are and ensure that those needs are met (including supporting staff in the transfer of skills learnt in training into the workplace). This is particularly important if a person's job has changed in any way.
10. **Make sure staff know about all available support structures.** If your organization has an Employee Assistance Programme or other counseling service, make sure your staff know how to access it and what support it provides. Make sure that staff also understand what other support structures are available to them, for example occupational health advice, access to advice and support from Human Resources and anything else available through the organization or through the local community.

(P) Reducing pressure

In seeking to prevent stress, the aim is not to reduce pressure for the sake of it. The right amount of pressure can be motivating and good for both health and performance. However, excessive pressure or demands will cause stress, especially when the pressure is unremitting or 'chronic'.

In today's workplace, the risk of stress comes mainly from 'overload', or too much pressure. But you should also bear in mind that a lack of challenge or too little pressure ('underload' as it is sometimes called) may also cause stress-related problems.

While enabling control, reducing uncertainty and providing support (the C, U and S of CUSP™) will make an enormous difference in terms of how well your staff can cope with the inevitable pressures in the workplace, there may also be things you can do that will directly reduce the pressures they are under. When thinking about how you can prevent stress in your team, it is useful to think about the pressures on your staff, identify the ones you have some influence over and look at ways to reduce them. The following points give common-sense, general ideas on 'pressure-reducers':

1. **Set achievable objectives.** Make sure that when you set your staff objectives that what you are asking them to do is reasonable. Avoid giving anyone an excessive workload. Monitor this regularly, not just at the time of appraisal.
2. **Distribute tasks fairly between team members.** When considering who should do what within your team, ensure that you are not giving anyone an unfair proportion of the overall workload.
3. **Set realistic timescales.** Allow people enough time to carry out the work you give them. Bear in mind how long tasks take and what other priorities a person has when setting deadlines for particular pieces of work.
4. **Make priorities clear.** When you ask staff to do work, make clear which responsibilities or tasks are the most important. Also clarify which are the most urgent. Help staff prioritise their workloads to ensure that the important things get done and that deadlines are not missed.
5. **Plan ahead.** Think about workload planning and scheduling. Aim to minimise peaks and troughs wherever you can. If your work area has particularly busy periods for any reason, ensure that you don't make the busy periods busier by making demands for things that could have been handled in a quieter period.
6. **Hand over tasks as soon as you can.** Don't sit on requests or pieces of work that have come in and only hand them over when the deadline is approaching.
7. **Avoid giving staff conflicting tasks or roles.** When setting objectives or giving staff work, think about the range of roles, responsibilities and tasks that they have. Look to see whether they have conflicting roles or priorities within their workload and aim to resolve any conflicts.
8. **Match tasks to skills.** When allocating work, bear in mind the strengths and weaknesses of your team members. Aim to play to people's strengths and give them tasks for which their skills are a good fit.

9. **Avoid giving staff repetitive and boring work where possible.** Giving people insufficient challenge and stimulation in their work can cause stress. Consider how you can add interest and challenge to people's jobs.
10. **Minimize environmental pressures.** Consider aspects of the work environment such as noise, lighting, temperature, pollution etc. If these things make the workplace uncomfortable for staff, they can cause stress. Find ways of tackling these issues wherever possible. This is area where 'quick wins' are often possible. Anything you can do to improve the working environment for your staff will contribute to preventing and reducing stress.

Using CUSP™ reactively: tackling stress-related issues

We have been looking so far at using CUSP™ to prevent stress. Unfortunately, we can't prevent all stress, and sometimes we have to react once someone has become stressed in order to minimize the risk to their health and wellbeing. Fortunately, the CUSP™ framework can be used reactively as well. The main difference being that you are applying the framework to a specific situation rather than to your work area in general. However, the principles are the same. Anything you can do to boost or enhance a sense of control, reduce uncertainty, provide support, or reduce pressure will help the person who is experiencing stress. Because the person is already under stress, they are a more vulnerable to stress related illness, so anything you can do here will help to minimize the risk to their health and wellbeing.

It's a good idea to revisit all the hints and tips for C, U, S, and P, and think about which of these could be applied to the specific stress-related situation you are dealing with.

The vitally important role of listening

Here, you are likely to be dealing with a situation where an employee is already experiencing stress. Face to face communication, and especially listening, becomes vitally important. You need to build up as good a picture as you can of how the person feels and how they see the situation they are in.

Support for the stressed person

When using CUSP™ reactively, the aspect of providing **support** becomes particularly important. From a reactive point of view, there are two aspects to providing support:

1. How best to offer support
2. What sort of support to provide

You would no doubt agree that it is vitally important to be supportive when reacting to a specific stress-related situation, but it is also important to find out as best you can what practical support the stressed person needs. Good communication skills will help enormously here. In discussion with the person concerned, asking the right sort of questions in the right way should take you most of the way towards finding out 'what sort of support to provide.'

Know your support structures and services

Please make yourself as aware as you can be of all the support structures or services your employer provides. For example, does your employer provide a confidential counselling service? You may need to be in a position to refer someone to a support service, or point someone in the right direction (remember to make sure you record you have done so). Therefore, if you don't have sufficient knowledge about the support services and how people can access them, you will not be adequately equipped to manage risk effectively and put into effect what you have learned on this course.

Know your policies

If there are policies related to stress and related issues, pay particular attention to those. Do you have a specific policy on stress? Do you know what that policy says, particularly about the role of managers? You should. Are you familiar with your policy on absence or attendance, and what you need to do to manage absence effectively? Does your organization have a policy on 'dignity at work' or related to bullying and harassment, and would you know what to do if such issues come up? Is there a policy related to compassionate leave? Do you have a policy related to family friendly working or flexible working? If so, do you know how much flexibility you have in giving people options? If you aren't sure about any support structures and policies, contact your Human Resources or Personnel department for help and advice.

Reduce pressure for the person under stress

It is worth remembering that someone under stress may already be experiencing high levels of pressure, so reducing pressure will be especially important. Think carefully about any adjustments that could be made to reduce the pressure. Prolonged exposure to excessive pressure or demands is a major risk factor for stress-related illness. Reducing pressure, even if it is only for a time-limited period can reduce this risk substantially.

Work Pressure Profiling Exercise

Introduction

In this exercise, the idea is to think about the pressures you face at work in a structured way. In thinking about your work pressures, try to be as objective as you can. For instance, if you were on an interview panel for someone applying for your job, what would you tell them were the main pressures of the job based on your experience over the last six months or so?

We will be asking you to consider six areas or categories of work pressures, when completing your Work Pressure Profile. These are the categories that have been identified by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) as important when considering risk to health and well-being of employees:

- **Demands**
- **Control**
- **Support**
- **Relationships**
- **Role**
- **Change**

There are four stages to this exercise:

- 1. Think about and identify work pressures**
- 2. Rank the pressures**
- 3. Complete your Work Pressure Profile**
- 4. Complete the risk management questions**

Please make sure you complete stage 1 before starting on stage 2.

The questionnaire and relevant forms can be found after the following instructions.

Stage 1: Think about and identify work pressures

This stage involves filling in the left hand column of the questionnaire, please refer to: 'Work Pressure Profile Questionnaire (Stages 1 and 2).' Please do not fill in anything in the right hand column until you have completed stage 1.

For each category, we will explain what we mean by each term (e.g. the meaning of 'demands', 'role' etc). Then we will ask you to think about and write down any pressures in that category. There may be categories where you think that there are no sources of pressure for you in your job/role. If that is the case, just leave that section blank. On the other hand there may be areas/categories where you identify several different pressures. If that is the case write all the pressures in the space. If you run out of space for a particular category, just use space somewhere else on the form.

This is very important: when you fill in the questionnaire, **don't worry if you think of a pressure but are not sure which category it is in.** For example, if you are not sure whether one of the pressures of your job comes under the category of 'demands' or 'role', it doesn't really matter. Just make sure you write it down somewhere in the left-hand column of the questionnaire.

Stage 2: Rank the pressures Please read the following instructions carefully

The first thing we would like you to do is to look back over all the work pressures you have identified in all of the categories. Which ones stand out as being the most important?

We would like you to give a ranking (number) to each of the work pressures you have identified. For example, if you have written down ten different pressures, we would like you to rank them from 1 to 10. **Please take into account all of the work pressures you have identified under all of the categories, when ranking the pressures** i.e. don't rank them category by category, but rank them overall.

Number 1 would be the work pressure you regard as causing the most stress in your job, number 2 the second most important as a cause of stress, and so on. Once you have made your mind up write the number (ranking) in the right hand column next to the work pressure you have written down.

Take your time with this task; don't rush. There are no right or wrong answers in this exercise. Just be honest and reflect on your experience of the job over the last six months.

Stage 3. Complete your Work Pressure Profile

Next, complete your **Work Pressure Profile**.

Simply write down your top 5 work pressures in the space provided, and the Management Standard categories they fit into. Don't worry if you are not sure about the category. It is the work pressures and where they rank that are the important things.

Stage 4. Complete the risk management questions (group discussion)

In the final part of this exercise, we would like you to think about how you might use the 'work pressure profiling' tool to manage work pressures effectively in your area and with the people you manage.

Work Pressure Profile Questionnaire (Stages 1 and 2)

What is the name of your job/role?	
Stage 1: Work pressures in your job/role	Stage 2: Rank#
<p>Demands 'Demands' covers a number of potential sources of pressure at work. Having too much to do (overload) or too little to do (underload) are both examples of demands. Having too much work that is boring, repetitive and lacking in challenge is another example. So is work that is too hard or complex, and/or work that you haven't been trained for where you don't feel competent. Shift-work may be demanding, depending on shift patterns and you're ability to cope with them. There could also be demands in your (physical) working environment, such as noise, lack of space, cold/damp or a dry atmosphere. Risk of aggression or violence is another example of a demand.</p> <p>Please write down examples of work pressures related to demands (e.g. overload, underload, shift-work, environment etc.)</p>	

<p>Control. A feeling of not having control at work can cause stress for people, particularly if they already feel under pressure. Examples of 'lack of control' pressures include not feeling involved in decisions, not having a say or that your opinion doesn't count. Another example would relate to lack of flexibility. Pressure can increase if people feel that they don't have choices, for example over when to take breaks or the way work is scheduled and organised.</p> <p>Think about your job and write down below examples of pressures in your job associated with a lack of control at work.</p>	
<p>Support. When people don't feel supported this can add to pressure at work. Support comes in different forms. For example, support from other people is often referred to as 'social support'. Another form of support is 'practical support', such as having the right resources or equipment. Training is an example of practical support and is very important as it provides the skills you need to do your job. Support can come from different sources e.g. your colleagues or your manager.</p> <p>Think about and write down below any examples of pressures associated with a lack of support at work.</p>	Rank#

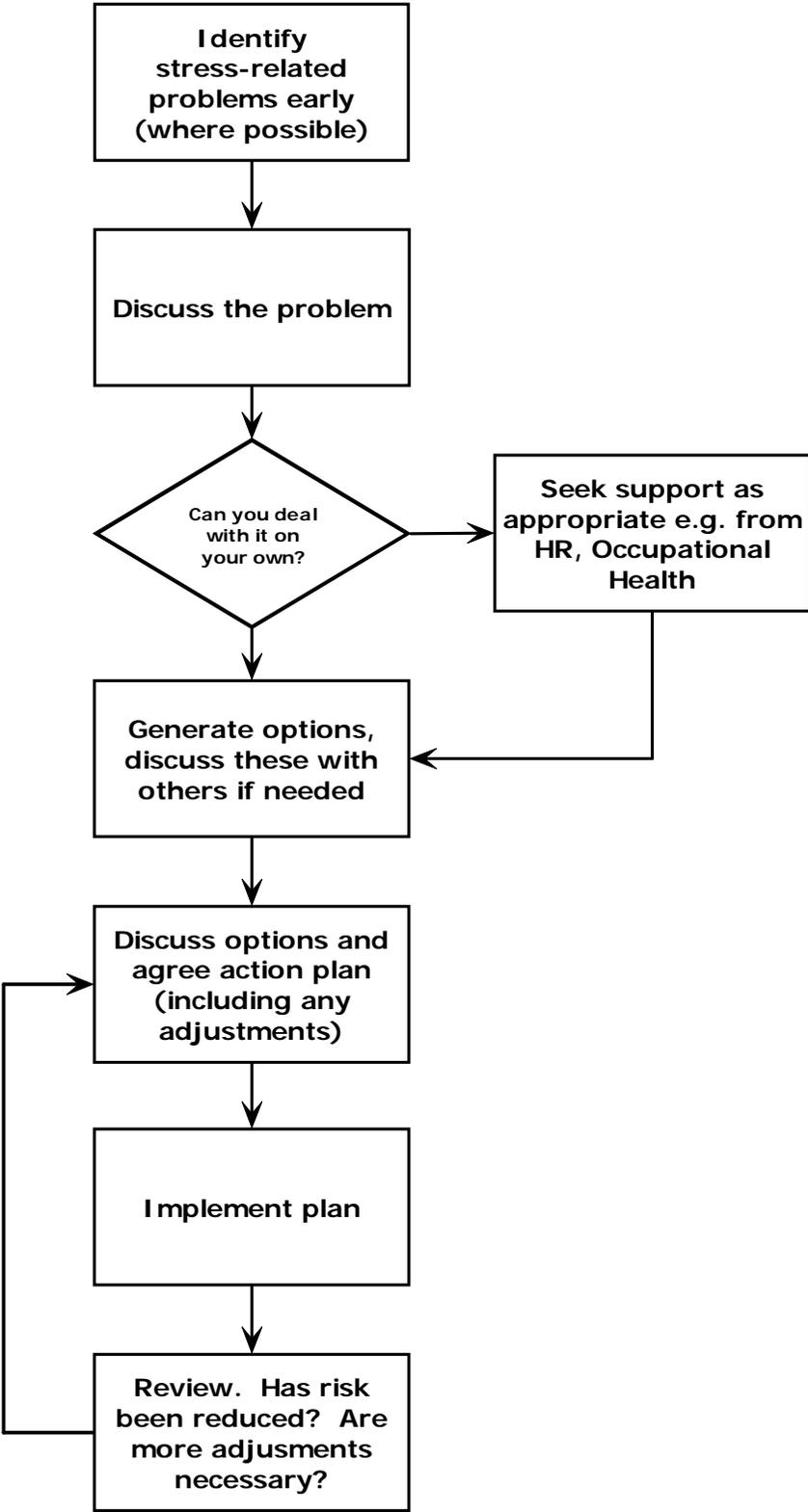
<p>Relationships. Poor working relationships can be a significant pressure at work, particularly when they are associated with conflict or negative behaviours such as bullying or harassment.</p> <p>Are poor working relationships a source of pressure for you? If so, please write down any examples below.</p>	
<p>Role. There are sometimes specific pressures associated with the role. For example, sometimes people aren't clear about what they should be doing, or who they are answerable to. This is called 'role ambiguity' and can be a cause of stress. Another problem associated with the role is where people feel that they are 'wearing too many hats'. This results in 'role conflict' where people find it difficult to prioritise.</p> <p>Think about and write down examples of any pressures associated with 'role ambiguity' or 'role conflict' within your job.</p>	

<p>Change. Change at work can increase the pressure on people, particularly if it is not managed well. Poorly managed change can make people feel uncertain, anxious and insecure. What can add to pressure is where people don't feel consulted or involved, and where communication has been poor.</p> <p>Are there examples of pressures associated with change, or the way it has been managed/communicated, over the last six months? If there are, write them down below.</p>	<p>Rank#</p>

Work Pressure Profile (Stage 3)

Job/role title:		
Ranking (highest first)	Pressure description	HSE category e.g. Demands
1 (pressure that contributes most to stress at work)		
2		
3		
4		
5		
Other main pressures		

Stress and the Risk Management Process



Individual stress risk assessment

Please read the ‘individual stress risk assessment guidance notes’. They take you through each question, providing information, practical guidance and advice you need to complete that question. The guidance notes can be found on page 46 of this document.

If you want to use these forms at work, we recommend you run it past your HR Adviser (or similar) and that you make sure you comply with your organisation’s policy on data protection re the storing of personal data.

Question 1. Is there anything giving you cause for concern that the employee may be experiencing stress?

Yes No

If Yes, complete the box below and continue.

If No, go straight to question 4.

Note down what is causing you concern and/or anything else you wish to discuss with the employee in this box (e.g. stress-related data).

Question 2. What are the employee's perceptions about this?

Please record the employee's perceptions. How do they see the situation?

Question 3. Are there issues unrelated to work that are making the employee more vulnerable to stress at this time?

Yes No

Question 4. What work pressures is the employee experiencing? Which of these does the employee regard as the most important?

Ranking	Pressure description	HSE category e.g. Demands
1 (most important or stressful)		
2 (2 nd most important)		
3		
4		
5		
Other main pressures		

Question 5. Action planning. What could you, as manager, and/or the employee do to minimise stress risk associated with pressures identified?

Date:

Manager name:

Employee name:

Stress management actions (agreed actions to prevent and reduce stress at work)		When?	Who?	HSE category
Signed. Manager	Signed. Employee	Evaluation and review date agreed		

Any personal data should be kept in accordance with data protection policy.

**Question 6. Does this stress risk assessment highlight issues that are relevant for the whole organisation?
(If so, what are they and how might they be addressed?)**

Yes No

If yes, please complete the table below.

Stress issues in the organisation	How might they be addressed?

This information should be fed back to HR (or similar) in accordance with agreed processes for stress risk assessments

Question 7. Action Plan evaluation/review. Have implemented actions minimised risk?

Date:

Manager name:

Employee name:

Evaluation of actions implemented? Has stress been prevented or reduced? Has risk been minimised?			
New steps/adjustments required?	When?	Who?	HSE category
Signed. Manager	Signed. Employee		Next evaluation and review date

Any personal data should be kept in accordance with data protection policy

www.in-equilibrium.co.uk

Individual stress risk assessment guidance notes

These notes provide advice and guidance on how to complete the Individual Stress Risk Assessment forms.

A general point that relates to all of the forms is that you should make sure you comply with your organisation's policy on data protection (keeping records).

Unless the use of these forms by line managers has already been agreed and endorsed by your employer (your trainer would have commented on this on the training day), we recommend you contact your HR adviser or similar before using them.

Our advice is: if in doubt, ask. Never be afraid to ask for support.

Please do not use these forms unless you have been on the relevant training course provided by In Equilibrium.

Proactive and reactive stress risk assessment

Please note that if you wish to conduct proactive stress risk assessments (aimed at prevention) you would not normally need to address questions 1 to 3. Rather, you would be best to commence with work pressure profiling at question 4.

If you are conducting a reactive stress risk assessment (i.e. assessing and managing risk in response to concerns about stress problems), you should address all the questions.

Question 1: Is there anything giving you cause for concern that the employee may be experiencing stress? Answer yes or no.

If yes, note down the relevant data and then continue.

If no, go straight to question 4.

There are three sources of data to consider where stress risk is concerned:

1. **Observable negative changes:** consider whether you have noticed any sustained negative changes in this employee, for example in their behaviour, health, performance, attitudes, mood or appearance.
2. **Objective, quantitative data (quantifiable, measurable):** review your management data relating to this employee, for example, their levels of sickness absence, performance indicators, accidents or complaints. Do any of these data give cause for concern about this individual?

3. Subjective, qualitative information (the ways people describe experience in their own words): consider your interactions with this staff member (e.g. from team meetings, informal chats, one-to-ones, return to work interviews) as a means of identifying whether there are any particular stress-related problems or sources of pressure in their current work situation. Also, have others' comments about this employee given you cause for concern?

It would be wrong to leap to conclusions or make assumptions about what these data mean (you are a manager, not a psychologist). Rather you should discuss your concerns/data with the individual to clarify whether the individual is experiencing stress-related problems, and how that individual sees the situation they are in (see Question 2 below).

Question 2: What are the employee's perceptions about this?

For this question, record how the employee sees the situation; that is, their perceptions, feeling and opinions. In order for this to happen you will need to make the employee feel that you are willing to commit time and space to this discussion.

Active listening skills, open questions, and clarification will all be important in discovering the way the employee feels. Remember it is too early to make assumptions. At this stage you are trying to find out how things are from the **employee's** perspective.

Question 3: Are there issues unrelated to work that are making the employee more vulnerable to stress at this time?

As a result of your discussions, have you become aware that the employee has issues outside of work that are contributing to stress levels?

Answer yes or no.

Please note that it is not normally necessary or advisable for a manager to record issues personal to the employee and not work-related. However, being aware that there are non-work 'circumstances', enables you as a manager to take account of increased vulnerability and make appropriate adjustments or provide support.

Question 4: What work pressures is the employee experiencing? Which of these does the employee regard as the most important?

If possible, give the employee the opportunity to think about this (time and space) and complete their own work pressure profile. Give the employee the Work Pressure Profiling example forms (in this document), and give them the chance to look through them.

When you do this, talk the employee through the work pressure profiling process and answer any questions they have. Reassure them that this is purely about identifying and tackling work pressures (which all jobs have), it is not about 'baring your soul' or asking the employee to speak about non-work issues they may not be comfortable about discussing with you (their manager).

Please write the work pressures the employee identifies into the work pressure profile and rank the pressures as the employee sees them. That is, the most important from the employee's perspective would be ranked 1, the second most important ranked 2, and so on. The employee's perception is what is most important here.

Which of the HSE Management Standards' categories do the pressures identified fit into? Please use your judgement as to which category each falls into and mark this on the form. More than one 'pressure' as identified by the employee may fall into the same category. It also is likely that some categories may not be represented at all. There is no need to fill in the whole table i.e. if the employee only identifies two specific pressures, that's fine, just fill in the top two rows.

As a reminder, the HSE Management Standards divide pressures (hazards) into 6 categories:

- Demands
- Control
- Support
- Relationships
- Role
- Change

It is important to clarify what each one means, so you can categorise them appropriately. The following explanations are taken from the pressure profiling questionnaire:

Demands. 'Demands' covers a number of potential sources of pressure at work. Having too much to do (overload) or too little to do (underload) are both examples of demands. Having too much work that is boring, repetitive and lacking in challenge is another example. So is work that is too hard or complex, and/or work that you haven't been trained for where you don't feel competent. Shift-work may be demanding,

depending on shift patterns and your ability to cope with them. There could also be demands in your (physical) working environment, such as noise, lack of space, cold/damp or a dry atmosphere. Risk of aggression or violence is another example of a demand.

Are any pressures identified related to demands at work?

Control. A feeling of not having control at work can cause stress for people, particularly if they already feel under pressure. Examples of 'lack of control' pressures include not feeling involved in decisions, not having a say or that your opinion doesn't count. Another example would relate to lack of flexibility. Pressure can increase if people feel that they don't have choices, for example, over when to take breaks or the way work is scheduled and organised.

Do any of the pressures identified relate to feelings of a lack of control?

Support. When people don't feel supported this can add to pressure at work. Support comes in different forms. For example, support from other people is often referred to as 'social support'. Another form of support is 'practical support', such as having the right resources or equipment. Training is an example of practical support and is very important as it provides the skills you need to do your job. Support can come from different sources e.g. your colleagues or your manager.

Are pressures identified by the employee related to either (a lack of) social support or (a lack of) practical support?

Relationships. Poor working relationships can be a significant pressure at work, particularly when they are associated with conflict or negative behaviours such as bullying or harassment.

Are there specific pressures relating to relationships that the employee is experiencing?

Role. There are sometimes specific pressures associated with the role. For example, sometimes people aren't clear about what they should be doing, or who they are answerable to. This is called 'role ambiguity' and can be a cause of stress. Another problem associated with the role is where people feel that they are 'wearing too many hats'. This results in 'role conflict' where people find it difficult to prioritise. This is an example of what is often called 'role conflict'.

Are pressures identified related either to role ambiguity or role conflict?

Change. Change at work can increase the pressure on people, particularly if it is not managed well. Poorly managed change can make people feel uncertain, anxious and insecure. What can add to pressure is where people don't feel consulted or involved, and where communication has been poor. Think about your job.

Do any pressures that the employee identifies relate to change management?

Question 5: Action Planning: What could you, as manager, and/or the employee do to minimise stress risk associated with pressures identified?

Please summarise any agreed actions here. Please make sure you are specific about what will be done, when, and who is responsible. Include all actions designed to minimise risk. Make sure you list actions you will take as a manager, for example:

- Any adjustments that will be made e.g. flexible working, changes to working patterns or hours, phased return, working from home, changes to tasks/roles etc.
- Any supports put in place e.g. referral to occupational health, employee assistance programme (counselling); additional management support of supervision, additional resources etc.
- Any training interventions agreed.

Please take into account reasonable practicability and the implications for other team members when developing action plans. Agree with the employee how and when action plans will be monitored and reviewed.

If you need to, make copies of the table.

Question 6: Does this stress risk assessment highlight issues that are relevant for the whole organisation? If so, what are they and how might they be addressed?

Please reflect on the issues raised by this stress risk assessment. Has the stress risk assessment highlighted general issues that could be fed back (e.g. to H.R. and/or Health and Safety)? If so, please list them.

If you have any suggestions as to how these general stress issues might be addressed please write these in the right hand column opposite the stress issue you listed in the left hand column. The employee's ideas on this and your opinions are both important.

If you need to, make copies of the table.

Question 7: Action Plan evaluation/review. Have implemented actions minimised risk?

This question is to be answered on the review date agreed at stage/question 5.

The main purpose of the review meeting is evaluation. Has the action plan you implemented been successful from both your and the employee's perspective? Has the risk to well-being (stress) been reduced? Please record a summary of this evaluation.

If the implemented action have been only partially successful, or not successful, consider and discuss with the employee any further steps or adjustments that are required. Write down agreed steps or adjustments in the space provided.

If further steps are required, make sure that you record when they will be implemented and who is responsible, along with the relevant HSE category (are new adjustments related to demands, support etc?).

You will need to agree another evaluation and review date if further steps or adjustments have been planned. Otherwise, the risk assessment process is now complete.

If you need to, make copies of the table.