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Chapter 2

Identifying the causes of your occupational stress

Introduction

The transactional model of stress introduced in Chapter 1 emphasized that stress is the result of an interaction between the individual and their environment. Stress is experienced when the individual appraises their coping resources to be insufficient to manage the demands of the situation that they are faced with. Occupational stress can be defined in a similar way. The United States National Institute for Occupational Health and Safety defines it 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.

Each employee brings with them a unique set of personal attributes and needs to the job and in turn the characteristics of the job itself and the working environment place demands on the employee. If the employee appraises that they have the capabilities and resources to meet the demands of the job, and the working environment also meets their needs, they experience job satisfaction. However, if the employee appraises that they do not have the required capabilities, personal attributes and coping resources to meet the demands of the job, or the job itself does not meet the needs of the individual, then occupational stress is likely to be experienced. This two way relationship and the central importance of the individual’s appraisal in the experience of stress at work is illustrated in Figure 2.1.

The model proposes that the better the match between the employee and their work environment (i.e., a good person–environment fit), the lower the occupational stress experienced. Conversely, the poorer the fit, the greater the level of occupational stress experienced. The next section
of this chapter provides an overview of the main individual and environmental factors that interact to cause occupational stress.

**An overview of the causes of occupational stress**

Occupational stress can be caused by individual factors, factors in the work environment and the home–work interface.

**Individual factors**

Individual causes of stress include a range of genetic/inherited, acquired/learned and personality/trait factors.

**Genetic/inherited factors**

Genetic/inherited factors refer to those characteristics that we are born with. For example, some people are naturally physically stronger or intellectually more able than others. Someone who is physically strong is able to lift and carry greater weights than someone who is weaker, and this gives them an advantage in a manual job which requires a lot of lifting and carrying. Similarly, intellectually more capable individuals are going to be able to perform better than less intellectual individuals in jobs that require intellectual ability. People are also born with different temperaments and some individuals are by nature more timid, introverted,
shy, less adventurous and risk taking than others. These natural inclinations manifest in such individuals in the way they cope with stressful situations. For example, they are likely to be less assertive and more avoidant than those who are outward going and adventurous risk takers. It has also been reported that there are sex differences in the way males and females deal with stress. However, it is debatable whether this sex difference should be considered as a genetic factor, or something which is learned through the stereotyping of male and female role models in society.

**Acquired/learned factors**

Acquired/learned characteristics are (as the name suggests) acquired and learned over time. For example, age is a factor which can influence how the individual deals with stress. Younger individuals tend to be more vulnerable to stress than older individuals, possibly because they have fewer coping strategies and less life experience to draw upon than older people. Life experience equips an individual with additional coping strategies which can inoculate them against stress. Level of educational attainment, knowledge and skills also determine how equipped an individual is to manage work related tasks. Those who are less well educated or trained to do a particular job are more likely to experience higher stress levels than those who are well trained and equipped with the knowledge and skills to do the job.

An individual’s beliefs and assumptions are learned in childhood and adolescence and consolidated throughout life. These can play an important role in determining the meaning that we attach to life events and ultimately what we perceive as stressful. Cognitive therapists have been aware for many years now that in most situations it is not the situation itself that causes stress but the way that an individual interprets that situation. If these interpretations are faulty, the individual’s reactions to that situation are also likely to be dysfunctional and result in stress. Beliefs also play a part in determining how the individual copes with stress.

A group of clinical psychologists led by Dr Jeff Young in the USA have called these faulty underlying beliefs ‘early maladaptive schemas’ (EMS). Young and his colleagues believe that these schemas are a product of the ‘adverse early life experiences’ (sometimes referred to as a ‘toxic early environment’), which the individual was exposed to in childhood. Early maladaptive schemas have been defined as ‘self-defeating patterns of thinking that are developed through childhood experiences and perpetuated in adult life’. The model proposes that these self-defeating patterns result in negative interactions with others in adult life. For
example, as a result of their adverse early life experiences, an individual may develop a schema that results in them being particularly sensitive to rejection. As an adult the individual is extra sensitive to any situation that triggers the theme of rejection and is likely to experience powerful and sometimes overwhelming emotional reactions, such as anger, despair or anxiety, if their dysfunctional schema is activated. In the work context, this could cause significant problems if the person doing the rejecting is their line manager. It could be even worse if the individual with the unhelpful schema is the manager! Individuals with early maladaptive schemas are thus more vulnerable to experiencing stress as a result of relationship difficulties at work.

**Personality/trait factors**

Personality factors refer to those relatively enduring characteristics or traits of an individual which define who they are. For example, we say that someone is an ‘extravert’ to describe the characteristics of being sociable and outward going, or ‘introverted’ to describe the characteristics of being shy and withdrawn. Personality is thought to develop through the interaction of an individual’s temperament (nature) with their early learning environment (nurture) and is consolidated by subsequent life experiences in adulthood. Both nature and nurture thus play a key role in determining an individual’s personality.

There is a considerable amount of research on the influence of ‘personality dispositions’ on the level of stress experienced. In general these studies have found that there are certain personality traits which make individuals more resilient to stress than others. For example, individuals who are more hostile and competitive (Type A individuals) are more prone to stress than easy going and uncompetitive (Type B) individuals. Those with high trait anxiety are more prone to experiencing stress than those who are temperamentally more relaxed. Those who perceive themselves as having little or no control over their own destiny are more prone to experiencing stress than those who believe that they do have a degree of control over their own destiny. So, clearly there are some personality traits that are ‘protective’ and make an individual more resilient to experiencing stress and when these are absent, increase the likelihood of experiencing stress.

**Factors in the work environment**

Workplace factors include job demands, physical working conditions, control, supports, relationships, role, change, and pay and career prospects.
Understanding occupational stress

Job demands
There are a number of possible reasons why excessive job demands can result in increased stress levels at work. It may be a result of the actual volume of work itself, the pace of work, unrealistic time pressures, excessive responsibility, unachievable targets or deadlines, too many competing demands, difficulty of the tasks involved, inflexibility of working arrangements, lack of opportunities for sufficient rest breaks, shift working, or pressure to work long hours. Stress can also result from being given only partial tasks to complete and therefore never having the satisfaction of seeing a finished product. It can also result from having a lack of variety in one’s work and (associated with this) feelings of boredom and monotony.

Physical working conditions
Working in an unsafe or uncomfortable physical environment can cause high levels of stress. Dirty, cramped, poorly lit, noisy, too hot or cold, stuffy conditions without facilities for taking breaks, can not only affect employees on a humanitarian level but also have a negative impact on their work rate and productivity. There are of course certain jobs which by their nature involve poor physical environments, such as sewage work, refuse collecting, and coalmining where miners work in cramped conditions without access to natural light. This can be made worse if shower and changing room facilities, the correct safety equipment and the right clothing are not made available to minimize the risk to employees.

Control
Employees need to feel that they have some discretion and control over the way in which they do their job and that they are able to influence the decision making processes in the organization in which they work. If they lack the autonomy and freedom to design and structure their work, this can lead to experiencing increased stress levels. For example, not having a say in the timing, sequence, pace and the way in which job tasks are done, not being allowed to manage one’s own diary, having no say in work schedules, annual leave and shift rotas, or being unable to have any freedom to prioritize tasks are all ways in which an employee can experience increased stress in their job. Being excluded from the decision making process can also be a stressful experience. For example, working for an organization that does not allow its employees to participate in

http://www.routledgementalhealth.com/overcoming-your-workplace-stress-9780415671781
staff meetings with managers, or more formal involvement in trade union activities, can be a source of stress for some employees.

**Supports**

People work best if they feel supported in what they are doing. Supports at work can be both formal and informal. Some formal methods of support include the provision of regular managerial supervision, feedback on performance through personal development reviews, mentorship arrangements, identifying ongoing professional development needs through appraisals and the provision of training to meet these needs. Up-to-date technology, the right resources and equipment to do the job are also important in making the employee feel supported. When these formal support mechanisms are not in place, the employee is likely to feel unsupported in their work. However, even if an employee does have all of these formal supports at their disposal, they could still be feeling socially isolated if their work does not allow them to have frequent informal social contacts within their work setting.

**Relationships**

Good working relationships are crucial to the efficient and effective running of an organization. Many people spend more time at work than in the company of their domestic partners, so it is understandable that experiencing relationship problems at work can have a major negative impact on the psychological wellbeing of the individuals involved. While people should not necessarily expect to become best friends with those they work with, they should be able to expect to work in an environment of mutual respect and satisfactory working relationships. It is an unfortunate fact however that approximately one in six people report that they have been the victim of workplace bullying and harassment. Bullying not only is about being overtly aggressive towards another person but also can manifest itself in a wide range of more subtle forms of behaviour. These may include, for example, the use of put-downs, making others the butt of jokes, keeping them out of the information loop, pulling rank, showing favouritism, setting them up to fail and patronizing or prejudicial treatment. Bullies are emotionally immature individuals who can create havoc for those they work with by their dysfunctional, divisive and disruptive behaviours.

The work environment provides an ideal stage upon which dysfunctional re-enactments of power, control and status dynamics can take place,
since the analogies between the work environment and the early family environment are numerous. For example, managers, supervisors and other authority figures can be seen as parent-like figures, and colleagues or peers as siblings in the family system. So, all the necessary actors are there to enable the toxic re-enactments to take place. Young’s model of early maladaptive schemas, which was referred to earlier in this chapter (p. 26), is useful in terms of understanding the underlying psychology of such behaviours. For example, bullying can be seen as a re-enactment of the ‘mistrust and abuse’ EMS. However, it is not only bullying but also a wide range of other negative and disruptive behavioural patterns in the workplace that can be explained by the re-enactment of EMS. For example, the behaviour of the ‘control freak’ may be an over-compensation for experiences of having been dominated and controlled excessively in childhood. The maladaptive behaviour may be driven by a ‘control or be controlled’ dichotomy and the assumption that ‘unless I maintain a tight control over others, they will control me’. Another example is the behaviour of the ‘disciplinarian’, who is driven by the ‘punitiveness’ EMS and the belief that ‘all mistakes however small must be punished’.

These re-enactments can be particularly damaging if the dysfunctional individual is a manager, since there is the potential for them to misuse the authority inherent in their role. Dysfunctional re-enactments of EMS derived from toxic early environments can continue indefinitely in adult relationships if the individual is not made aware of them. Unfortunately, most people with personality issues do not have much insight into the impact that their behaviour has on others and are much more likely to blame others than themselves for interpersonal conflicts that arise. It is usually left to those around them to come up with creative strategies for managing their dysfunctional behaviour and tackling the trail of devastation that such individuals can leave in their wake.

Role

People need to be clear about what is expected of them at work and what the priorities, aims and objectives of the wider organization that they work in are. In order to ensure that employees are clear about their role, there needs to be a clearly identified management structure, clear lines of accountability and good channels of communication throughout the whole organization. It is important that managers and supervisors make sure that their employees have a well-defined sense of their job responsibilities. The terms and conditions of a job, an outline of organizational relationships,
the lines of accountability, core functions, tasks and duties of a specific job should all be clearly written down in the individual employee’s job description. Changes to the job description should be made only through negotiation and by mutual agreement between the manager and the employee concerned. If any of these requirements are missing, the employee is likely to experience a lack of clarity about their role and become confused by what the organization is wanting from them. Role ambiguity and role conflict are known to be significant causes of stress in the workplace.

Change

Organizations are not static things. They are continually evolving and changing in order to survive and remain competitive. The way in which this change is managed is crucial to the ongoing success of the organization and also in determining the levels of stress experienced by the workforce. Employees need to be consulted about change at work and how changes will impact on the job that they do. They should also have sufficient opportunities to question managers about proposed changes in their working practices. The culture of the organization is a key factor in determining how it manages change. If it is an enlightened one, the employer is likely to be open and transparent about the changes they need to make. They will involve the workforce in a consultation process, communicate clearly, explain how the changes are going to impact on the job that they do in practice and offer the employee support at each step along the way. The negative impact of change can thus be minimized as potential problems are recognized and resolved at each step. An enlightened organizational culture also acknowledges the impact that organizational changes can have on employees and is proactive in terms of putting positive strategies in place to manage it. Unfortunately, however, some organizations are not so enlightened. They manage change in a secretive way, withhold information and do not consult their employees about the changes. This can lead to high levels of distress among employees, which is driven by their fears and fantasies about the unknown.

Some organizations also have cynical and negative attitudes towards those who experience stress and perceive them as being weak. This attitude is captured by the cliché ‘If you can’t stand the heat then stay out of the kitchen’, meaning that if you cannot take the pressure, you should not be in the job. The employee is blamed for creating their own stress and thus the organization conveniently lets itself off the hook by the
failure to acknowledge the part played by the work environment in creating the stress experienced. This is analogous to pushing someone into a strong tidal current and then blaming them for not being able to swim out of it! Clearly the employer does have a responsibility for the welfare of the employees during times of organizational change and needs to take these responsibilities seriously.

**Pay and career prospects**

Employees are entitled to a fair wage for the job that they do. They are also entitled to expect that they are given equal opportunities in terms of career, promotion prospects and security of employment. In the UK employees are protected by equal opportunities, the minimum wage and anti-discrimination legislation. However, this does not always stop unscrupulous employers from trying to deny employees of their entitlements and this can be the cause of considerable stress for those individuals who are subjected to such discrimination.

**The home–work interface**

Employees have a range of responsibilities outside of work such as running a home, bringing up a family, caring for relatives, paying bills, to name but a few. Stress in life outside of work can impact on life at work and vice versa. This is known as the home–work interface. For example, a poor marriage and lack of social support outside of work can make an individual more susceptible to experiencing stress at work. Similarly, a couple both pursuing a career may experience strain in the marital relationship. For example, men are expected to move readily for job transfers and promotion if they want to progress in their careers and it is traditionally expected that their partner and family follow them. Dual careers can make this more complex. The traditional stereotype of the man as the breadwinner of the family may be challenged if the woman’s income equals or exceeds that of their male partner and this can lead to marital tensions. It is not uncommon for successful women to reject promotion, or to avoid being more successful than their partner, in order to prevent such conflicts from arising. Also, the bulk of non-work domestic roles and responsibilities such as housework, cooking, shopping and childcare still tends to fall mainly on the woman of the household and this can cause stress if they are trying to do all this and hold down a job at the same time.
Identifying the causes of your occupational stress

The employer’s ‘duty of care’ to provide a healthy working environment

Case study: Schmidt

In 1947 W. F. Taylor, an industrialist and Tory radical, presented his prize case study of Schmidt, a pig iron handler, to an appreciative and admiring audience of employers. He began by describing Schmidt in what is now recognized as rather politically incorrect language, as a ‘thick-skulled little Dutchman’, who was by constitution something like a ‘human ox’ and was able to shovel twelve and a half tons of pig iron in a day. Taylor reported that through a process of scientific management he had successfully ‘systematized’ Schmidt to increase his output fourfold, up to fifty tons a day. For this increase in output, he rewarded Schmidt with a bonus of just over half his original pay. This was a pay rise that impressed Schmidt! Taylor claimed that he had achieved this by subtle manipulation of financial incentives.

This case study illustrates some of the prevalent management attitudes in the mid twentieth century. In particular it ‘dehumanized’ the worker and implied that employees are driven purely by financial incentives. Taylor rather arrogantly described them as ‘greedy robots’. Unfortunately, it later emerged that Schmidt died at an early age of a heart attack, a fact that did not seem to disturb Taylor unduly, since at that time employee casualties were seen by many employers as an inevitable and acceptable sacrifice to make in order to make a profit.

The impact of employment legislation

Fortunately, the kind of management described by Taylor in the mid twentieth century has largely been eradicated. This has not been because unscrupulous employers have suddenly developed a social conscience but a result of the proliferation of employment laws aimed at protecting the individual employee from working in such harmful working environments.

In the UK employers now have a ‘duty of care’ enshrined in law towards their employees and are required to demonstrate that they are providing reasonable, safe and healthy working conditions and that failure to do so can lead to expensive litigation claims by employees. One
example of this is the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, which requires employers to take all reasonably practicable measures to protect the health, safety and welfare of employees at work.

Additionally, the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations (1999) legally require an employer who employs more than three workers to assess health and safety risks in the workplace and to introduce prevention and control measures based on those risk assessments. A statutory body known as the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has been set up in the UK to ensure compliance with this legislation. One of its main functions with respect to work related stress risks has been to provide clear guidance to employers on how to manage them. In particular the HSE has published the Management Standards for Tackling Work Related Stress, which all employers have a responsibility to read and understand. Employers also have a legal duty under the health and safety legislation to do a risk assessment on their own workplace and make every effort they can to ensure that these standards are being met within the teams that they manage. Each standard spells out good management practice in one of six areas relating to demands, control, support, relationships, role and change.

**Demands**

Demands include issues like workload, work patterns and the work environment. The organization must make sure that tasks are achievable within the hours of the job, the employee has the skills and the job is designed to be within the capabilities of the employee. The management standard is that ‘employees indicate that they are able to cope with the demands of their job and systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns’.

**Control**

Control involves how much say an employee has in making decisions about the way they do their work, the pace of their work, work patterns and when breaks can be taken. The standard is that ‘employees report that they do have a say about the way they do their work and systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns’.

**Support**

Support includes the encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided by the organization, line management and colleagues. Employers need
to ensure that they provide adequate information and support to do the job, systems are in place to support staff, employees know how to access this support, can access the right resources to do the job and receive regular and constructive feedback on their performance. The standard is that ‘employees indicate that they receive adequate information and support from their colleagues and supervisors and that systems are in place to respond to any individual concerns’.

Relationships

Relationships include promoting positive working to avoid conflict and dealing with unacceptable behaviour such as bullying and harassment. The standard is that ‘employees have a positive environment to work in, are not subjected to unacceptable behaviours at work, that there are agreed policies, procedures and systems in place to respond to individual concerns’.

Role

Role refers to whether employees understand their role within an organization and whether the organization ensures that the person does not have conflicting roles. The employer needs to ensure that employees are clear about their roles and responsibilities and that they are given sufficient information to enable them to do their job. The management standard is that ‘employees indicate that they understand their role and responsibilities and there are systems in place locally to respond to any individual concerns’.

Change

This refers to how change is managed and communicated within the organization. The employer needs to ensure that employees are given adequate notice, consultation, a timetable and support through any organizational changes. The management standard is that ‘employees indicate that the organization engages them frequently when undergoing any organizational change and systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns’.

Further developments in management standards

The management standards approach has generated a significant amount of interest not only in the UK but also internationally in Europe,
Australasia, Canada and the Indian subcontinent. Although each country tends to have its own way of regulating the safety in the workplace, the interest shown internationally would seem to indicate that the approach can, with some minor modifications, work within the regulatory systems present in these countries. It is flexible enough to be accommodated within a range of different regulatory systems and it has even been used in countries without regulatory systems in place.

The Health and Safety Executive has developed a risk assessment tool based on the six standards identified above, known as the Management Standards Indicator Tool. It is a questionnaire consisting of thirty-five items which investigate the presence or absence of known organizational risk factors for organizational stress and rates the employee’s perceptions of the six key aspects from demands through to change. It is designed to be used as a screening tool for whole organizations but can also be used by individuals to provide information on their current working conditions. For example, it has been used in return to work interviews, individual risk assessments, job design and annual appraisals.

**Identifying the main causes of stress in your own working environment**

Before you can address the causes of stress in your own working environment, you need to identify what they are. The questionnaire in Table 2.1 is intended to help you identify the main causes of stress in your own working environment. Please read the questions and circle your answer. It is important that your responses relate to the last six months.

**Interpreting the results of your questionnaire (Table 2.1)**

*Interpreting individual items*

You will notice that on each of the subscales of the questionnaire there are shaded boxes, some are dark grey, others are a lighter shade of grey, or some are white. These shaded areas give you information about how your own rating compares to the HSE national benchmarks for each item derived from a 2004 survey of 5,800 workers. You can interpret your rating on each individual item by using the key in Table 2.2.

*Interpretation of subscales*

The key in Table 2.2 allows you to compare only individual items within each subscale using the HSE benchmark. In order to interpret your score...
Table 2.1 Questionnaire to identify the main sources of stress in your work environment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1 Demands</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Seldom</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Always</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Different groups at work demand things from me that are hard to combine</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 I have unachievable deadlines</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Seldom</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td></td>
<td>Always</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 I have to work very intensively</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Seldom</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td></td>
<td>Always</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 I have to neglect some tasks because I have too much to do</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Seldom</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td></td>
<td>Always</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 I am unable to take sufficient breaks</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Seldom</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td></td>
<td>Always</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 I am pressured to work long hours</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Seldom</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td></td>
<td>Always</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 I have to work very fast</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Seldom</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td></td>
<td>Always</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 I have unrealistic time pressures</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Seldom</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td></td>
<td>Always</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2 Control</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Seldom</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Always</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 I can decide when to take a break</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Seldom</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td></td>
<td>Always</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 I have a say in my own work speed</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Seldom</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td></td>
<td>Always</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 I have a choice in deciding how I do my work</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Seldom</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td></td>
<td>Always</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 I have a choice in deciding what I do at work</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Seldom</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td></td>
<td>Always</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 I have some say over the way I work</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Seldom</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td></td>
<td>Always</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 My working time can be flexible</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Seldom</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td></td>
<td>Always</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3a Managers’ support</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Seldom</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Always</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 I am given supportive feedback on the work I do</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Seldom</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td></td>
<td>Always</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 I can rely on my line manager to help me out with a work problem</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Seldom</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td></td>
<td>Always</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Continued)
Table 2.1 Questionnaire to identify the main sources of stress in your work environment (Continued)

| 3 | I can talk to my manager about something that has upset or annoyed me about work | Never 1 | Seldom 2 | Sometimes 3 | Often 4 | Always 5 |
| 4 | I am supported through emotionally demanding work | Never 1 | Seldom 2 | Sometimes 3 | Often 4 | Always 5 |
| 5 | My line manager encourages me at work | Never 1 | Seldom 2 | Sometimes 3 | Often 4 | Always 5 |

3b Peer support

| 1 | If work gets difficult, my colleagues will help me | Never 1 | Seldom 2 | Sometimes 3 | Often 4 | Always 5 |
| 2 | I get help and support I need from colleagues | Never 1 | Seldom 2 | Sometimes 3 | Often 4 | Always 5 |
| 3 | I receive the respect at work I deserve from my colleagues | Never 1 | Seldom 2 | Sometimes 3 | Often 4 | Always 5 |
| 4 | My colleagues are willing to listen to my work related problems | Never 1 | Seldom 2 | Sometimes 3 | Often 4 | Always 5 |

4 Relationships

| 1 | I am subject to personal harassment in the form of unkind words or behaviour | Never 5 | Seldom 4 | Sometimes 3 | Often 2 | Always 1 |
| 2 | There is friction or anger between colleagues | Never 5 | Seldom 4 | Sometimes 3 | Often 2 | Always 1 |
| 3 | I am subject to bullying at work | Never 5 | Seldom 4 | Sometimes 3 | Often 2 | Always 1 |
| 4 | Relationships at work are strained | Never 5 | Seldom 4 | Sometimes 3 | Often 2 | Always 1 |

5 Role

| 1 | I am clear what is expected of me at work | Never 1 | Seldom 2 | Sometimes 3 | Often 4 | Always 5 |
| 2 | I know how to go about getting my job done | Never 1 | Seldom 2 | Sometimes 3 | Often 4 | Always 5 |
| 3 | I am clear what my duties and responsibilities are | Never 1 | Seldom 2 | Sometimes 3 | Often 4 | Always 5 |
Identifying the causes of your occupational stress

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>I am clear about the goals and objectives for my department</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Seldom</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Always</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>I understand how my work fits into the overall aim of the organization</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Seldom</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Always</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 6 Change

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>I have sufficient opportunities to question managers about change at work</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Seldom</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Always</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Staff are always consulted about change at work</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Seldom</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Always</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>When changes are made at work, I am clear how they will work out in practice</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Seldom</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Always</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Adapted from Health and Safety Executive Management Standards Indicator Tool with permission)

Note: This table is available to view and print from the following website: www.routledge-mentalhealth.com/9780415671781

Table 2.2 Key to questionnaire

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Indicates a score in the bottom 20% when compared to the benchmarked scores and it indicates that this item is likely to be a significant source of stress to you and requires your immediate attention.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Indicates a score in the lower 50% when compared with the benchmarked scores and it indicates that this may be a source of stress to you, there is scope for some improvement on this item and that it needs addressing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>Indicates a score in the top 50% when compared to the benchmarked score and it indicates a satisfactory/good response on this item at the time of completing the questionnaire.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: data derived from the HSE survey *Psychosocial Working Conditions in Great Britain*, 2004)

http://www.routledge-mentalhealth.com/overcoming-your-workplace-stress-9780415671781

on each complete subscale, you will first need to work out your average score for each subscale of the questionnaire. The average score for each subscale can be calculated by adding up the total of all the items and then dividing by the number of items in the subscale (demands = 8 items; control = 6 items; managers’ support = 5 items; peer support = 4 items;
Table 2.3 Mean ratings for each subscale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Management standard</th>
<th>In bottom 20 per cent compared to benchmark scores</th>
<th>In bottom 50 per cent compared to benchmark scores</th>
<th>In top 50 per cent compared to benchmark scores</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Demands</td>
<td>Less than 2.9</td>
<td>2.9 to 3.1</td>
<td>More than 3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>Less than 3.2</td>
<td>3.2 to 3.5</td>
<td>More than 3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managers’ support</td>
<td>Less than 3.3</td>
<td>3.3 to 3.5</td>
<td>More than 3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer support</td>
<td>Less than 3.6</td>
<td>3.6 to 3.8</td>
<td>More than 3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>Less than 3.6</td>
<td>3.6 to 3.9</td>
<td>More than 3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role</td>
<td>Less than 4.0</td>
<td>4.0 to 4.2</td>
<td>More than 4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change</td>
<td>Less than 2.8</td>
<td>2.8 to 3.0</td>
<td>More than 3.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

relationships = 4 items; role = 5 items; change = 3 items). Once you have the average (mean) score you can make comparisons with the benchmark in Table 2.3.

The shaded areas in Table 2.3 are interpreted in exactly the same way as indicated in the key (Table 2.2) and allow you to identify where you stand in relation to the norms for each of the management standards. This information should be useful to you in terms of identifying which areas of your working environment are causing you stress. This information can then be used to help you identify which of the interventions outlined in Chapter 3 will be the most helpful to you.

Summary and main learning points from Part I

Part I of this book aimed to promote your understanding of the stress concept, its causes and consequences. In Chapter 1 the transactional model of stress was introduced, in which stress was conceptualized as being the result of an interaction between an individual and their environment. The central importance of the appraisal or meaning of an event or situation to the individual in the causation of stress was also emphasized. An overview of the sequence of physical and mental changes triggered in the stress reaction was also presented. You were then asked to complete a quiz to test your knowledge of stress. The subsequent list of answers provided was aimed at dispelling some commonly held myths and misconceptions about stress. The chapter concluded with a checklist which allowed you to identify the symptoms and assess the severity of
your own current levels of stress. The key learning points from Chapter 1 are listed below:

- Occupational stress is costing employers billions of pounds each year.
- A certain amount of stress at work is normal and at optimal levels can actually be a motivator and enhance performance.
- Prolonged high levels of chronic unmitigated stress are potentially harmful and can lead to more serious physical and mental health consequences.
- The stress reaction consists of a sequence of physical, emotional, cognitive and behavioural changes known as the emergency response.
- Stress is the consequence of an interaction between the individual and their environment.
- The interpretation or meaning that an individual attaches to an event or situation is a key factor in determining whether or not they will experience it as being stressful.
- Tackling stress in the workplace is worthwhile not only on humanitarian grounds but also because it make sound economic sense to do so.

Chapter 2 of this book (the present chapter) focused on identifying the main causes of occupational stress. The transactional model of occupational stress was introduced, which conceptualized stress as being the consequence of a mismatch between the individual employee’s capabilities, resources and needs and their work environment (i.e., a poor person–environment fit). An overview of the main individual and environmental causes of occupational stress was then presented. The chapter concluded with a questionnaire on the causes of work related stress, derived from the Health and Safety Executive’s six management standards. Completion and scoring of the questionnaire allowed you to identify the main causes of stress in your own working environment. The key learning points from Chapter 2 are listed below:

- Individual causes of stress include a range of genetic/inherited, acquired/learned and personality/trait factors.
- Environmental causes of stress can be found in the demands of the job itself, the physical working conditions, amount of control and autonomy over the job, supports available, quality of working relationships, role clarity, the way change is managed, and pay and career prospects.
The interface between work and home life is also a potential causal factor.

Employers have a duty of care to ensure that they provide as healthy and stress free working environment as far as possible for their workforce.

The British Health and Safety Executive has identified a number of management standards with respect to managing stress in the workplace, which employers are expected to comply with.

Each management standard spells out good management practice in each of six areas relating to job demands, control, support, relationships, role and the way that organizational change is managed.

Employers in the UK in any organization with three or more employees have a legal duty under health and safety legislation to do a risk assessment on their own workplace based on the six management standards.

Employers in the UK are required to make every effort they can to ensure that these standards are being met within the teams that they manage.

The management standards approach has generated a significant amount of interest in many countries around the world and is flexible enough to be accommodated within the range of different regulatory systems present in these countries.

About Part II of this book

Part II provides a range of interventions for tackling occupational stress. Researchers in the field have identified three levels of interventions for managing work related stress more effectively, known as primary, secondary and tertiary level interventions. Part II (Chapters 3 to 10) covers these three levels of intervention respectively.

Primary level interventions

Primary level interventions are aimed at changing the work environment itself to reduce or eliminate the cause of the stress at its source. These are covered in Chapter 3. However, sometimes it is not possible to change the work environment either because it is uneconomical for the employer to do this, or because there are aspects of the job itself that are inherently stressful. For example, if an individual is working in the emergency services or armed forces, there will clearly be stressful aspects of the job that cannot be removed. Where this is the case and the sources of stress
cannot be readily removed, secondary level interventions are considered to be more appropriate.

**Secondary level interventions**

Secondary level interventions aim to teach the employee a range of coping skills or strategies to help buffer them against an inherently stressful environment and to assist them to develop the confidence to look after themselves more effectively in situations that would in actual fact be stressful to anyone. These are covered in Chapters 4 to 9.

**Tertiary level interventions**

Tertiary level interventions are appropriate when secondary level interventions are ineffective and the individual is experiencing one of the stress syndromes outlined in Chapter 1, which is impacting on their capacity to be productive in the work setting, or even to remain at work (p. 11). These aim to reduce and, it is hoped, eliminate the clinical level of distress they are experiencing by providing psychological therapy to assist them to return to their previous normal levels of productivity. Tertiary level interventions are covered in Chapter 10.
PART III

Pulling it all together

11 Developing a self-help plan
12 Summary and conclusions

Appendix: Useful books and contacts
Index