Management competencies for preventing and reducing stress at work

Identifying and developing the management behaviours necessary to implement the HSE Management Standards: Phase Two

Prepared by **Goldsmiths, University of London**
for the Health and Safety Executive 2008

INVESTORS IN PEOPLE

cipd

RR633
Research Report

Management competencies for preventing and reducing stress at work

Identifying and developing the management behaviours necessary to implement the HSE Management Standards: Phase Two

Joanna Yarker MSc, PhD, C Psychol
Rachel Lewis MSc, C Psychol
Goldsmiths, University of London
New Cross
SE16 6NW

Emma Donaldson-Feilder MA, MSc, C Psychol
Affinity Health at Work
20A Park Road
New Barnet
EN4 9QA

This report presents the findings of the second phase of a research project to identify the specific management behaviours associated with the effective management of stress at work. This phase aimed to: examine the usability of the 'Management competencies for preventing and reducing stress at work' framework developed in Phase One; refine and revise the framework; and design a 'Stress management competency indicator tool'. An additional aim was to explore the commonalities between the framework and indicator tool on the one hand and the HSE Management Standards and general management measurement tools on the other.

A qualitative approach was used to explore the usability of both the framework and the indicator tool: this involved interviews with 47 managers and 6 stakeholders working within the five HSE priority areas (Education, Finance, Local Government, Central Government and Healthcare), along with one 'Other sector' organisation, and workshops with 38 stress experts. A combined quantitative and qualitative approach was taken to construct the indicator tool and refine and revise the framework: this involved 152 managers and 656 direct reports. Statistical and qualitative evidence was used to create a revised framework that consists of four competencies and 12 sub-competencies. The final indicator tool contains 66 items. A literature review and mapping exercise was conducted to compare the revised framework and emergent indicator tool with the HSE Management Standards and 12 existing management/leadership frameworks.

HSE Books

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Objectives of the study

The objectives of the second phase of this research programme were threefold:

- o To **examine the usability, range of uses for and best approaches to using** the management competency framework developed in Phase One. This will be achieved by conducting a quantitative pilot and gathering qualitative evidence from Human Resources/Occupational Health/Health and Safety practitioners, and end users (line managers) on organisational needs and potential uses of the framework.

- o To **refine and revise the competency framework** based on evidence from three sources: i) review of qualitative evidence from a pilot exercise, ii) reliability analysis and exploratory factor analysis and iii) literature review. A series of workshops will be conducted with stress management experts (including HR/OH/H&S practitioners, consultants and academics working within the field of stress management) to further refine the framework.

- o To **design a stress management competency indicator tool** that measures the degree to which an individual exhibits Management competencies for preventing and reducing stress at work.

Background

This research represents the second phase of a project aimed at identifying and developing the specific management behaviours associated with the effective management of stress at work. In the first phase of the research, a qualitative, multi-method approach was taken, involving 216 employees, 166 line managers and 54 HR practitioners from the five HSE priority areas (Education, Finance, Local Government, Central Government and Healthcare). The emergent 'Management competencies for preventing and reducing stress at work' framework identified 19 competencies relating to the management of stress in employees.

Following the publication of the 'Management competencies for preventing and reducing stress at work' framework by the HSE (Yarker et al, 2007), and the related guidance leaflets by the CIPD (CIPD, 2007), anecdotal feedback suggests that the framework is already proving useful to practitioners. However, feedback also suggests that there is a need to refine the competency framework. The Phase One research identified 19 competencies that define the behaviours important for preventing and reducing stress at work. It is recognised that, in many situations, it is unrealistic for organisations or individuals to assess and/or develop such a large number of discrete sets of behaviour. In order to have practical value and make the framework more manageable for users, it is necessary to reduce the number of behavioural competencies. To do this in a rigorous way, a quantitative research methodology is needed.

There is also a need to explore in more depth the ways that organisations can use the findings. Since the overall aim of the research programme is to support employers in tackling stress at work, there is a need to ensure that its outputs are in the form most appropriate and useful to the end users, i.e. line managers and HR/Occupational Health/Health and Safety practitioners.

Finally, while the 'Management competencies for preventing and reducing stress at work' framework provides a useful starting point for discussion and reflection, it does not provide line managers or other practitioners with a means of assessing managerial competence in specific areas. For this, a quantitative measurement tool is needed. While a range of

measures of management and leadership exist, the review described in this report highlighted their limitations in terms of measuring the behaviours relevant to the prevention and reduction of stress at work. In particular, it found that the published measures used to link management style to health outcomes predominantly draw from a-priori models of leadership, which may fail to capture the unique set of behaviours specific to the management of well-being, health and stress of employees. Only one of the measures reviewed (SPI, Gilbreath & Benson, 2004) was developed specifically to capture those behaviours required for the management of employee well-being: and this measure has limitations in terms of specificity and geographical context. The review therefore suggests that there is a need to develop a measure/tool that specifically examines the degree to which an individual exhibits the management behaviours emerging from the 'Management competencies for preventing and reducing stress at work' research.

Methodology

A qualitative approach was used to explore the usability of both the competency framework and the 'Stress management competency indicator tool' within organisations. Structured one-to-one interviews were conducted with managers and stakeholders working with the five HSE priority areas (Education, Healthcare, Central Government, Local Government and Finance), along with one organisation from an 'Other' sector; and workshops were conducted with stress experts, comprising independent stress practitioners, Human Resources, Occupational Health and Health and Safety professionals. The sample included 47 managers, 6 stakeholders and 38 stress experts. Interview and workshop data was transcribed and content analysis was used to extract themes.

A combined quantitative and qualitative approach was taken to construct a 'Stress management competency indicator tool', and revise the existing 'Management competencies for preventing and reducing stress at work' framework. Behavioural statements were extracted from the Phase One data (see Yarker et al, 2007) and tested both qualitatively with stakeholders and experts (n = 21) and quantitatively with a snowball sample of employees (n = 292). Following reliability analysis, the revised questionnaire, consisting of 112 items, was used as an upward feedback measure in 22 organisations. Participants included employees directly managed (Direct reports) and managers working within the five HSE priority areas, along with one 'Other' organisation. Managers responded to the questionnaire with their perceptions of their own behaviour, and direct reports responded with their perceptions of their manager's behaviour. The sample included 152 managers and 656 direct reports. Direct report data was analysed using reliability analysis and exploratory factor analysis in order to establish the psychometric properties of the indicator tool and provide information on the factorial structure of the competency framework. Exploratory factor analysis revealed a four factor solution. To further validate this solution, two workshops of stress experts (n =38) explored the framework, named each factor and identified sub-clusters.

The revised 'Management competencies for preventing and reducing stress at work' framework and emergent 'Stress management competency indicator tool' were then compared to the HSE Management Standards to identify commonalities and discrete components related to the effective management of stress at work. A literature review and further mapping exercise were also conducted to compare the revised framework and emergent indicator tool with 12 existing management/leadership frameworks and metrics.

Main Findings of the Research

The main findings of the research are reported in light of the three objectives of the study: the usability study; and the refinement of the competency framework and development of the stress management competency indicator tool. The results of the mapping exercise comparing the refined framework and emergent indicator tool to the HSE Management Standards, and to 12 existing management/leadership frameworks are also reported.

Main findings from the usability study

The main findings relating to this aim of the research were:

▪ When stakeholders and workshop participants were asked how they felt the 'Management competencies for preventing and reducing stress at work' framework would fit into their existing HR/H&S policies and processes, their responses fell into two themes. Firstly, it was felt the framework could be used in a stress management context; to review and develop policies, to inform the development of action plans for stress management at an organisational level, and to integrate with existing policies. Secondly, it was felt that the framework would be of use in a leadership development/training context: to dovetail into existing frameworks and programmes, to develop new training programmes, or as a guiding structure or checklist for training.

▪ When stakeholders and workshop participants were asked how they felt the 'Stress management competency indicator tool' would fit into their existing HR/H&S policies and processes, both groups saw a dual use for the questionnaire tool. Firstly, it was felt that the tool could be used in a stress management context for providing information at the local level. It was suggested that this would help 'tie-in' managers to the process, and be useful in specific scenarios such as where a particular line manager was seeking help with problems that might be stress related. There were requests for the tool to be part of a flexible 'tool kit' offered to organisations that would include training materials, case studies, guidance and sample tools. Secondly, the groups saw the tool being useful in a more general management development or appraisal context. In this context, it was suggested the tool would be best used in conjunction with follow up support or coaching, or as part of an overall development programme, rather than as a stand-alone exercise.

▪ Information was also gathered from managers, providing a user perspective on the 'Stress management competency indicator tool' in terms of its ease of use, its relevance to the individual's role, accuracy of identifying key development areas, and best use of the tool. The findings were very positive:
  o 91% of managers who responded said the tool was 'easy' or 'very easy' to answer.
  o 76% of managers who responded felt that all the items in the tool were relevant. Of the 21% that felt there were irrelevancies, all referred to a group of items under the competency 'Friendly style'.
  o 85% of managers who responded felt that there were no gaps or exclusions in the tool. Of the 15% that felt there were, the majority of comments focused on the closed format questionnaire and a wish for additional free-text responses.
  o 82% of managers who responded felt that the tool was accurate in terms of identifying key management development areas.
  o 73% of managers who responded felt that a 360 degree feedback questionnaire would be the best format for the tool. 27% felt that upward feedback would be more preferable. Five of the six stakeholders who responded also felt that 360 degree feedback would be best format.

Main findings from the refinement of the framework and development of the 'Stress management competency indicator tool'

- Exploratory Factor Analysis of the direct report data revealed four factors. To further validate this solution, the workshop participants explored the framework, named each factor and identified sub-clusters. The factors were named as:

    o Respectful and responsible: managing emotions and having integrity
    o Managing and communicating existing and future work
    o Reasoning/managing difficult situations
    o Managing the individual within the team

- As a result of the validation exercise with workshop participants, and input from an independent observer, each factor was grouped into three sub-clusters, providing a refined competency framework of four competencies and 12 sub-competencies. Following analysis of the data, and feedback from managers, stakeholders and experts, the final number of questions in the 'Stress management competency indicator tool' was 66.

Main findings from mapping the refined framework and indicator tool onto the HSE Management Standards and the general management/leadership measures

- Mapping the refined 'Management competencies for preventing and reducing stress at work' framework onto the HSE Management Standards revealed all of the competencies and sub-competencies could be mapped on the Management Standard areas, but none referred directly to the Management Standard area of 'Change'. All of the four competencies, and five of the 12 sub-competencies mapped onto more than one Management Standard area. Three of the competencies, and 11 of the 12 sub-competencies could be mapped onto the Management Standard areas of 'Support' and 'Relationships'.

- Mapping the refined 'Management competencies for preventing and reducing stress at work' framework onto five transformational leadership frameworks (TLQ Public, TLQ Private, MLQ 5X, GTL and LBS) demonstrated that three of the sub-competencies ('Managing conflict', 'Taking responsibility for resolving issues' and 'Sociable'), were not represented by any of the frameworks. Conversely, five of sub-competencies were included in all five transformational leadership frameworks. The two TLQ frameworks mapped most closely onto the refined 'Management competencies for preventing and reducing stress at work' framework. Overall, two of the four competencies ('Respectful and Responsible: Managing emotions and having integrity', and 'Managing and communicating existing and future work') mapped more closely onto a transformational model of leadership than the other two competencies.

- Mapping the refined 'Management competencies for preventing and reducing stress at work' framework onto seven other management frameworks demonstrated a more mixed picture. Each of the competencies appeared in at least one of the frameworks, but no framework contained all of the sub-competencies. The closest match to the 'Management competencies for preventing and reducing stress at work' was the Supervisor Practices Instrument, with only one sub-competency ('Use of organisational resources') not being represented. Interesting this was the only framework developed with the intention of measuring behaviours that impact on employee well-being. Overall, the competency 'Reasoning/managing difficult situations' was the least well represented across all the management frameworks.

Implications of the Research

Policy makers

The research provides a further vehicle for encouraging employers to tackle stress in the workplace and implement the Management Standards, together with mechanisms to help them do so. Effective promulgation of the findings will be needed in order to ensure that the benefits of the research are fully realised. By clarifying the behaviours needed to manage stress, the refined framework and indicator tool allow the development of interventions to ensure managers can manage employee stress effectively. Such interventions are seen to be useful not just in terms of stress management, but also for integration into management and leadership development processes and other areas. However, there remains a need for the HSE to offer more guidance, in terms of a flexible tool kit, providing training materials, case studies, guidance and sample tools. Longitudinal case studies of different approaches to integrate the research findings into organisations' existing culture and practice will be required to ensure that HSE guidance provides appropriate support for employers.

In addition, the research has links with, and therefore provides a potential platform for integration across, a range of UK Governmental initiatives. It could be a vehicle for 'joined up thinking' at Governmental and national levels, by integrating the Health, Work and Well-being, Skills, Health and Safety, and Business agendas. This would be particularly true if effective interventions could be developed to improve employee well-being by improving manager skills/behaviour.

Research

In order to enable the development of a sound psychometric measure, the next step is to test the criterion-related validity, and further assess the construct validity of the refined 'Management competencies for preventing and reducing stress at work' and the 'Stress management competency indicator tool'. Research should also be conducted to design and test interventions that develop managers' management competence in the prevention and reduction of stress. There is also a need to capture data on organisations integrating the framework and the tool into their existing processes, in order to develop longitudinal case studies.

Employers (Health and Safety, Occupational Health and Human Resource Professionals)

Feedback suggests that organisations can use and already are using the 'Management competencies for preventing and reducing stress at work' framework, both at the individual level, enabling managers to access specific and clear guidance about behaviours they should be displaying, and at a group/organisational level, guiding the design of training programmes and interventions. In addition, the vast proportion of managers who used the 'Stress management competency indicator tool' found it 'easy' or 'very easy' to answer, relevant to their roles, and accurate in terms of identifying key management development areas.

The 'Management competencies for preventing and reducing stress at work' framework and the 'Stress management competency indicator tool' can be used both to embed stress management into people management, and to complement other stress management activities. This dual use of the framework and the tool came out very strongly from the research, moving the utility of this research firmly beyond stress to broader aspects of good management and healthy organisational cultures. With regards to the use of the framework and tool within people management processes, the usability study suggests that the framework and the tool would be best utilised in a performance management/development context rather than in a

selection context. With regards to the use of the framework and tool within stress management processes, the usability study suggests that the framework be used to review and update existing policies and to aid in the development of action plans following audits of workplace stressors. The tool was felt to be useful as an individual diagnostic, enabling organisational stress management to be focused locally at the individual manager, and/or to provide a mechanism for tackling specific situations or scenarios and was welcomed as a way to engage the manager in the process of stress management. The overriding benefit of both deliverables will be to enable employers to support managers better.

Line Managers

The key messages to line managers are: that stress management is a part of normal general management activities; and that there is no single behaviour needed for effective stress management, so managers need to think about using a complementary set of behaviours. Through providing managers with a clear specification of the relevant behaviours and a means to assess whether those behaviours are already part of their repertoire, the research can support managers in behaving in ways that prevent and reduce stress for their staff. The development of the 'Stress management competency indicator tool' opens the possibility of assessing the relevant behaviours through self-assessment, upward feedback or 360 degree feedback. For managers who are involved in other stress management activities, the framework and the tool can provide a useful starting point from which to approach solutions.

Table 1.1 provides further information regarding the tools used for measuring leadership and management, including scales, items, reliability and the sample used to develop the measure.

Table 1.1 Review of management and leadership measurement tools, their scales, items reliability and construction

Leadership Model	Tool	Authors	Scales	No. of Items	Reliability	Sample Item(s)	Sample
Transformational & transactional Leadership	**Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQForm5X)**	Avolio, Bass & Jung (1999)	**3 Higher Order** Transformational Developmental Exchange Corrective Avoidance **6 Lower Order**				3786 participants from 14 independent samples including students, administrators, supervisors middle-level managers from a
			Charisma	12	.92	Emphasizes the collective	nursing school and a
			Intellectual Stimulation	4	.83	mission	government research agency
			Individualized Consideration	4	.79	Seeks different Views	as well as US Army Officers.
			Contingent Reward	4	.80	Teaches and Coaches	
			Active Management-by-Exception	4	.63	Rewards your achievement	
			Passive Avoidant	8	.84	Concentrates on failures	
			TOTAL	**36**		Avoids involvement	
Transformational/ Transactional Leadership	**Leader Behavior Scale**	Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Moorman & Fetter (1990)	**Core Transformational** Articulating a vision	5		Understands where we are going	Petrochemical company across US Canada and Europe. 90% male sample
			Providing an appropriate model	3	.87	Leads by example	
			Fostering acceptance of group goals	4		Fosters collaboration within work group	
			Additional				
			High performance expectations	3	.78	Will not settle for second best	
			Individualised support	4	.90	Shows respect for my feelings	
			Intellectual stimulation	4	.91	Asks questions that prompt me to think	
			Transactional				
			Contingent Reward	5	.92	Personally compliments	
			TOTAL	**33**		outstanding work	
Transformational Leadership	**The Global Transformational Leadership Scale (GTL)**	Carless, Wearing & Mann (2000)	Communicates a vision	1	.93	Clear & positive vision	1440 employees of large Australian financial institution
			Develops Staff	1		Encourages development	
			Provides support	1		Recognition to staff	
			Empowers Staff	1		Fosters trust	
			Innovative	1		Encourages thinking in new ways	
			Leads by example	1		Practices what he/she preaches	
			Charismatic	1		Instils pride and respect	
			TOTAL	**7**			

Table 1.1 (continued) Review of management and leadership measurement tools, their scales, items reliability and construction

Transformational Leadership	**Transformational Leadership Questionnaire (TLQ) A 360-degree feedback instrument based on a public sector sample**	Alimo – Metcalfe & Alban-Metcalfe (2005)	**Leading and developing**			Information not provided	2000 mixed race, ethnicity and gender across top senior and middle management from UK NHS and local government.
			Showing genuine Concern	13	.95		
			Enabling	6	.86		
			Being Accessible	5	.84		
			Encouraging Change	8	.88		
			Personal Qualities				
			Being honest and Consistent	4	.93		
			Acting with integrity	9	.89		
			Being Decisive, Risk-taking	5	.83		
			Inspiring Others	5	.84		
			Resolving Complex Problems	5	.85		
			Leading the Organisation				
			Networking & Achieving	12	.92		
			Focusing Team Effort	9	.90		
			Building Shared Vision	7	.90		
			Supporting a developmental culture	9	.90		
			Facilitating Change Sensitively	6	.85		
			TOTAL	**103**			
Transformational Leadership	**Transformational Leadership Questionnaire (TLQ) A 360-degree feedback instrument based on a private sector sample**	Alimo-Metcalfe & Alban-Metcalfe (2001)	**Leading and developing**			Information not provided	Information not provided
			Showing genuine Concern				
			Enabling				
			Being Accessible				
			Encouraging Change				
			Personal Qualities				
			Acting with integrity				
			Being Entrepreneurial				
			Inspiring Others				
			Resolving Complex Problems				
			Leading the Organisation				
			Networking				
			Focusing Effort				
			Building Shared Vision				
			Facilitating Change Sensitively				
			Creating a culture of development				

Table 1.1 (continued) Review of management and leadership measurement tools, their scales, items reliability and construction

Ethical Leadership	**Ethical Leadership Scale (ELS)**	Brown, Trevino & Harrison (2005)	Ethical Leadership	**10**	.91	Makes fair and balanced decisions Defines success not just by results but by the way they are obtained.	980 participants across 4 studies including undergraduate, MBA& I/O student &, private sector employees
Leader-Member Exchange	**Leader-member Exchange (LMX)**	Graen & Uhl-Bien (1995)	Leader-Member Exchange	**7**	.89 (Gersnter & Day 1999)	How well do you think your manager understands your job related needs?	Information not provided
Leader-member Exchange	**Leader-Member Exchange-MDM**	Liden &Maslyn (1998)	Affect Loyalty Contribution Professional Respect **TOTAL**	3 3 3 3 **12**	.90 (Pellegrini & Scandura 2006)	I do not mind working my hardest for my supervisor	500 working students
Management skills and practices	**The Survey of Management Practices (SMP)**	Wilson & Wilson (1991)	Clarification of Goals and Objectives Upward Communications and participation Orderly Work planning Expertise Work Facilitation Feedback Time Emphasis Control of Details Goal Pressure Delegation Recognition for Good Performance	100	.79-.97 for all scales (Offermann & Hellmann (1996)	Information not provided	Information not provided
Behavioural	**The Great 8 (SHL) Competency Framework**	Bartram (2002)	Leading and Deciding Supporting and Co-operating Interacting and Presenting Analysing and Reporting Creating and Conceptualising Organising and Executing Adapting and Coping Enterprising and Performing	8	N/A	N/A	N/A

Management competencies for preventing and reducing stress at work

Identifying and developing the management behaviours necessary to implement the HSE Management Standards: Phase Two

This report presents the findings of the second phase of a research project to identify the specific management behaviours associated with the effective management of stress at work. This phase aimed to: examine the usability of the 'Management competencies for preventing and reducing stress at work' framework developed in Phase One; refine and revise the framework; and design a 'Stress management competency indicator tool'. An additional aim was to explore the commonalities between the framework and indicator tool on the one hand and the HSE Management Standards and general management measurement tools on the other.

A qualitative approach was used to explore the usability of both the framework and the indicator tool: this involved interviews with 47 managers and 6 stakeholders working within the five HSE priority areas (Education, Finance, Local Government, Central Government and Healthcare), along with one 'Other sector' organisation, and workshops with 38 stress experts. A combined quantitative and qualitative approach was taken to construct the indicator tool and refine and revise the framework: this involved 152 managers and 656 direct reports. Statistical and qualitative evidence was used to create a revised framework that consists of four competencies and 12 sub-competencies. The final indicator tool contains 66 items. A literature review and mapping exercise was conducted to compare the revised framework and emergent indicator tool with the HSE Management Standards and 12 existing management/ leadership frameworks.

INVESTORS IN PEOPLE

cipd

RR633

www.hse.gov.uk