

Management competencies for preventing and reducing stress at work

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

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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

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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.

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CONTENTS

Executive Summary		vii
1. Introduction		1
1.1	Background to the research: summary of finding from Phase One of the research	1
1.2	Literature relating to the link between management behaviour and workplace stress	4
1.3	Theories of management and leadership	9
1.4	Measures of management and leadership	11
1.5	The need for further research and a measurement tool	20
1.6	Objectives of Phase Two of the research	21
1.7	Chapter summary	21
2. Method		23
2.1	Overview of methodology	23
2.2	Recruitment of participating organisations and sample	24
2.3	Usability study/Qualitative data collection	26
2.4	Development of prototype ‘Stress management competency indicator tool’	27
2.5	Piloting the management competencies/quantitative data collection	29
2.6	Literature review/mapping the indicator tool against the Management Standards, published frameworks and metrics	31
2.7	Data storage, confidentiality and individual feedback	32
2.8	Chapter summary	33
3. Results		34
3.1	Overview of results	34
3.2	Usability results	34
3.3	Refined ‘Management competencies for preventing and reducing stress at work’ framework	39
3.4	Refined ‘Stress management competency indicator tool’	41
3.5	Results of mapping the ‘Management competencies for preventing and reducing stress at work’ framework and the ‘Stress management competency indicator tool’ onto published frameworks and metrics	44
3.6	Chapter summary	48
4. Discussion and Conclusion		50
4.1	Examining the usability, range of uses, and best approaches to using the ‘Management competencies for preventing and reducing stress at work’ framework and the ‘Stress management competency indicator tool’	51
4.2	Validating, refining and revising the competency framework and developing a ‘Stress management competency indicator tool’	52
4.3	Validating the refined framework and emergent indicator tool through literature review and mapping onto other frameworks	53
4.4	Strengths and potential bias in the research	55
5. The Way Forward		58
5.1	Policy makers	58
5.2	Research	59
5.3	Employers (Health and Safety, Occupational Health and Human Resource Professionals)	60
5.4	Line managers	61
6. References		62
7. Appendices		68

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:
 - 91% of managers who responded said the tool was ‘easy’ or ‘very easy’ to answer.
 - 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’.
 - 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.
 - 82% of managers who responded felt that the tool was accurate in terms of identifying key management development areas.
 - 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:
 - Respectful and responsible: managing emotions and having integrity
 - Managing and communicating existing and future work
 - Reasoning/managing difficult situations
 - 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.

