CHAPTER 10

Stress and Careers

Yehuda Baruch
Norwich Business School, University of East Anglia, UK

**Motto**

Stress is sometimes the price many people are happy to pay for a successful career. It is also a factor that sends successful careers to their downfall.

Stress is a major factor in human life, and can influence people in many ways, either positively or negatively. The management of stress is crucial for both individual and organizational processes. Within the work realm, stress can come in the form of occupational stress, job stress, organizational stress and other types of stress-related issues. A number of studies have examined the impact of stress on work attitudes and outcomes, but there is less knowledge and understanding about the specific impact of work-related stress on people’s careers (Clarke & Cooper, 2004, p. 23). In this chapter I will investigate the association in terms of career choice, commitment and success at the individual level, and explore the relevance of organizational interventions like career planning and management for work stress.

Much of the literature on stress and its impact focuses on the negative aspects of high-stress environments. There are two principal reasons for this tendency. First, the phenomenon of people suffering from high levels of stress and its negative outcomes (e.g. anxiety, burnout) reflects a reality in many contemporary workplaces. The second reason is concerned with political correctness. It is easier for academic scholars to take the high-moral ground view and preach to managers and executives about the need to be positive, supportive and accommodating towards employees, whereas business needs and fierce competition might mean that many professions and roles are highly demanding. This is particularly true for managerial roles. To compete effectively and motivate employees, managers may need to put a certain level of pressure on their employees. At the same time, effective
management would require high ability to manage and cope with stress. In this chapter I will reflect on both perspectives. First, why stress is an essential part of the modern work environment – required for effective performance; and second, why stress should be kept at a manageable level.

Figure 10.1 presents the four quadrants of fit along two dimensions. These two dimensions are the individual level of stress tolerance and the work environment characteristics, which reflect vocational, professional and occupational characteristics. It is a schematic framework, and there are a number of other inputs and factors that determine prospects of fit and either negative or positive impacts of stress at work. These factors include a range of personal sensitivities and a variety of possible stressors.

The framework presented in Figure 10.1 relates to the theory of person–job fit (Cable & Judge, 1996; Edwards, 1991) and career choice (Holland, 1959). Holland claims that high fit between personal attributes and the characteristics of the work environment would lead to both high job performance and job satisfaction. Vast empirical evidence supports this assertion (Assouline & Meir, 1987). Conversely, discrepancy between the two would lead to poor performance and low satisfaction.

The four quadrants are:

- **Q1: Low-pace fit.** This quadrant represents cases where people have low stress tolerance, prefer to avoid a high-stress, high-demanding work atmosphere, and where the work environment provides them with such needs. One may think of a person who wishes to have a quiet place, with relatively
low intellectual demands and minimal surprises. For such a person, the role of allocating returned books into the correct shelves in a library might be an ideal job.

- **Q2: Under-load related stress.** In this quadrant, people with a high need for stimulation, who look for challenges and possibly high rewards, are placed in a non-demanding work environment. Take an ambitious law graduate who aspires to be a top barrister finding herself in a back-office of a solicitor’s practice, having to draft conventional lease contracts for property transactions.

- **Q3: High-pace fit.** Some people enjoy the rough and tumble of business life. Stock-market traders flourish when they are constantly put under pressure, given high (but manageable) targets, immerse themselves in the job, and gain high personal and financial benefits. For such people this quadrant represents a best-fit model.

- **Q4: Over-load related stress.** The contemporary business environment is very dynamic and competitive. It puts high demands on people, and for many it is more than they can cope with. The pressure may be to reach unattainable performance targets, stay for long hours, or work in hazardous and risky environments, to name a few factors (Cooper & Baglioni, 1988). Examples can be overwork, long working hours (Peiperl & Jones, 2001) and extreme workaholism (Burke, 1999).

People need to work for a number of reasons, not merely to gain income. Work gives purpose in life, helps to shape identity development (Ibarra, 2003) and satisfies a wide range of human needs (Baruch, 2004). People need work, and as adults, they find identity and are identified by the work they do (Gini, 1998). Work offers challenges, which is a great thing – but challenges are associated with stress. Stress is part of life, and thus part of work. Management of stress is a key factor to appropriate functioning.

As a sense-making rule of thumb, people should aim to avoid both Q2 and Q4, because operating under such conditions is very likely to generate negative stress, possibly leading to distress and burnout (Maslach, 2006), and subsequently ending with negative career outcomes such as poor performance, withdrawal and career frustration or crisis. Q2 environments lead to boredom (Game, 2007) and feeling of being undervalued and underperforming, whereas Q4 environments lead to both psychological (e.g. anxiety) and physiological or medical setbacks (Kivimäki et al., 2002). People who have effective boredom-coping strategies reported significantly better job-related affective well-being (lower depression and anxiety) compared with those who do not cope well (Game, 2007).

Much of the literature on work-related stress focuses on the over-load related stress. This is mainly due to negative outcomes, in particular burnout.
Job burnout is a psychological syndrome that involves a prolonged response to chronic interpersonal stressors on the job (Maslach, 2006). It has a significant negative impact on work and health-related outcomes (Melamed et al., 2006). In extreme cases, overwork can lead to the ultimate outcome – death due to hard work – known as karoshi in Japan, where it became an unfortunate phenomenon in a culture of high-stress work environments (Kawakami & Haratani, 1999; Nishiyama & Johnson, 1997).

10.1 PERSONAL DIFFERENCES

Different people have different ‘stress triggers’. A person can cope very well and enjoy a highly demanding business environment working with sophisticated computer systems dealing with future commodities. Put that same person in front of kindergarten children, and the stress level can become unbearable. Take the same library worker from the Q1 example, and ask her to deal with anxious students needing a limited number of books before exams and arrogant academics demanding books required for their research but are not on the shelf where they are supposed to be, and the same person will suffer considerable stress. Dealing with people, dealing with information technology, dealing with numbers – each task requires different faculties and qualities, and can put certain people under severe stress, whereas for others it would be a preferred situation to manage.

Individual personality is then a major factor. Cattell’s 16PF (Cattell & Kline, 1977) is an example of a validated tool that can help to identify right or wrong fit.

Let us look at the following five of the 16 factors:

- emotional vs. emotionally stable;
- shy, restrained vs. venturesome, bold;
- tough minded vs. tender minded;
- confident, complacent vs. worrying, insecure;
  and in particular
- relaxed, tranquil vs. tense, frustrated.

These factors are crucial in figuring out which type of person might be inclined to high stress if allocated a role in the Q2 or Q4 quadrants. Someone who is ‘venturesome, bold’, who finds himself positioned in a quiet, monotonous role, would suffer stress due to under-load, whereas someone who is ‘tender minded’ and perhaps also ‘worrying, insecure’ would be under the danger of a nervous breakdown if positioned in a role within the Q4 environment.
Many other factors can influence people’s careers and priorities. Some are demographics, though most are related to individual differences associated with personality, values and competences. Gender impact is relevant, as are many other areas of individual differences and managerial practices. Working women have to endure the dual stress of work and being the major child carer and thus are more inclined to suffer stress (Hobfoll et al., 1994). Differences related to occupational level and/or gender were found for autonomy and social support at work, competitiveness, gender role and reported conflict between demands from paid work and other responsibilities (Frankenhaeuser et al., 1989). The stress profile of female managers was considered in terms of possible long-term health risks.

Mainiero and Sullivan (2006), in their *Kaleidoscope Careers*, identified three ‘mirrors’ through which people examine their career priorities. These are:

- **Authenticity**: a striving to be genuine, to be one’s true self, to create a healthy alignment between one’s values and outward behaviours.
- **Balance**: finding a healthy congruence between work and non-work.
- **Challenge**: the need to continuously learn and find stimulating, exciting work.

They argue that two factors are instrumental in setting career priorities across the three ‘mirrors’ – career stage and gender. Alpha and Beta are identified as two ‘archetypes’:

- **Alpha** – mostly characterizing males:
  - early life into midlife: focus on challenge;
  - latter part of midlife: focus on authenticity;
  - later life: focus on balance.
- **Beta** – mostly characterizing females:
  - early life: focus on challenge;
  - midlife: focus on balance;
  - later life: focus on authenticity.

Intuitively, high challenge may cause certain stress levels, which can be energizing for further career investment, but less so when people find they cannot manage the stress. The need for balance emerges from levels of stress in one’s career.

A different factor influencing feelings of stress is the ability to control a situation. Less ambiguity reduces stress (Cooper, 1983, 1998, 2002). Studies showed that being in control, even when the situation is apparently highly
stressful, enables executives to feel less stressed (Baruch & Woodward, 1998).

More generally, looking at an integrated model of career stages (Baruch, 2004, p. 54), different sources for stress, which might arise in different stages of a person’s career, can be identified (Table 10.1).

As can be seen, stress-inducing issues vary across the career stages. One in particular, which spans over the whole career cycle, is the need for money. While positive thinking and philosophical writing suggest that money is not a strong motivator, lack of money is certainly a major stressor. The use of money will vary – from getting on the housing ladder, to purchasing basics and luxuries, through to enabling dignified retirement (see Feldman, 2007, p. 163). People need money, people need purpose, and people need fulfilment. Maslow’s hierarchy of needs is not dead, but for different people the priorities vary, and they certainly vary throughout the different career stages. People make mistakes along the way – and while we can learn best from mistakes, studies about career mistakes are rarely reported in the literature. A typical mistake can be a mismatch between expectations and reality, which may arise because expectations are based on individual experience rather than on information provided by the organization (Blenkinsopp & Zdunczyk, 2005).

As I mentioned in my book (Baruch, 2004), a major difference between the early models on career stages and the integrated model is the ability and availability of re-running stages (b)–(e) (see Table 10.1) for another round or more of the career cycle. This is a significant contribution to stress release for people. In the past people were stuck in a career, having no real choice to move on. In contemporary labour markets, people are more free to choose and change their careers (Hall, 1996, 2002). Contemporary labour markets are dynamic and career changes are frequent, many times initiated and led by individuals (Hall, 1996; Peiperl & Baruch, 1997). Not everyone can move easily, though. People may find they are stuck in a certain career, not progressing, and yet do not have the ability or will to change, they are at a plateau, which can be another factor causing stress (Elsass & Ralston, 1989).

Career-related stressors may come in the shape of too fast success, too low success, plateau in success, or the ‘wrong’ type of success (Derr, 1986). Derr pointed out five individual career success indicators or dimensions:

(a) Getting ahead: motivation derives from the need to advance both in professional standing and up the organizational ladder.
(b) Getting secure: having a solid position within the organization.
(c) Getting high: being inspired by the nature and content of the work performed.
Table 10.1  Career stage and sources of career stress

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Sources of stress – individual quest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| (a) Foundation | Childhood and adolescence experience and education help in planting the seeds of career aspiration                                                                                                         | What do I want to do when I grow up?  
Will I get a job?  
Is it the right place to start?  
Where it may lead me?  
Is the money enough? |
| (b) Career entry | Usually through attainment of profession. Can be done via being an apprentice, training on the job, attending college, university or other professional training. Usually even for qualified people, the first stage of work will include further professional establishment | Will I get a job?  
Will I keep it?  
Is it the right place to start?  
Where it may lead me?  
Is the money enough? |
| (c) Advancement | Both professional and hierarchical development within organization(s) or expanding own business. This stage can be characterized with either continuous advancement or reaching a plateau. In today’s career environment and concepts, this stage will typically be associated with several changes of employer | Am I advancing?  
Is it a good pace of advancement?  
How do I do against my reference group?  
Do I do too much?  
How can I manage multiple commitments – what price do I pay in terms of my other life interests?  
Is the money enough? |
| (d) Re-evaluation | Checking match between aspiration and fulfilment; rethinking job/role/career. Can emerge from internal feeling or need (e.g., bored due to lack of challenge, life crisis), or external force (redundancy, professional obsolescence). May end with decision to keep in the same path or change career direction, returning to stage (b) | Shall I change? To What?  
What will it cost me vs. what may gain from it?  
Can I deal with risk taking?  
Will the money still be enough? |

(continued)
(d) Getting free: being motivated by a need for autonomy and the ability to create your own work environment.
(e) Getting balanced: attaching equal or greater value to non-work interests.

People with different career aims are inclined to suffer stress for different reasons. For example, if someone’s aim is to reach the top of the ladder at any cost, this is a case of extreme careerism, which may mean that certain people are too eager and ambitious, leading to manipulative behaviour on their side (Bratton & Kacmar, 2004). Such a rat-race career is very stressing, and if a person does not reach their aim it leads to frustration, inevitable when many aim to reach the top, where positions are few and contenders are many. Others who look for autonomy may benefit from an entrepreneurship career (Fuller & Tian, 2006). Having one’s own business puts high risk on the entrepreneur, again a possible source of stress.

Thus, the role of management, as I will elaborate on later, is to realize the various sources for stress, and to treat different people in different ways. This is not to say by discrimination – all should have equal opportunity. Yet, sense-making means realization and acceptance of differences.
10.2 WHAT IS THE ‘RIGHT’ LEVEL OF STRESS?

Figure 10.2 shows the inverse U curve relationship between stress and performance. Basically it builds on the activation theory, which anticipates behaviour related to variations in task design (Scott, 1966). Too low level of stress might lead to withdrawal, lack of interest and stimuli. Too high level of stress might lead to lack of ability to cope, and withdrawal due to over-load.

The cognitive activation theory of stress (CATS), suggested by Ursin and Eriksen (2004), used the term ‘stress’ for four aspects: stress stimuli; stress experience; the non-specific, general stress response; and experience of the stress response. Activation theory (Berlyne, 1960, 1963; Fiske & Maddi, 1961) argues that people, employees in the context of work and careers, try to alter their stimulus field so as to attain an optimal level of the potential to create personal stimulation. When the actual stimulation is below the optimal level, discomfort in the form of boredom results. When the stimulation is above that optimal level, it produces discomfort in the form of stress. Both boredom and stress are negative affective states.

The stress response is a general alarm in a homeostatic system, producing general and unspecific neurophysiological activation from one level of stimulation to another. Stress response is an essential and necessary response (Ursin & Eriksen, 2004). The unpleasantness of the alarm is no health threat. However, if sustained, the response may lead to negative results – in

---

![Figure 10.2](image-url)  
*Figure 10.2  Assumed association between work-related stress and work performance*
terms of work attitudes, behaviours, as well as physiological results such as illness. Much research was conducted following Beehr and Newman’s (1978) call for further study on the impact of job stress on employees’ health.

Stressors can operate at individual and organizational level. Up to this point my emphasis has been at the individual level of analysis.

10.3 STRESS MANAGEMENT – ORGANIZATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

Moving to the organizational level, there are major factors contributing to a level of stress for individual employees (at all levels, including managerial). The prominent ones are general change, in particular changes involving restructuring and downsizing – not only for those made redundant, but for the survivors too (Brokner et al., 1992). Mergers and acquisitions (Cartwright & Cooper, 1996; Larsson & Finkelstein, 1999) and overall anxiety (Baruch & Lambert, 2007) are catalysts for increased stress levels across organizations.

Again, it must be remembered that while change might cause stress, having no change is not an option in the current dynamic business and social environment. Steadiness in time of environmental dynamism means lack of ability to respond. This too can generate stress.

The following list of stress-related organizational causes was suggested by Quick and Quick (1984): task demands; physical demands; role demands; and interpersonal demands. Of these, task and role demands are strongly associated with career-related stress.

Schabracq and Cooper (2000) elaborated further:

- too many working hours, unsocial hours and global traveling;
- inadequately coordinated tasks, leading to task interruptions, territorial and role conflicts;
- role ambiguity, ambiguous and unclear goals, priorities, procedures;
- too variable and too loosely connected tasks;
- too difficult and complex tasks, demanding instant creativity;
- having to take too many decisions, often with serious consequences, often based on insufficient information;
- risks of making mistakes;
- working in different and changing configurations of very diverse people;
- exposure to ‘contagiously’ stressful colleagues;
- exposure to frequent changes in tasks, equipment, managers, colleagues, working arrangements, production processes and jobs;
The CAST – Career Active System Triad (see Figure 10.3) – manifests how individuals and organizations plan and manage careers at three different levels. At the individual level, relating to career-related stress, people may take various actions, as described in the early section of this chapter. At the organizational level, the organization needs to develop a set of policies, derived from its strategy and leading philosophy of management. Employing ‘best practice’ would help to control and reduce high levels of stress and ensure people have enough stimuli to avoid under-load stress induced reactions.

The challenges for the organization are to maintain a fit between individual needs, competences and career aims and the organizational operational and future goals.

Gaining both procedural and distributive justice is of high relevance in generating acceptable psychological contracts (Herriot & Pemberton, 1996). Matching individual career plans and organizational career management is a real test for managing the new psychological contract. The concept is not new (see Granrose & Portwood, 1987).

Rousseau argues that people gain specific employment arrangements that, on the positive side, enable flexibility, but may also lead to injustice

* Note that in their original list, Schabracq and Cooper refer to mergers, but there is rarely, if ever real merging of two firms into one new coherent blend of the two – it is almost always that one firm is taking over the other. I thus prefer the term acquisition. The stressors would be different for each part of the new firm – those taking over and those being taken over.
A number of career management practices exist (see Baruch 1999, 2004), many of these can help in maintaining career-related stress at a manageable level. Later in this chapter I will focus on such cases.

However, there are also negative practices. An example of problematic practices is forcing employees and managers to work overtime (Peiperl & Jones, 2001). Long hour culture is a clear factor that causes spill-over from work to family life, generating inevitable conflicts (Bellavia & Frone, 2005). Lee and Ashforth’s (1996) meta-analysis examined how demand and resource correlates and behavioural and attitudinal correlates were related to three different dimensions of job burnout. They found that emotional exhaustion is more strongly related to the demand correlates than to the resource correlates, suggesting that workers might have been sensitive to the possibility of resource loss.

Job strain (job dissatisfaction, depression, psychosomatic symptoms) and burnout were found to be higher in jobs that combine high workload demands with low decision latitude (Landsbergis, 1988). Indeed, being in control is a factor that reduces stress even in highly demanding positions and roles (Baruch & Woodward, 1998).

While Clarke and Cooper (2004, p. 23) lamented the apparent lack of studies on the specific impact of work-related stress on people’s careers, some issues such as burnout have been intensively studied. There is clear evidence based on empirical research that supports the assumptions that high levels of work stress lead to negative work outcomes (Harpaz & Snir, 2003; Porter, 2004; Spence & Robbins, 1992), and non-work outcomes (Bonebright, Clay & Ankenmann, 2000; Gini, 1998). The mechanism by which stress leads to such outcomes is typically via burnout, and the results of burnout are detrimental to people’s career and well-being (Westman & Eden, 1997). Another direction of the relationship is that career stressors like lack of promotion opportunities lead to negative outcomes, such as involuntary turnover (Jones et al., 2007; 2008McCabe et al., 2008; Reisenberg, 2005) and even accidents (Clarke & Cooper, 2004, p. 144). Short-term fix-it solutions would not necessarily work in the long run. For example, providing a vacation is not a long-term solution, as stress levels are fast to return within a short time (Westman & Eden, 1997).

It is hard, probably impossible to ‘win’ the delicate balance of maintaining career-related stress. There are a number of stressors, many of them that are not under the control of a single person or organization. And as indicated, it is not about simply minimizing stress, but finding the right measure, the optimal level, a moving target which depends on individual characteristics, and changes as time goes by.
10.3.1 Organizational Interventions and Practices to Identify and Tackle Career-Related Stress

The so-called ‘best practice’ offers a number of organizational interventions, policies and practices, and it is assumed that appropriate application of these would help in many ways, including in the management of career-related stress. First I wish to point out that the expression ‘best practice’ is contradictory to both contingency theory and common sense. Contingency means that under different circumstances, different actions should be taken. Thus a given set of ‘best practice’ cannot serve as a ‘one-size-fits-all’ option. There is a further contradiction inherent in the label ‘best practice’: let us assume that there is such a thing as a well-known, valid and reliable set of practices that enhance individual and organizational performance. If that is the case, each organization will employ these ‘best practices’ and all will be successful, above their competition. But the competition would also employ it, meaning that all will be ‘best’. In fact, to have a competitive advantage over others means doing things differently – contradicting the basic concept of ‘best practice’.

Yet, some caveats for the above arguments are valid too. It is not only the ‘what’, but also the ‘how’ of these practices. Having a ‘mentoring’ system is great HR practice in general (Kram, 1985), but even this practice can become dysfunctional (Scandura, 1998; Scandura & Pellegrini, 2007) and cause more harm than good. Generally, though, mentoring is a type of career practice that could help in stress management, not necessarily directly, by helping individuals set themselves attainable career goals. Similar impact can be made from the availability of career counselling. Some of the impact of these practices derives from having social support within the organizational boundaries. Social support was found to buffer the impact on physical aspects of stress such as anxiety, depression and somatic symptoms, but not for job attitudes like job satisfaction and boredom (LaRocco, House & French, 1980).

10.4 A PORTFOLIO OF STRESS-RELATED CAREER MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

Below is listed the wide portfolio of career management practices that may be associated with stress management (for the full list see Baruch, 1999, 2004). Clear practices can help in controlling and reducing negative stress, even in a ‘lean production’ environment (Conti et al., 2006).
Posting (advertising) internal job openings

Ambiguity increases stress, thus when organizations openly publish new vacancies within, and let current employees have a first go at applying for these positions, that is a best practice which reduces ambiguity, hence, indirectly, helps in stress prevention.

Formal education as part of career development

Some organizations select people of managerial or technical potential and send them on a programme of formal study as part of their development path. This may take the shape of short training courses, and span up to a full university degree sponsorship. This practice manifests that the employer is happy to make investment in human capital and value its people. Not directly aimed at stress reduction, but improves well-being in general.

Lateral moves to create cross-functional experience

Lateral moves to create cross-functional experience are on the increase, and may be seen as elementary career planning and management practices which most organizations with HRM systems need to apply. The flattening of organization means fewer hierarchy levels, and thus fewer opportunities for upward mobility. If that was the case, lateral moves would be seen as a failure indicator, and thus generate stress. When this is done widely and accepted as a slow burn to the top, such moves will be accepted and not inflict stress and negative feeling on the employees.

Retirement preparation programs

This practice is directed at a target population of employees approaching retirement and about to leave the organization. In these programs the employee is prepared to face the retirement in several ways. Attention is devoted to financial considerations such as understanding the pension conditions and learning tax regulations as well as to psychological issues surrounding an individual’s need to re-adjust to life without work. This practice certainly helps to reduce stress which will otherwise be induced due to the approaching major life change for retiring people (and can be relevant to people facing early retirement as a replacement of redundancy).
Booklets and/or pamphlets on career issues

Booklets, pamphlets or leaflets on career issues represent a formal presentation by an organization regarding all kinds of career-related information. Such information is useful to reduce ambiguity, and similarly to the job posting practice, indirectly reduces stress.

Dual ladder

The dual ladder provides an organizational hierarchy for non-managerial staff, such as professional or technical employees, that is parallel to the managerial hierarchy. The major role of such a ladder is to enable ‘upward mobility’ and recognition for those employees who cannot or do not wish to pursue a managerial role in the organization. Without such an option, stress levels can be high if people cannot see a route for promotion.

Induction or socialization

The process of introducing people to their new organization is the first CPM practice which the employee experiences. This is a process whereby all newcomers learn the behaviours and attitudes deemed necessary for assuming roles in the organization as well as reinforcing organizational identity. Part of this process is formal, led by organizational officials, whereas other aspects may be acquired more effectively via informal routes. Smooth induction helps people to be more relaxed in the first stages of their employment.

Assessment and development centers

Assessment centers have been found as a reliable and valid tool for identifying managerial potential and for developmental processes. They are used to increase and manifest procedural justice, crucial in developing a stress-free culture in terms of equality, though their existence may imply a culture of promotion to those deemed worthy of progress. Such a culture is inevitably one that generates stress – which can be the right level for encouraging people to target managerial roles, even though these roles tend to be stressful.

Mentoring

The principal aim of mentoring is to bring together a person with managerial potential and an experienced manager, who is not necessarily the direct
manager. Such a senior manager can provide advice and tutoring, serving as metaphorical ‘uncle/aunt’ in the workplace. This practice helps to reduce stress by the availability of support and consulting options. Yet, mentoring might also be dysfunctional, due, for example, to a negative relationship between mentor and protégé, a possible collision of interests between the individual’s mentor and his or her direct manager, and the challenges of managing a cross-gender relationship.

**Career workshops**

Career workshops are short-term workshops focusing on specific aspects of career management that aim to provide managers with relevant knowledge, skills and experience. These can help to reduce career ambiguity and prepare people for progress and development, again, reducing unwarranted stress.

**Performance appraisal as a basis for career planning**

In the vast majority of organizations, and certainly when organizational size passes the threshold of a few hundred, a formal system of performance appraisal (PA) is often introduced. It serves both evaluation needs and developmental purposes. PA is perhaps the most fundamental system to be utilized by HR to provide information regarding internal human capital. The appraised member of the organization is put under pressure, which may be the right level of push they need to invest in their future in the organization in order to become best performers. It is not the opportunity to inflict harsh derogatory feedback on the employee (unless, of course, the employee ‘deserves’ to be told, for example, if they were not performing, or harassing colleagues). The appraiser running the process is also under pressure and possible stress – it is not the easiest task to tell people that they are under-performers. A different method is providing a 360-degree feedback, a relatively new system introduced in the 1990s, and adopted by a number of organizations, utilizing sources such as self-appraisal, peer appraisal, upward appraisal and a combination of several sources in addition to that given by the direct manager. This practice is very demanding in terms of the time that needs to be invested and the analysis that needs to be conducted.

**Career counselling**

Career counselling represents a two-way communication between the employer and the employee for formal or informal discussion about the future
of the employee, within or outside the organizational boundaries. Two main sources are available to conduct the counselling: the direct manager (or another higher manager) and the HRM manager. Depending on the complexity and the financial resources of the organization, external counselling can also be provided. Such counselling, when done appropriately, will eliminate possible sources of stress (and when done inappropriately might induce unnecessary stress too).

Succession planning

Succession planning determines the possible replacement of every manager within the organizational ranks, and evaluates the promotional potential of each manager. It is primarily directed towards the managerial workforce. Careful analysis of the succession planning should be concerned with its implications for other CPM practices. The availability of succession planning means people can learn the prospects for their future, and thus reduces stress, in particular if they are perceived as high potential. Knowing that others compete for the same future role, though, might generate competition-related stress.

Programmes for special populations of employees

With an increasing level of employee diversity, new work arrangements and globalization, career practices need to address the needs of specific populations, such as ethnic minorities, women, physically disabled, expatriation/repatriation and dual-career couples. Under the banner of equal opportunities and with increased litigation brought against companies, organizations realize the need to go beyond paying lip service to equality and to make sure that all members are given fair promotional opportunities. This is certainly a stress reduction practice. Yet, some might suspect positive discrimination in a way that achieving balance is challenging to the HR manager.

Building psychological contracts

The establishment of new psychological contracts can be counted among the new career planning management practices. I have already introduced in the early part of the chapter the concept of psychological contract as a crucial aspect of the employment relationship and thus a stress-mitigating factor. Breaking or breaching these psychological contracts is a stress-generating event, in particular redundancies. Organizations should be able to set the
‘unwritten rules’ in a sensible way, without generating apparent conflicts with the formal, legal contract.

**Secondments**

Another new career planning management practice is the secondment – a temporary assignment to another area within the organization, and sometimes even to another associated organization (such as a customer or supplier). A person from the managerial or professional echelons of one organization is transferred to another organization for a specific time period (usually 1–3 years). Experience is shared to benefit both the organizations and the individual involved. When this is done as an alternative to redundancy, it helps to prevent the redundancy-related stress.

**Written personal career planning for employees**

The CPM practice of having written personal career planning for employees represents long-term commitment, but such a promise for life-time employment has become virtually an extinct feature of organizational life. Written personal career plans are also problematic in the sense of creating employee expectations that the organization may not be capable of fulfilling, inducing long-term stress. This practice is rarely applied in the contemporary workplace.

**Common career paths**

A career path is the most preferred and recommended route for the career advancement of a manager in an organization. Such career paths may be based on the way former executives progressed to top positions (‘historic path’) or on a thorough analysis of the requirements from certain top positions (‘logic path’). The use of career paths spread rapidly in the 1970s and 1980s and led people through various departments and units within the organization. It can make sense in very complex organizations. With traditional hierarchical structures flattening and diminishing and with the creation of boundaryless careers, it has become the norm, rather than the exception, for organizations to have no fixed career paths and for individuals to see no further than one or two years ahead.

To these specific HR practices I would add the existence of clear leadership. Leadership is another factor within the organization that can help people manage their career and cope with career-related stress, but poor leadership can harm, for example, poorly led reward systems (Kelloway *et al.*, 2005.
and instead of reassuring employees about the future, can create anxiety and fear (Baruch & Lambert, 2007).

10.5 INDIVIDUAL IMPLICATIONS

People need to be aware of their own level of stress compared with their own ‘optimal’ level of stress. They can then learn how to manage stress, and ‘live in peace’ with it.

After setting awareness, people should identify the various sources of stress (there are rarely single causes of stress), and then develop suitable coping strategies and practices. It is more difficult to identify unconscious sources of stress, though they do exist.

Macik-Frey, Quick and Nelson, (2007) have pointed out the burden of health-related suffering due to stress and consider both the economic and humanitarian results of poor occupational health. For employees with high job strain, a combination of high demands at work and low job control had a 2.2-fold cardiovascular mortality risk compared with their colleagues with low job strain (Kivimäki et al., 2002). The reader can find more on individual responses and approaches to stress in other chapters of this Handbook, as the present chapter is more focused on the organizational perspective.

10.6 MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

Employees need a push. Sometimes they will have an inner push, a strong urge to work, an ambition that energizes them to invest in achieving work-desirable outcomes. Sometimes the drive needs to come from the system, typically from managers. Managers should be aware that this should be a push forward, not a push over the cliff.

It is the role of ‘management’ to identify how much people can do and wish to do, and find out how to motivate them. Stress management is not a creation of tranquility in the workplace. Yet, if people are pushed too hard, they can reach the stage of burnout, and this will be too late and will require double the amount of managerial effort to regain their trust and get them back to work. Thus it is much better to focus on prevention and identification of initial signs of high stress. Treatment might mean having to move an employee to a less demanding role, or losing him or her entirely.

10.7 WHOSE JOB IT IS?

People management should be undertaken by all managers. And the responsibility for it should rest also at the individual level. Human resource
management should be the guide, the facilitator and the policy maker. Direct managers should apply the policies.

Management should not take overall responsibility – this should be shared with all employees. Much of the feeling of stress is self-imposed. The way people perceive pressure determines whether they are stressed by it. There is a certain level of inner choice between seeing it as positive in terms of providing challenges and opportunities or as negative, taking it as a threat, which might result in anxiety and burnout. Managers can help employees realize that they have a choice in controlling stress.

New careers may mean many things and HR managers need to be able to realize the variance and how to deal with it. Such is Derr’s (1986) differentiation of career success characteristics for different people. Similarly, the Kaleidoscope careers need HR policies that allow them to make changes in their careers given their needs for authenticity, balance and challenge (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2006). But, even if individuals have aims of progress and high investment, managers may need to step in and make sure that workaholism does not lead to a wide variety of life and work-related problems (Burke, 1999; Porter, 2004).

Psychological contracts should be established (Rousseau, 1996). They reduce ambiguity, clarify mutual expectations and lead to appropriate work relationships. When these are breached, the results are high levels of stress. Managers should stick to what was agreed – for example, changing the work load without consent could lead to burnout (van Emmerik & Sanders, 2005).

Keeping career-related stress at the right level is a managerial responsibility of HR managers, as stress is an unavoidable part of working life (as well as life in general).

Stress is an inevitable companion of motivational efforts, of challenging goal setting, of high need for achievement. It is a predictable side effect of any competitive arena. Conversely, having no stress is probably a reflection of a boring job, eventless tasks, that could lead to stress due to lack of challenge.

REFERENCES


