

choices, to consider the best ways of managing themselves. They are almost looking to counselling to be a part of their life management strategy. The skill set of counsellors therefore has to grow apace. While boundaries are, and will remain, crucially important to a counsellor there will be a growing need to offer a variety of relationships to clients and to be clear about exactly what is and what is not on offer. A counsellor may be engaged in a strictly psychotherapeutic relationship, but sometimes may also find that there is a place for coaching. A client may want to engage in a mentoring relationship with someone who has the skills that a counsellor brings, or an organisation may turn to the counsellor as a tool in talent development and engagement. However we slice it, counselling has become involved with business across a wide spectrum; workplace counselling is in a business-to-business relationship as much as it is in a therapeutic one, and we have to be clear about what we are doing, with whom, why and to what degree of success. The Government is committed to introducing mandatory regulation for the profession – at a level far below accreditation – and there is a need to maintain the quality of workplace counselling as a learned profession, helping the public, employers and clients alike to appreciate the value and the benefit we bring to them.

Who, then, is to set standards, support practitioners in this changing world, help to grow and position the profession? Who is to speak authoritatively on behalf of us, to present a public face of a complex profession? Step forward BACP Workplace, the new home of workplace counselling. We will offer guidance, leadership and support for counsellors and others concerned with the wellbeing of employees and of organisations. We will listen, consult and engage with our membership, and we will be central to BACP's understanding of the complexities of the workplace, bringing fresh ideas while sustaining professional standards.

We are BACP Workplace because we understand that it is about counselling but it is also about something more. We are working with our mission statement: 'Towards an emotionally healthy workplace'. ■

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Putting the stress manager behaviours

Emma Donaldson-Feilder and Rachel Lewis

As workplace counselling professionals will know only too well, one of the determinants of whether an individual employee suffers work-related stress or not is the behaviour of that individual's line manager towards them. There is evidence to suggest that the line manager-direct report relationship is the most commonly reported cause of stress in the workplace^{1,2}. Over the last five to 10 years, there has been increasing recognition of and research interest in the line manager's role in determining employee stress levels. A number of studies have shown a link between particular management and leadership models (such as transformational and behavioural models) and the wellbeing of those being managed^{3,4}. However, the vast majority of these studies used *a priori* measures of management or leadership – which were developed in the context of management for good performance and productivity – meaning that they may not capture the full range of management behaviours that are important for staff wellbeing. There was therefore a need to conduct research that looked specifically at the management behaviours relevant to stress management.

From a practical perspective, the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has been working towards reducing stress in UK workplaces for some years. In 2004, it introduced Management Standards for stress at work⁵, designed to give employers guidance on the workplace characteristics that present risks of work-related stress and how they can be effectively managed and controlled. While these Standards are driven from a health and safety perspective, much of the responsibility for implementation falls on human resources (HR) professionals and line managers. In addition, the content of the Standards is such that their achievement will be influenced, if not determined, by how line managers carry out their people management responsibilities.

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that prevent and reduce stress at work

discuss the findings of research that explores the role of the line manager in staff wellbeing

This means that line managers need to understand how their behaviour affects the stress levels of those they manage and what they need to do in order to prevent and reduce stress in their staff. There was therefore a need for clear guidance for line managers on the management behaviours that are relevant in this context.

Recent research funded by the HSE, the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) and Investors in People (IIP) set out to meet both the research and the practical need. The 'management competencies for preventing and reducing stress at work' research has involved three phases as shown in the flow diagram in figure 1.

Manager behaviours

The first two phases of the research revealed four broad themes of behaviour, or competencies, that are important for line managers to show in order to prevent and reduce stress in their staff:

■ **Respectful and responsible: managing emotions and having integrity** This is about treating staff with respect, including acting with integrity, managing emotions and being considerate. For example, managers must act calmly in pressured situations and take a consistent approach, as opposed to panicking or exhibiting mood swings. Ensuring deadlines are realistic, giving more positive than

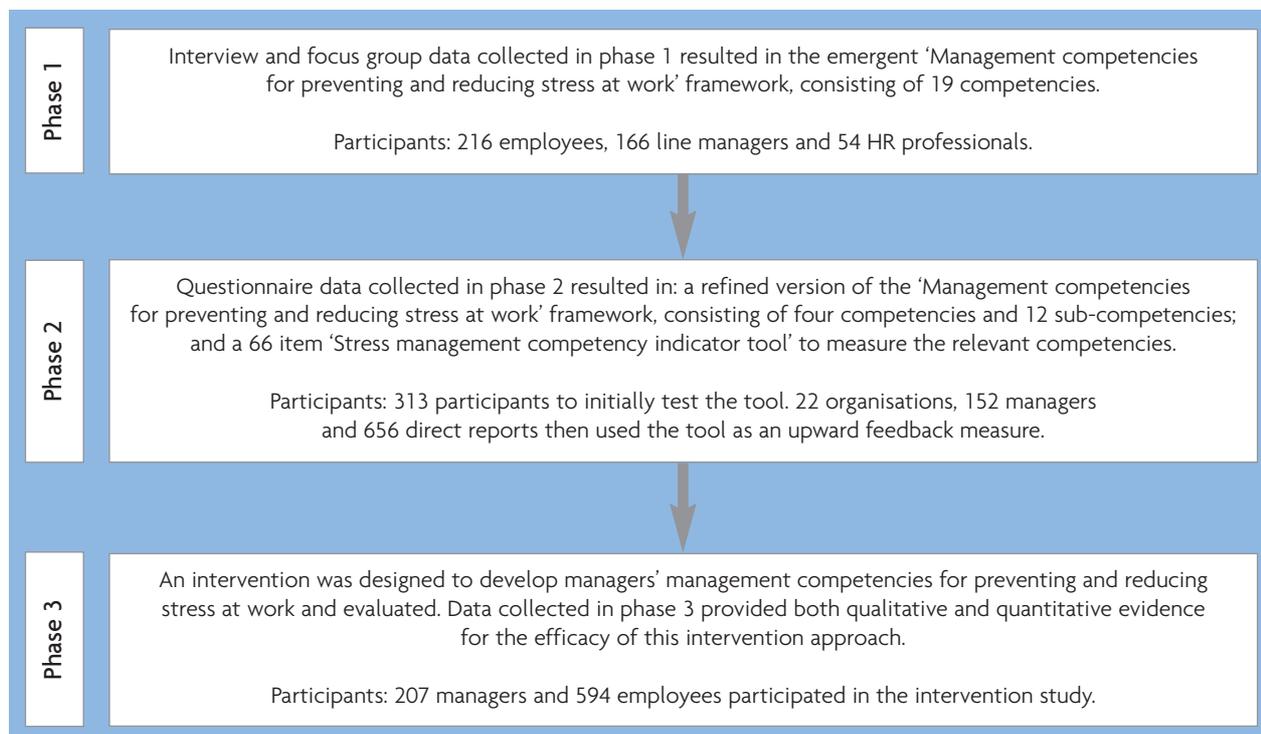


Figure 1. The three phases of the 'Management competencies for preventing and reducing stress at work' research

‘The study showed that it is possible to change a manager’s behaviour ... particularly when they have development needs’

negative feedback and showing consideration for staff’s work-life balance are other key elements.

■ **Managing and communicating existing and future work**

This includes proactive work management; for example, communicating job objectives clearly and monitoring workloads, developing action plans and prioritising. Dealing rationally with problems and being decisive are key elements. Managers also need to keep staff informed and encourage their participation, for example through team meetings and individual discussions. However, they need to judge when to consult staff versus when to make a decision without doing so. Helping staff develop and acting as a mentor are also important.

■ **Managing the individual in the team** This is about speaking to people personally rather than using email, providing regular opportunities for staff to speak one-to-one and being available to talk when needed. It may be as simple as being willing to have a laugh and socialise with staff. It is vital to recognise that every individual is different, so managers need to see others’ points of view and understand what motivates them, regularly ask staff how they are and treat everyone with equal importance.

■ **Reasoning and managing difficult situations**

This involves dealing objectively with conflicts and acting as a mediator, then following up conflicts after resolution, seeking advice from others within the organisation where necessary and supporting staff through incidents of abuse and bullying. Managers must make it clear they will take ultimate responsibility when things go wrong.

These behaviours could be described as general good management practice. However, the research showed that many general management frameworks currently used by organisations include only a subset of the behaviours identified⁶. In practice, this means that behaviours relevant to preventing and reducing stress at work may not be included in a particular organisation’s HR practices and management development activities.

Using the research findings in organisations

For employer organisations, the research findings can be used in a number of ways. The usability study conducted in phase two of the research suggests that there are two broad types of usage:

■ **As part of management or leadership**

development The framework of behaviours can be used to guide the design and implementation of management development programmes, induction for new managers and people management training courses and as a way of raising managers’ understanding of the key behaviours.

■ **Within stress management activities**

The framework of behaviours can be integrated into policies, as part of action planning following stress risk assessment and as a way of tackling stress management issues at a local level.

As well as developing the framework of behavioural competencies, the research also produced a questionnaire designed to measure whether a particular manager shows the behaviours identified. This can be used either as a self-report measure, getting the manager themselves to assess whether each behaviour is part of their current management style, or as an upward feedback (or 360 degree feedback) measure, getting the manager’s direct reports (and others) to provide their perspective on whether the manager shows the relevant behaviours. This questionnaire supports the application of the research findings in the two types of usage described above particularly by helping managers understand how their behaviour is perceived by others: identifying what areas of their management style they need to change and/or how their behaviours could contribute to the reduction of stress in their staff.

Changing manager behaviour

The most recent phase of this research, published in June 2009, explored how best to help managers demonstrate the behaviours identified as important for the prevention and reduction of stress at work. A learning and development intervention was designed, involving a combination of upward feedback and a training workshop. This was rolled out to managers in a range of organisations in order to establish its effectiveness and generate guidance on how best to support this kind of management development.

The study showed that it is possible to change a manager’s behaviour and help them to show the

Key messages to give to managers about preventing and reducing stress in their staff

- **Being an effective stress manager does not require extra work** – given that the pressures on most managers at work are already high, the emphasis here is on making stress management part of everyday people management rather than an additional set of activities. It is about the way managers behave on a day-to-day basis with those they manage.
- **There is no one key behaviour needed to be an effective stress manager** – effective stress management requires a complementary set of behaviours. These behaviours are likely to differ in importance depending on the situation and the individuals within a particular team.
- **Some of the behaviours may be things the manager already does, but some may not** – through reviewing their current management approach and receiving feedback from their staff, managers can assess which of the behaviours are part of their repertoire and which are not. This will help identify any gaps in the manager's skills or behaviours, so they can seek targeted and specific help and guidance.
- **It is possible to change behaviour** – the findings of phase three of the research show that managers can change their management behaviour in positive ways in order to prevent and reduce stress in their staff, particularly if they have development needs in this area.
- **Feedback on behaviour is important to support behaviour change** – as mentioned above, it appears that feedback from others, particularly from direct reports, is important to help managers learn and develop new management behaviours. Managers need to be encouraged and enabled to get this feedback. The increased insight and self-awareness provided is a good basis from which to understand what behavioural changes would be appropriate.
- **Other support may also be needed** – once a manager has identified changes they want to make to their behaviour, they may need to seek support from others in the organisation, including their manager, peers and team. Additional training and development may also be helpful.
- **There may be barriers to showing positive manager behaviour** – even when a manager is committed to behaving in ways that prevent and reduce stress in their staff, they may find that it is not easy to do so: there will be barriers to behaving in positive ways (as described above). In order to be able to overcome these barriers, managers will need to adopt a range of strategies and self-management approaches, such as: planning, saying 'no', challenging and clarifying demands, delegating, communicating, dealing with problem performance, getting training and development and looking after themselves.

behaviours identified, particularly when they have development needs in this area. The research indicated a number of ways in which employers can ensure the success of this kind of intervention:

■ Providing managers with upward feedback

The findings suggest that giving managers upward feedback from their direct reports is important in helping them achieve behaviour change. Completing a self-report questionnaire will help managers reflect on the relevant behaviours but it will not help them understand how they are perceived by others, and managers often have a different perception of their own behaviour to that of their staff.

■ Providing managers with further support

The research suggests that case studies and opportunities to share experience with fellow managers, through a workshop or action learning, are also important for helping managers change their behaviour. It also suggests that managers will probably need further support, for example:

training in specific skill areas, such as leadership and conflict management; support from their own managers, colleagues and team; ongoing feedback on their behaviour and performance; and time in their schedule to focus on people management. Ensuring that this kind of support is provided effectively may require that the employer takes a strategic approach, clarifying the support needed/provided at each stage, establishing good communication from the start of the process and being strategic about choosing participants for intervention.

■ **Helping overcome barriers** The findings suggest that there are a number of potential barriers to managers showing the behaviours relevant for staff wellbeing. These include: aspects of the job itself, such as workload, deadlines and conflicting priorities; organisational issues such as bureaucracy and processes; team issues such as capability and problem behaviours; and personal issues, including lack of confidence and managers'

own stress levels. Where possible, employers need to help managers identify and overcome these barriers in order to encourage them to show the behaviours that prevent and reduce stress at work.

■ **Integration with organisational practices**

The research indicates that, for maximum effectiveness, these kinds of learning and development interventions need to be embedded into organisational practices. This integration may be facilitated by establishing a steering group to oversee the process and ensuring that different professionals, particularly HR, health and safety and occupational health, work together to drive the process forward. It also seems to be important to find the 'branding' and communication mechanisms that are most appropriate for the particular organisation involved and show how the intervention fits with existing initiatives and policies and with other initiatives such as management development and performance management.

■ **Achieving buy-in** In many cases, getting managers to participate and buy in to management development of this kind will need some effort. As well as integration with existing organisational practices, these interventions require good communication about what is involved and benefits of participation, together with senior management endorsement and role modelling of the relevant behaviour. This latter endorsement and role modelling is itself a challenge; the research suggests that the following may be helpful:

- establish a clear business case and a link between positive manager behaviour and positive business outcomes
- link the intervention to national goals/initiatives
- link positive manager behaviour to business planning and objectives
- communicate the relevant legislation and/or risk of litigation
- create specific senior level responsibilities for this domain
- present the initiative as a joint HR, health and safety and occupational health activity.

Employers need to help managers identify and overcome barriers in order to show the behaviours that prevent and reduce stress at work

Conclusion

The behaviour of line managers is important for staff wellbeing. Recent research has identified the behaviours managers need to show in order to prevent and reduce stress in those they manage. The research has also shown that it is possible to help managers behave in these ways and provides guidance on how best to do this. ■

Further information and resources

Guidance leaflets for managers and HR professionals, providing information on these competencies, are available for free download from the CIPD website: www.cipd.co.uk/subjects/health/stress/_Instrswrk.htm?IsSrchRes=1.

The full research report can be downloaded from: www.cipd.co.uk/researchinsights or www.cipd.co.uk/subjects/health/stress/_preventing_stress

The full scientific research reports relating to this project can be downloaded from: www.hse.gov.uk/research/rrhtm/rr633.htm www.hse.gov.uk/research/rrhtm/rr553.htm

The self-report version of the questionnaire is at: <http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/mcit.htm>

During 2009 we will be developing packages of online materials to help managers show the behaviours set out in the framework above and b) to help those who are supporting managers to show these behaviours (ie trainers, coaches, consultants, HR professionals etc). These will be available for free download through the HSE website at www.hse.gov.uk/stress

For further details about the research project, please contact Emma Donaldson-Feilder or Rachel Lewis, Affinity Health at Work: emma@affinityhealthatwork.com rachel@affinityhealthatwork.com

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Management competencies for preventing and reducing stress at work: refined framework following phase 2 of the research

Competency	Sub-competency	Do (✓) Don't (X)	Examples of manager behaviour
Respectful and responsible: managing emotions and having integrity	Integrity	✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is a good role model • treats team members with respect • is honest
		X	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • says one thing, then does something different • speaks about team members behind their backs
	Managing emotions	✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • acts calmly in pressured situations • takes a consistent approach to managing
		X	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is unpredictable in mood • passes on stress to employees • panics about deadlines • takes suggestions for improvement as a personal criticism
	Considerate approach	X	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • makes short-term demands rather than allowing planning • creates unrealistic deadlines • gives more negative than positive feedback • relies on others to deal with problems • imposes 'my way is the only way' • shows a lack of consideration for work-life balance
Managing and communicating existing and future work	Proactive work management	✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • clearly communicates employee job objectives • develops action plans • monitors team workload on an ongoing basis • encourages team to review how they organise work • stops additional work being taken on when necessary • works proactively • sees projects/tasks through to delivery • reviews processes to see if work can be improved • prioritises future workloads
		✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • deals rationally with problems • follows up problems on team's behalf • deals with problems as soon as they arise
	Problem-solving	X	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is indecisive at decision-making
		Participative/empowering	✓
	X		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • gives too little direction to employees

Management competencies for preventing and reducing stress at work: refined framework following phase 2 of the research (continued)

Competency	Sub-competency	Do (✓) Don't (X)	Examples of manager behaviour
Reasoning/managing difficult situations	Managing conflict	✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> acts as mediator in conflict situations deals with squabbles before they become arguments deals objectively with conflicts deals with conflicts head on
		X	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> acts to keep the peace rather than resolve issues
	Use of organisation resources	✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> seeks advice from other managers when necessary uses HR as a resource to help deal with problems seeks help from occupational health when necessary
		Taking responsibility for resolving issues	✓
	X		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> doesn't address bullying
Managing the individual within the team	Personally accessible	✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> speaks personally rather than uses email provides regular opportunities to speak one to one returns calls/emails promptly is available to talk to when needed
		Sociable	✓
	Empathetic engagement		✓
			X

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