

experience may also foster resilience. Some individuals will be enabled by their life experiences and others disabled. Reaching out for the support of friends, family and community is necessary during difficult periods. Resilient managers view crisis as an opportunity, accentuate the positive and minimise the negative. They can also influence change by adapting how they think and using their instincts to overcome problems and setbacks, and bounce back in a very positive manner.

Health, wellbeing and the work-life balance

As the global economy grew at an accelerated pace, a long-hours culture became the norm and the work-life balance became an issue. Work-life balance is essential to ensure employee health and wellbeing. Integrating work and life commitments will assist managers in being more productive. Employers are now aware of the potential conflict between work and life commitments and the impact on work performance. Working 70 to 80 hours per week in a pressurised work environment will lead to a work-life imbalance and a risk of burnout and ill health. Personal energy requires replenishment. In order to maintain positive health the human body requires nurturing and development in the following four key areas: emotional, physical, mental and spiritual health. Managers should be discouraged from taking work home or from forfeiting or cancelling holidays. Contact by email or mobile phone while on holiday should be discouraged. This time should be seen as important in replenishing personal energy and assisting in the return to work of a rejuvenated employee.

What are the net benefits?

Resilient managers create resilient organisations and developing resilient manager training will contribute to corporate success. This investment will assist managers in balancing all areas of their lives and will result in improved personal health and productivity. Resilient organisations need their people to be engaged and committed in order to sustain organisations in the current challenging times. ■

Reference

1 Siebert A. *The resiliency advantage: master change, thrive under pressure, and bounce back from setbacks.* Berrett-Koehler Publishers Inc; 2005.

See also...

■ *Maurice Quinlan's seminar, 'Developing a resilient workforce', at: www.eapinstitute.com*

■ National Framework Committee for Work Life Balance Policies: www.worklifebalance.ie

Assessing p

Gill Thurgood and Karen Crampin champion

The *Britain Under Pressure* research, commissioned by Friends Provident, reported its findings in November 2008¹. The report found that almost 29 million people in the UK – nearly two-thirds of the nation – felt more stressed, less fit and healthy, and more prone to illness, than they did just three years earlier – and more than 10 per cent reported that any stress they were experiencing came from work. Despite all the evidence of the cost of stress-related illnesses to business, many companies do not take time to identify what pressures are on their workforce and/or take any action to promote and enhance employee health and resilience, to sustain staff performance in their staff. In difficult economic times it is even more important for businesses to take these actions to promote the physical and mental wellbeing of their staff and ensure competitive advantage.

The first step to helping people become more resilient to pressure is to identify where the pressure on them actually comes from and what effect it has on the individual. Pressure is a continuum – from the very positive pressure of challenge, which encourages personal development, to the very negative pressure of stress, which is entirely destructive. There are many workplace stress surveys and questionnaires, and most mirror the Management Standards set by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) in 2004². The HSE identified six key components of work/life that if not properly managed can cause ill health and poor wellbeing, lower levels of performance and increased sickness absence. They can be described as the primary sources of stress at work as follows:

- work demands – including issues such as workload, work patterns and processes
- level of control – how much say the person has in the way they manage their work and their time
- support – the level of encouragement and resources provided by the organisation, line management and colleagues
- relationships – the quality of relationships with management, peers, direct reports and suppliers; and the organisation's processes for dealing with unacceptable behaviour
- role – people's understanding of their role within the organisation and whether they receive the necessary development
- change – whether and how change is managed and communicated in the organisation.

Pressure in the workplace

resilience training to combat pressures at work

It is also very useful to include some measures of employee level of engagement with their work, their level of physical and mental wellbeing, their style of behaviour and the mechanisms they use to cope with pressure. This will result in a more meaningful survey.

The sources of work pressure interact with these personal and individual factors to determine whether there is a positive or negative outcome in terms of wellbeing and performance.

It has been found that, to improve team and organisational resilience, it is necessary to focus on both the six key workplace stressors and, at the same time, attempt to strengthen individual resilience skills such as lifestyle choices, energy management, coping skills, competency, perceptions and confidence levels.

The survey is just one part of the stress risk assessment process where the views of employees are systematically gathered and the results analysed in a structured way. Other sources of data that may give further information on the effects of pressure may come from staff turnover rates, sickness absence statistics and performance measures. Exit interviews, appraisals and other staff surveys may also point to the causes of stress. Once the results of the survey are complete, the next part of the risk assessment process is sharing the results with managers and employees, and an action planning session arranged to look for things within individual or team control, which, if worked on, could start a process of improvement and reduce workplace pressures. These actions are monitored and reviewed regularly and the process becomes part of good management practice.

Stress risk assessment: the focus

The focus of a stress risk assessment should be to:

- improve the ability to identify the organisational factors that support or impair health, wellbeing, performance and resilience
- enhance those behaviours and practices that enhance health, performance and resilience
- eliminate or minimise the organisational factors that impair health, performance and resilience.

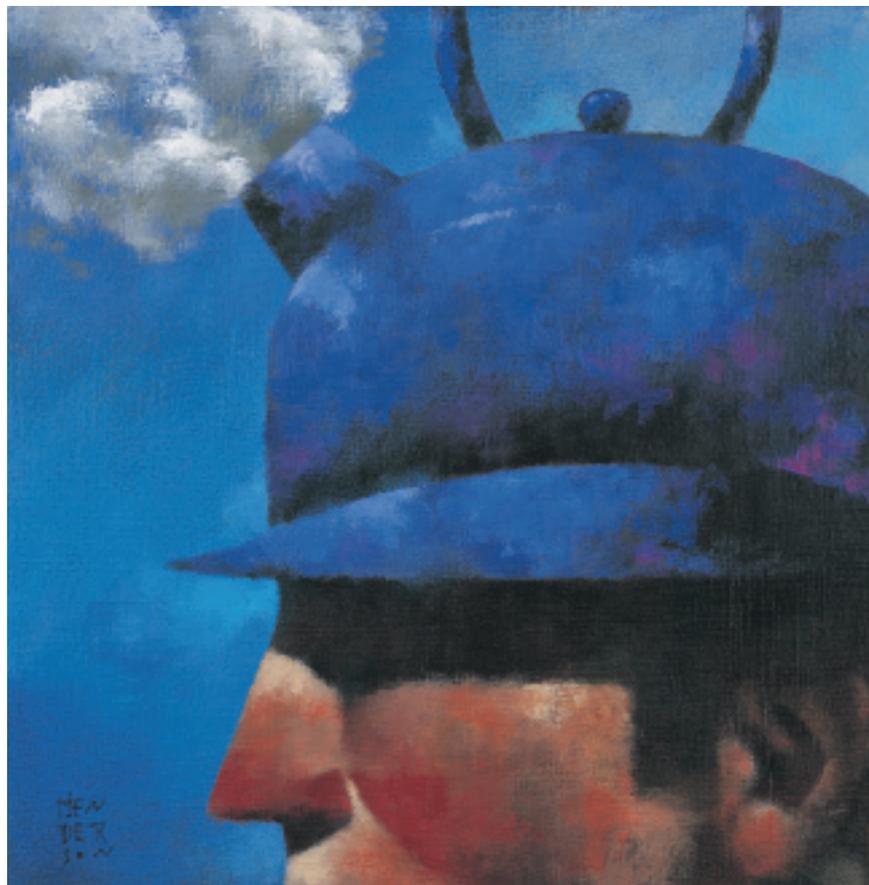
To enable the process to work, commitment from senior management is crucial, along with careful planning and excellent communications.

Employers who invest time in developing resilience and engagement, as well as tackling workplace stressors, enable employees to function more effectively both at work and outside work, and give them the skills necessary to sustain healthy high performance. One UK company, GlaxoSmithKline, has run programmes that focus on the key workplace stressors alongside health and wellbeing initiatives over many years. It reports that staff satisfaction has increased by 21 per cent and performance between 7-13 per cent, a reduction in days lost of 44 per cent, and global work-related mental ill health has dropped by 60 per cent³ ■.

References

- 1 'Britain under pressure' reported at <http://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/120733.php>
- 2 Health and Safety Executive. Management Standards. 2004. www.hse.gov.uk/stress/standards/index.htm
- 3 Unum Healthy Workplaces Award 2007; BITC.

Gill Thurgood and **Karen Crampin** are directors of empowerME² Ltd. They have over 20 years' direct experience in developing, delivering and evaluating award-winning workplace intentions to increase engagement and improve and sustain workplace health within a major FTSE 100 company. gill@empowerme2.co.uk karen@empowerme2.co.uk



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